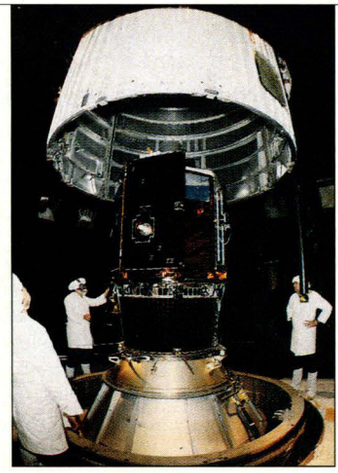
SCIENCESCOPE

edited by RICHARD STONE

White House Wants New Moon Mission

With the Jupiter show over, what can planetary scientists do for an encore? Forget comets for a moment. Sources in the Administration and Congress say they are anxious for a reprise of Clementine, the Defense Department's highly praised moon mission last year. However, signs of discord have begun to creep into the melody.

Clementine fits the "smaller-faster-cheaper-better" mantra of National Atmospheric and Space Administration (NASA) Administrator Daniel Goldin. For $80 million—a fraction of other planned planetary probes—the spacecraft made a fine topographic map of the moon's surface using a "Star Wars" laser-ranging device (*Science*, 17 June, p. 1666) and detected possible evidence of ice after bouncing radio signals off the moon's poles.



DEPT. OF DEFENSE

Moon star. The White House and Congress are pressing for a sequel to the Clementine moon mission.

Clementine 2 is equally attractive to bean counters—it's planned to cost less than $100 million—and may yield valuable science, such as an attempt to find moon ice using gamma-ray and neutron spectrometers. "We are hot on this mission," pants one White House official, who's pushing for a sequel in 1996.

But a cacophony of managers could endanger the mission. A Defense Department source says the Air Force is likely to get the nod to run a Clementine-2 team of Defense, NASA, and Energy Department scientists. But even though Congress has yet to find money for the mission, Air Force officials have already begun carping about having to spend money on other agencies. "There is great resistance in the Air Force to subsidizing NASA," one Air Force official told *Science*. Harmonizing these voices rests with the defense appropriations committees, which are considering whether to fund the mission in 1995 or 1996.

Poisoning Alleged in French AIDS Scandal

On the first day of his parole on 8 August, having served half of his prison sentence for a misdemeanor in the French HIV-tainted blood affair, Cambridge medical professor Jean-Pierre Allain was indicted on a new, more serious charge: poisoning.

Allain, former head of plasma products research at the French National Center for Blood Transfusion, was convicted in 1992 of failing to prevent the distribution of HIV-infected blood clotting factors to hemophiliacs in France in 1985; he was sentenced to 4 years in prison, two of which were suspended (*Science*, 18 February, p. 907).

Earlier this week, the French Ministry of Justice rehashed the original evidence and charged Allain with poisoning, a criminal act. Unlike the misdemeanor trial, prosecutors must now prove that Allain intended to poison the hemophiliacs. In addition, Allain's lawyers could appeal to the European Court on the basis of the European Convention of Human Rights, which states that no one can be tried on different charges for the same act.

MIT Student's Chernobyl Analysis Flawed

Alexander Sich's thesis on the 1986 Chernobyl accident may have earned him a Ph.D. from MIT, but it's getting low grades elsewhere. Three government reviews, spurred by reports on Sich's work in the popular press, now argue that the student greatly overestimated the amount of radioactivity released during the reactor explosion.

Sich's thesis concluded that the accident in Ukraine released more than 185 million curies of radiation—nearly four times more than the Soviet government originally claimed and twice as high as current official estimates (*Science*, 11 February, p. 750). The startling claim caught the eye of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), which launched a review of Sich's findings last February.

The NRC has now concluded that Sich made several miscalculations, including an overestimation of the amount of cesium-136 released. "If these errors are corrected, then Sich's results are reduced by about a factor of two," says George Sege, an NRC nuclear engineer. After launching reviews at NRC's request, Oak Ridge and Sandia National Laboratories reported similar conclusions last month.

Sich has acknowledged the cesium error in an erratum to his thesis. But he disputes other parts of the reviews. For instance, he maintains that more iodine was released than U.S. officials estimate, although he concedes that the evidence is inconclusive.

Promotion for NIH?

If Congress enacts a law reforming health care, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) may benefit from a bureaucratic boost. According to congressional aides, the House health-care reform bill now proposes to elevate NIH's rank. The NIH director, who would administer a new research fund also proposed in the health-care legislation (see p. 862), would hold the title of "Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services for Scientific Affairs." The promotion would remove one of the layers between the NIH director and the Cabinet and give the director more clout in annual budget battles.

Senators Trip Up Biodiversity Treaty

The biodiversity treaty has hit unexpected rough sledding in the Senate. After receiving a 5 August letter from Republican Senators raising concerns about the treaty's language, Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D–ME) shelved a ratification vote scheduled for earlier this week. The letter has forced the Administration to scramble, because it wants to see the treaty ratified by November, when signatories plan to meet and decide how to implement the treaty.

The Convention on Biological Diversity, as the treaty is formally known, calls for developed and developing countries to conserve the world's ecosystems. President Bill Clinton signed the treaty in June 1993; the Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved the treaty in a business meeting last June and tagged it for a vote in the full Senate, which requires a two-thirds majority to ratify the treaty.

Last month, however, the American Farm Bureau (AFB), a lobbying organization, led a drive to alert Senators to treaty language that it claims could classify non-indigenous species such as cattle and wheat as "alien species." The AFB argues that the treaty might force American farmers to pay royalties to countries in which alien species originated. "This is a hot issue for us," says AFB's Jon Doggett.

Picking up on AFB's theme, Senators Jesse Helms (R–NC) and Robert Dole (R–KS) rallied 35 of the Senate's 44 Republicans to sign a letter stating that the treaty "is vague in many areas and some of its provisions are contradictory." The letter raised the alien-species issue and several others, including how the treaty will affect the Endangered Species Act and whether it may force countries to develop a common protocol for handling biologically modified organisms. The State Department was drafting a response to the letter as *Science* went to press.