

## Group Brands AIDS Trials Unethical

TV crews packed a press conference to hear Ralph Nader's Public Citizen organization charge on 22 April that 15 AIDS-therapy trials planned or under way in developing countries violate international and national ethics guidelines. The watchdog group claims that the placebo-controlled trials, which test several therapies to prevent transmission of HIV from infected mothers to their babies, do not offer the best known treatment—AZT—to all participants. Such trials would never pass ethical muster in the United States, says Public Citizen's Peter Lurie. The group wants Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala to order that all participants receive AZT and to launch an investigation.

But Phillip Nieburg of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta says the studies are ethical and are vital to addressing the double standard that exists in AIDS worldwide. He points out that an expert panel concluded in 1994 that because lengthy AZT therapy is not feasible for pregnant women in developing nations, placebo-controlled trials were the best way to rapidly assess alternative treatments.

Lurie concedes that "hundreds of people knew about" these studies—indeed, *Science* wrote about them 20 months ago (4 August 1995, p. 624). But, he says, "no one has complained" until now.

## Europe Doubles Up to Save Space Science

The European Space Agency (ESA) has come up with an original solution to ease its space science program's money problems: It hopes to combine two astronomy missions by arranging their telescopes back to back on a single spacecraft.

ESA's shrinking budget and its decision this month to refly last year's failed Cluster mission are threatening to delay the schedules of other science missions.

## NASA Drops Monkey Mission

NASA has decided to abandon Bion, a controversial life sciences project undertaken with Russia and France to test the effects of weightlessness on monkeys in space. Faced with political pressure from critics—animal-rights advocates and their congressional allies—the agency announced this week that it will not proceed with the next experiment, Bion 12.

Despite charges that Bion is cruel and of little scientific value, NASA officials pledged last year to continue the \$33 million program, which aims to collect data on weightlessness for long-term human space missions. But the death in January of one of the two monkeys after the flight of Bion 11 forced the agency to reevaluate the program's technical and political problems.

A report on the monkey's death, due out this week, recommends improved protocols. But NASA opted to cut its losses in the face of political opposition. Representatives Greg Ganske (R-IA) and Tim Roemer (D-IN) had begun circulating "Dear Colleague" letters opposing Bion, and they planned to offer an amendment this week to the NASA authorization bill calling for the program's elimination.

These include the 2007 launch date of the 3- to 3.5-meter Far Infrared Space Telescope (FIRST) and the 2004 launch of Planck, the rotating 1.5-meter mirror of which will detect microwave background radiation. But at a symposium last week in Grenoble, France, ESA proposed combining the instruments for these two missions on a spacecraft to be launched in 2005. At minimum, this will save the cost of Planck's launch (\$68 million).

"It is a compromise, but so far, [one] which will not harm the main scientific goals of the two missions," says Michael Rowan-Robinson, an astronomer at London's Imperial College. But

FIRST (3.0 years) and Planck (1.5 years) to 4.5 years each, the total for the dual mission.

## Anthropology Research Institute to Relocate

The prominent Institute of Human Origins (IHO) in Berkeley, California, is pulling up stakes in July to form an alliance with Arizona State University (ASU) in Tempe. Anthropologist Donald C. Johanson, IHO's founder and discoverer of the famed 3.2-million-year-old "Lucy" skeleton in Ethiopia, will remain director.

ASU will pay institute personnel and operating costs of about \$285,000 a year, and Johanson and two of IHO's four other scientists will teach in ASU's anthropology department. Johanson says IHO's scientists were attracted by "an irresistible opportunity" to teach "with world-class colleagues" while continuing their fieldwork. The move, announced last week, may also bring a welcome measure of financial stability. In 1994, in a bitter dispute that wound up in court, the 16-year-old IHO broke with its materials dating group, now the Berkeley Geochronology Center, and lost its major funding source—San Francisco billionaire Gordon Getty (*Science*, 27 May 1994, p. 1247). The split meant IHO had to intensify efforts to raise private donations to supplement its National Science Foundation grants.

## Japan Reforms: Mixed Impact on Science?

The Japanese government has caught reform fever. A slew of committees has been working furiously since last fall's elections on plans to slim the bureaucracy, cut Japan's enormous budget deficit, and deregulate the economy. And science could both benefit and suffer from these efforts, as recent accounts of committee deliberations are making clear.

A potential plus could be looser reins on Japan's 98 national universities, a move being studied by a panel advising Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto on ways to streamline the bureaucracy. "There could be some good points [to greater independence]," says Kimito Kubo, an official in the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports, and Culture bureau that oversees the universities. It might mean, for example, more leeway in spending funds and an end to rules making it difficult to hire lab technicians.

But Kubo quickly adds that there are worries that a 1996 plan to increase spending on science may fall victim to efforts to rein in the government's \$2 trillion debt. Indeed, a separate committee looking at the country's financial situation last week bluntly told the head of the Science and Technology Agency (STA), which oversees many big science programs, that the government's plan to increase R&D spending dramatically each year through 2000 (*Science*, 28 June 1996, p. 1868) will not be "a sanctuary." A series of accidents and cover-ups this spring at several STA-affiliated experimental nuclear-power facilities is also casting a shadow over the agency's big science projects.

STA official Minoru Yonekura says what will happen to the 1996 plan "is a tough question," although he expects research-related ministries to "make every effort to achieve the [spending] goal." Detailed reform proposals are expected this autumn.



**Twofer.** Planck mission may be paired with a second telescope.

there is at least one drawback: Planck rotates while FIRST points to objects, so the telescopes will have to alternate taking data—stretching the planned time for