

## Bombs Stall Ganges Cleanup

Repercussions from India's nuclear bomb tests last May are rippling down the Ganges and may sink an unusual project for cleaning up part of the heavily polluted river.

The government's Ganga Action Plan, which involves

mixing and aerating sludge, has been hobbled by India's chronic electricity shortages. But at the holy city of Varanasi (Banaras), where the river has a blackish tinge from pollution, sewage, and partially burnt corpses, a local religious leader has been

promoting a low-tech alternative. Veer Bhadra Misra, a mahant of the Sankat Mochan Temple—who is also a hydraulics engineer at Banaras Hindu University—leads a foundation for cleaning up the

Ganges. He has enlisted the help of William Oswald, a professor emeritus of engineering at the University of California, Berkeley, and developer of a back-to-nature sewage treatment system. Oswald's plan would involve installing a huge pipe in the river that would funnel sewage downstream to a series of holding ponds where bacteria and algae would break down organic matter and ultimately return clean, oxygenated water to the river.

Officials at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which has so far kicked in about \$100,000 to the project, were optimistic about the system. "It

requires minimal use of electricity, as the force of gravity will take the water downstream, and after that nature takes over," says Earl Kessler of USAID in New Delhi. Oswald and Misra submitted a plan to local authorities earlier this year and were hoping that, once it was approved, they would find an outside source for the estimated \$38 million needed.

Prospects now look dim. An official of the ministry of environment says that even though post-bomb test sanctions are not targeted at development projects, "our chances of getting any overseas funding for this promising proposal are almost negligible."



Burnt corpse floats in Ganges at Banaras.

## Breeding Science Communicators

Tired of the same old talking heads lecturing you about species extinction and global warming? Expect some fresh faces out of a new initiative to turn established environmental scientists into "scientist communicators."

Dubbed the Aldo Leopold Leadership Fellows, the program, announced on 4 August at the annual meeting of the Ecological Society of America in Baltimore, has \$1.5 million from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation to train 60 experts over 3 years in the arts of lobbying, testifying, giving explanations to reporters, and writing letters to the editor.

"We desperately need" more competent scientists who know how to communicate with nonscientists, says zoologist Jane Lubchenko of Oregon State University in Corvallis, a prime mover behind the project. She herself gets "hundreds" of invitations a year to give speeches or otherwise share her expertise.

Any tenured academic scientist is welcome to apply; the first 20 winners will be announced in January. Those cho-

sen will receive 2 weeks of intensive training and will participate regularly in various "communications and outreach" fora.

Lubchenko expects no problem in finding recruits. At workshops held at two recent professional society meetings, she says, "we were just swamped with people saying 'where can I sign up.'"

## SOHO Ahoy

A NASA press release last week gave many the impression that progress had been made in recovering the Solar and Heliospheric Observatory (SOHO), which spun out of control and lost power on 25 June.

Contrary to media reports, SOHO was never "lost," and when scientists got a reflected signal from bouncing radio waves off it on 23 July, that didn't mean its prospects were improving. One hopeful sign is that SOHO is probably rotating slowly, which would make it easier to regain control. But it will be weeks before it's clear whether SOHO will ever get in position to catch enough solar rays to power back up.

## Antarctic Probe Aborted

An engine-room fire and explosion have brought an abrupt end to a \$2 million Antarctic research voyage. On 22 July, 7 days out, a fire aboard Australia's *Aurora Australis* destroyed the main engine, forcing the 79 people aboard to spend 3 days adrift.

It was to have been the first winter expedition to the Mertz Polynya, a "lake" of open water surrounded by ice, covering 23,000 square kilometers, that forms every winter near Antarctica's Mertz Glacier. Scientists say incessant winds streaming off the glacier keep the lake clear by blowing away newly formed ice. Ex-

posed to the frigid air, the polynya water bleeds heat into the atmosphere. And because salt is expelled when ice forms,

the heavy, salty surface waters sink to join the "Antarctic bottom water" that helps drive global ocean circulation. Scientists had planned

to spend more than a month probing these processes with balloons, radar, and buoys. But instead the ship had to limp home to Hobart, Tasmania. Voyage leader Ian Allison of the University of Tasmania is still upbeat, saying, "We are confident that we will be able to repeat the experiment, perhaps next year."



*Aurora Australis* in the ice.