

SCIENCE

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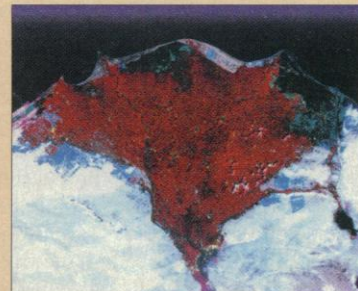
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LETTERS

Sentiments and sediments

Two readers jump to the defense of Vice President Al Gore (in response to an earlier, critical letter), who is described as showing “concern for the environment” and “support for research.” The cause of erosion of the Nile delta (at right) is debated: Are irrigation canals or dams the “main reason for erosion of the [delta] coast?” The implications of hookups to the Internet around the world (to Africa, Australia, Indonesia, the Netherlands, Russia, and the United States) are discussed. A plea is made for contributions to (and suggestions about) a proposed database of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) protease structures to be sponsored by the U.S. National Institutes of Health.



Politics and Science

Shame on you for publishing such a transparent, politically motivated letter as that by U.S. Representative Dana Rohrabacher (15 Mar., p. 1479). After reading the complete text of U.S. Vice President Al Gore's speech to the recent AAAS annual meeting (<http://www.aaas.org/spp/dspp/re/gore.htm>), as well as Andrew Lawler's well-worded commentary on Gore's speech (News & Comment, 16 Feb., p. 903), it became disturbingly clear to me that Rohrabacher's criticisms of Gore were not based on anything Gore said at the AAAS meeting, or that was summarized in Lawler's article, but rather on Rohrabacher's own preset political agenda. Having been a full-time scientist and part-time political observer for the past 30 years, I am amazed that so many in Congress still think that the American public wants to hear and believe their transparent election-speak rhetoric and their disinformation-filled op-penent bashing.

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Every paragraph of Rohrabacher's distorted summary of Vice President Gore's speech at the AAAS annual meeting can be countered with facts that prove Gore's concern for the environment and his continued support for research. Such documentation, however, could also be termed political.

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Internet Access

Susumu Wakai's concerns about inequality in Internet access (Letters, 8 Mar., p. 1347) stem from a principal phenomenon: high cost for most current technologies, computer or otherwise. Before the Internet, the same arguments about inequality were made for personal computer access in general, an inequality that has been magnified by networking. With the Internet in a rapid growth phase, financial resources determine expertise in Internet skills. Those skills are determined by the quality of the computer used to access the Internet, the speed of connectivity, and the duration spent on the Internet. Enhancement of these factors are proportionate to cost.

Historically, sustainable services available to all citizens were those fully subsidized. While costs may drop because of communication deregulation, users will still be responsible for subscriptions and hardware. Some costs will always be involved. As in many services in a democracy, constituents supporting nonsocialist policies need to decide how much inequality to tolerate. Before we all write our congressmen asking for an “Internet Bill of Rights,” and another bureaucracy to enforce it, we should reflect on Medicaid costs, the quality of our public schools, and Social Security.

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