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ARMENIAN ACAD. OF SCIENCES

New money. Armenian academy members likely to receive help from abroad.

USAID to Help Armenian Science

Perhaps best known for providing humanitarian aid and support for market reform in developing countries, the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) is about to take on a new role: It's setting up a science assistance program in the former Soviet Union (FSU). AID has agreed to bankroll a science grantmaking body in Armenia, a country tucked between Turkey and Iran.

Since Armenia won independence in 1991, the Armenian Academy of Sciences' (AAS's) 42 research organizations have had to skimp by on poor funding and live with intermittent power outages. Hoping to create a system that would sustain Armenia's top scientists, U.S. Ambassador Peter Tomsen last year began pressing the State Department's FSU assistance program to come up with $500,000 in seed money. State persuaded AID to carve out the funds from its $90 million aid package to Armenia. The U.S. Civilian Research and Development Foundation will coordinate the initiative, which CRDF director Gerson Sher calls "unique in the history" of AID's FSU assistance program.

Meanwhile, Armenian scientists have had to muster political support for the project—particularly among AAS officials, who could see some of their influence wane. As a result, parliament is looking at establishing the Armenian Fund for Science and Advanced Technology, which may be up and running by the fall.

House Weighs In on Fusion Project

Congress has spoken out on a controversy involving a laser fusion project at Lawrence Livermore National Lab, saying the project should not go forward until its opponents have had their day in court. But the project appears to be proceeding anyway.

Last month, in language accompanying a bill authorizing defense spending, the House directed the Energy Department (DOE), which oversees Livermore, to avoid "irreversible commitments of resources to construction" of the National Ignition Facility (NIF) until "outstanding environmental process issues are addressed in the district court."

Construction of the $1.2 billion NIF, which will use lasers to study fusion and to maintain nuclear weapons without detonating explosives, was put on hold last month after antinuclear activists challenged DOE's environmental plan for its weapons program. At two recent hearings in Washington, D.C., U.S. District Judge Stanley Sporkin seemed to favor allowing construction while DOE does more reviews. The court had issued no ruling at press time, and DOE planned to begin construction this week.

In the same report, the House also told the DOE secretary to have the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) keep watching the project "in full compliance with applicable law." The NAS is appealing a court decision that found a panel reviewing the NIF was not sufficiently open to public scrutiny. "We're not taking a position on that," says a House aide, "but as we move forward, peer review is important." NAS Executive Director Bill Colglazier says if asked to do a review, the academy would offer an alternative to a panel, such as having an independent investigator do the study.

Adios to ADEOS

Worldwide studies of climate and oceans took a blow this week when Japan lost contact with its sensor-laden Advanced Earth Observing Satellite (ADEOS). The failure is also a setback to Japan's fledgling environmental remote-sensing program. "It's extremely disappointing," says Akimasa Sumi, who heads the University of Tokyo's Center for Climate System Research. "There's nothing to do except work to minimize the effect on research."

The $1 billion ADEOS, the first of several new Japanese remote-sensing satellites, was launched last August to gather data for 3 years on greenhouse gases, the ozone layer, ocean temperatures, and ocean winds (*Science*, 23 August 1996, p. 1038). The satellite carried five Japanese instruments and one French and two U.S. sensors.

The first sign of trouble, says the National Space Development Agency of Japan (NASDA), was a loss of observation data transmission on 30 June. Other data indicated the satellite was slightly out of position and unable to draw power from its solar-cell panel. Later that day, all contact was lost. Officials initially thought the panel had been hit by space junk, but later realized ADEOS had been losing solar power for several days. That raises the possibility of an internal failure, says Arlin Krueger of NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center.

Yasuhiro Sasano, head of Japan's ADEOS ozone monitoring, says it had the only sensor providing detailed vertical data on the ozone layer at both poles. He notes, however, that the team has 8 months of data and is developing an ozone monitor for ADEOS II, set for launch in 1999. "It's not like we'll have nothing to do for 2 years," he says. And Krueger, principal investigator for a sensor that mapped ozone worldwide, says NASA expects to change the orbit of another satellite so it can "take over the role of global ozone monitoring."

Congress Wants Results on Results Legislation

Federal agencies have spent the past 3 years getting ready for a task that's particularly hard for those that fund research: By law, they soon must justify their budgets on the basis of performance. Last week, Congress said most research agencies have already flunked a warm-up test by failing to turn in their strategic plans on time.

The 1993 Government Performance and Results Act requires that, by 30 September, agencies outline their goals for the next 5 years and tell how they will measure their progress (*Science*, 5 July 1996, p. 27). The plans must also support the requests sent this fall to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for inclusion in the president's 1999 budget.

Last week at a Senate hearing, only one agency—NASA—was deemed by the governmental affairs and appropriations committees to have an acceptable plan. The departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services (HHS), parent of the National Institutes of Health, were rated "poor," while most other agencies had missed a 1 June deadline.

Agency officials, however, insist they are on track. The National Science Foundation, for example, posted its draft strategic plan on the World Wide Web 1 day before the hearing, and HHS is revising a draft plan it circulated this spring.

While the plans are larded with bureaucratese—"The outcomes of NSF investments, aggregated across the portfolio over time, provide evidence for NSF's success as an investment agent," for example—Senator Fred Thompson (R–TN), who chaired the hearing, said they'll help "a smaller, leaner government work smarter." And Appropriations Chair Ted Stevens (R–AK) warned that any agency without an acceptable plan by 30 September may not receive any money for the fiscal year that starts the next day. "That will get our attention," agreed OMB director Franklin Raines.