

Russians Peddle a Tech Transfer Institute ...

Western prospectors panning for salable nuggets of technology in Russia's declining science institutes are about to gain a key ally: the Russian government. In the coming weeks, Russian President Boris Yeltsin hopes to launch a nonprofit center to license inventions to the United States.

Such a center would be a boon to Western investors, who have spent millions finding and developing Russian technologies only to run into red tape and stiff taxes when they try to export their ideas. Russia's high-level attempt to bypass bureaucratic obstacles "is a watershed event," says Deborah Wince-Smith, a senior fellow at the U.S. Council on Competitiveness.

The Russians have dubbed their technology matchmaker the Russian-American Institute for

President Programs (RIPP). The first order of business for RIPP, which will have offices in Moscow and Washington, D.C., will be to "create a database of Russian technologies that will sell on the American market," says Yeltsin's science adviser Nikolay Malyshev, who struck a similar deal with Germany last month. According to Malyshev, new products are expected to rise from areas such as informatics, energy technologies, and biotech.

A key selling point of RIPP is that it would have "access to Russian government officials to secure necessary government support," says Lev Mukhin, science counselor at the Russian Embassy in Washington. So far, Russian investors have raised \$5 million for RIPP. Malyshev is now looking for matching funds from U.S. firms and for an investment firm to manage the center.

... While NIH Unveils a Tech Transfer Treaty

When it comes to sharing reagents, researchers are sometimes quicker to promise than to deliver the goods. One reason it can take a long time to get material from another lab is that legal procedures for sharing materials vary from place to place. But now, thanks to a new protocol developed by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), biomedical researchers may find it easier to exchange everything from monoclonal antibodies to transgenic mice.

To help clear up the legal morass, NIH has developed a Uniform Biological Material Transfer Agreement (UBMTA). According to the agreement, universities and nonprofits that want to share materials would sign a UBMTA treaty that lays out the rights of senders and recipients. Transfers could then occur between signatories without legal wrangling; scientists themselves would execute the agreement with a simple form letter.

Having a uniform agreement should speed academic transfers,

but is not expected to satisfy industry. "We had hoped it would be uniform even for the private sector," says Joyce Brinton, director of Harvard's tech transfer office. However, she says, the UBMTA's boilerplate language is unlikely to satisfy firms seeking maximum protection for products.

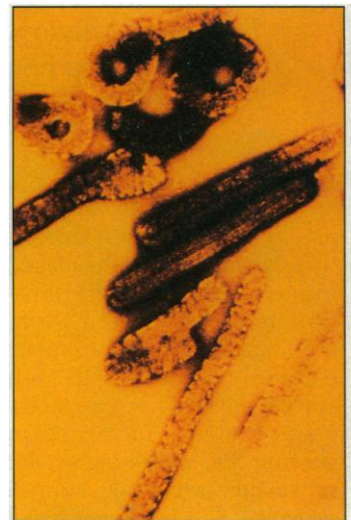
The treaty documents are available from the Association of University Technology Managers by calling (203) 852-7168.

Ebola Virus Re-emerges In West Africa

The dreaded Ebola virus, which sparked an epidemic of lethal hemorrhagic fever in Zaire in the 1970s, appears to have re-emerged in Africa, *Science* has learned. A Swiss ethnologist became infected with Ebola last November while dissecting a chimpanzee in West Africa's Ivory Coast; she had been investigating a spate of deaths among local chimps. The researcher came down with the classic symptoms of Ebola infection, according to a staffer at the Institut Pasteur near Paris, where the virus was identified. The patient has survived and is doing well.

The Pasteur's conclusions are being reviewed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta. According to officials at both agencies, an epidemiological report is being submitted for publication.

If the findings hold up, this "will be the first human Ebola case" since the late 1970s, when about 500 people became infected in Zaire and Sudan, says Brian Mahy, director of CDC's division of viral and rickettsial diseases. Although the virus is highly lethal, with reported human death rates between 50% and 80%, an investigator involved in the case says Ebola's virulence may have been exaggerated, and that the virus found



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Renewed threat. Ivory Coast has first human case of the dreaded Ebola virus since the 1970s.

in West Africa doesn't seem to be as deadly as reports on outbreaks in Zaire and Sudan indicated.

While Pasteur and CDC officials are confident that the virus found in Ivory Coast is a form of Ebola, they aren't sure yet where to place it in the Ebola family. Most likely, they say, it is a new strain that's closely related to the Zaire and Sudan types, and a distant cousin to a strain detected several years ago in monkeys at a research facility in Reston, Virginia. Another big question remains unanswered: As chimps seem too vulnerable to serve as a reservoir for Ebola virus, what is its natural host?

Search Narrows on New NCI Director



Bishop

Four names top the list of candidates selected by a search committee reviewing nominations for the next director of the National Cancer Institute (NCI), according to a high-level official in the Public Health Service (PHS).

Two have been sent on to the White House by Harold Varmus, director of the National Institutes of Health, for final consideration.

The candidate supported by the biggest political clique is Mary Claire King, the well-known breast cancer genetics researcher at the University of California, Berkeley. Her name has been pushed to the fore by the National Breast Cancer Coalition, which is campaigning for a woman NCI



King

director. The other top candidate is Michael Bishop, oncogene researcher at the University of California, San Francisco, co-chair of a blue-ribbon panel now reviewing NCI, and winner with Varmus of the 1989 Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine. The other candidates chosen by the search committee, according to a PHS official, were Edward Scolnick, senior vice president and head of research at Merck & Co., Inc., in Whitehouse Station, New Jersey, and Richard Klausner, director of the cellular biology and metabolism branch at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Bishop, King, and Scolnick were unavailable for comment. Klausner declined to comment because, he said, "there's a process under way" that hasn't reached its conclusion.