of Chinese, including voice recognition, information retrieval, and machine translation systems. The long-term, fundamental research will be "China oriented," says Kai-Fu Lee, managing director of the lab, which will be known as Microsoft Research (MSR) China.

The Beijing facility is the second overseas venture established by Microsoft Research, a $200 million division of the Redmond, Washington–based company. In June 1997, it opened its first such facility in Cambridge, England (*Science*, 20 June 1997, p. 1783). The two sites, together with two U.S. labs, employ some 300 scientists working in such areas as speech recognition, databases, user interfaces, and three-dimensional (3D) graphics.

The Beijing center will occupy 3000 square meters on the sixth floor of an office building in Zhongguancun, an area already home to dozens of research institutes of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and not far from Beijing and Tsinghua universities. The northwestern suburb is also known as a Chinese version of "Silicon Valley" for its concentration of computer and electronics companies. The new lab is expected in 3 years to grow from a half-dozen employees to around 100 researchers. "The strength of China's economy and the quality of its academic system" were major factors in choosing the location of the new lab, says Jack Breese, assistant director for Microsoft Research.

Lee, former president of Cosmo Software, the multimedia software business unit of Silicon Graphics Inc., joined Microsoft in July to head the new Beijing facility. He has been a pioneer in the areas of speech recognition, artificial intelligence, 3D graphics, and multimedia. Born in Taiwan and raised in the United States, Lee, 37, received his Ph.D. in computer science at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, where he helped to develop a speech-recognition system that doesn't have to be trained to respond to a particular voice as well as a program for Othello, a board and computer game, that defeated the human world champion.

MSR China hopes to expand Microsoft's ties with China's computer science community by sponsoring international seminars, supporting journals, funding academic studies, setting up links to universities around the world, and hiring Chinese students after they have finished their studies abroad. "Our research will be focused on forward-looking studies" that should appeal to the best students, Lee says.

China is the fastest-growing information market in the world, says Lee, with 30% annual growth rates for PCs and estimated sales of 8.3 million in 2000. Earlier this year the company opened the Greater China Regional Support Center in Shanghai, and its efforts to upgrade Windows CE, an operating system for handheld computers, mark the first time Microsoft has formed teams in both China and Redmond to tailor products for the country. The company also has an agreement with the Ministry of Information and Industry to promote its products on the Internet in China, and it recently signed agreements with six large Chinese software companies to bundle Windows NT and SQL, for database management, into their business applications. **–JUSTIN WANG**

Justin Wang writes for *China Features* in Beijing.

SOCIAL SCIENCES

Canada Opens Program To Community Groups

OTTAWA—Canada's research granting councils traditionally channel funds into the academic community. But last week one of them took the revolutionary step of making public-interest groups eligible for grants from a new research program to attack such societal problems as poverty, illiteracy, and poor health.

The new activity, called Community University Research Alliances (CURA), is being funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), one of the country's three major funding councils. Over the next 2 years, SSHRC will make 3-year, $160,000 awards to 16 centers that will plant the seeds for what the council hopes will grow into a national network of university and community researchers working on projects that serve local needs in the social sciences. Council president Marc Renaud says that making community groups eligible is the only way to make them feel like "true partners" in the venture, which is modeled after a long-running program in the Netherlands. "If partners means that it's always the university that calls the shots, that controls the budget, and that gives resources free of charge to these projects, then maybe we're not talking about real partners," Renaud says.

The very notion that community groups can apply for research grants intrigues Montreal social activist Alice Herscovitch. As director of Project Genesis, an advocacy group for the poor and elderly, Herscovitch has often served in an advisory capacity on collaborative projects with universities. But the experience has been less than satisfying. "Being part of an advisory committee means you have absolutely no input or, if you really push, very little," she says. "The process, the analysis, and even the final results—we don't have access to them."

Keven O'Brien, head of Canadian Feed

ScienceScope

U.K. PANEL TO VET GENE TESTING

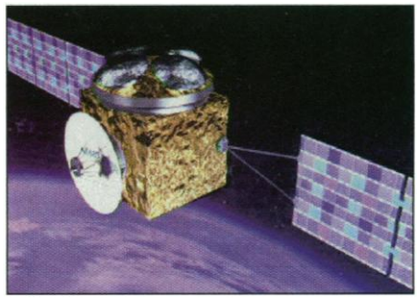
The British government is taking steps to prevent insurance companies from discriminating against people who have had genetic testing. Critics worry that insurers may use the tests, which can reveal who carries genes that increase disease risks, as an excuse to jack up policy prices or deny coverage to those carrying "bad genes."

Government officials announced last week that they will work with insurers over the next year to devise a scheme for reviewing test reliability and the fair use of results in policy pricing. The initiative, led by the government's Advisory Committee on Genetic Testing, will also establish an appeals process for those who believe insurers have discriminated against them.

"People are waiting to see flesh on the bones of these proposals," says Martin Bobrow, a medical geneticist at the University of Cambridge. "A lot will depend on who is on the evaluating committee and how the appeals process works."

MORE SPACE MISSIONS IMPERILED BY RUSSIAN WOES

Russia's economic woes are threatening to derail three more high-profile space science projects. Just a month ago, the United States moved to save the international space station by launching what



CREDIT: ESA

Derailed? Mars Express.

could end up being a billion-dollar bailout of its ailing Russian partners. Now it is the European Space Agency (ESA) that must ponder how to pay for planned missions if Russia proves unable to provide promised Proton launch vehicles and other support.

The threatened missions are Mars Express, which would map the Red Planet and hunt for water beginning in 2003; Integral, an x-ray observer scheduled for a 2001 launch; and Spectrum-X-Gamma, a long-delayed astronomy platform now slated for launch in 2001.

their local schools. "But I think that those who are open-minded will welcome it."

Despite the hurdles facing NSF's new program, Guthrie says ESEP has shown that the right environment can make for a great partnership. "I'm still in charge," she says about the students she has worked with. "I take care of discipline and make sure that we follow the curriculum. But they often bring in other material that I don't have access to. And even when they use terminology that might be a little too sophisticated, the kids think it's really neat to be taught by a scientist." –JEFFREY MERVIS

BIOTECHNOLOGY

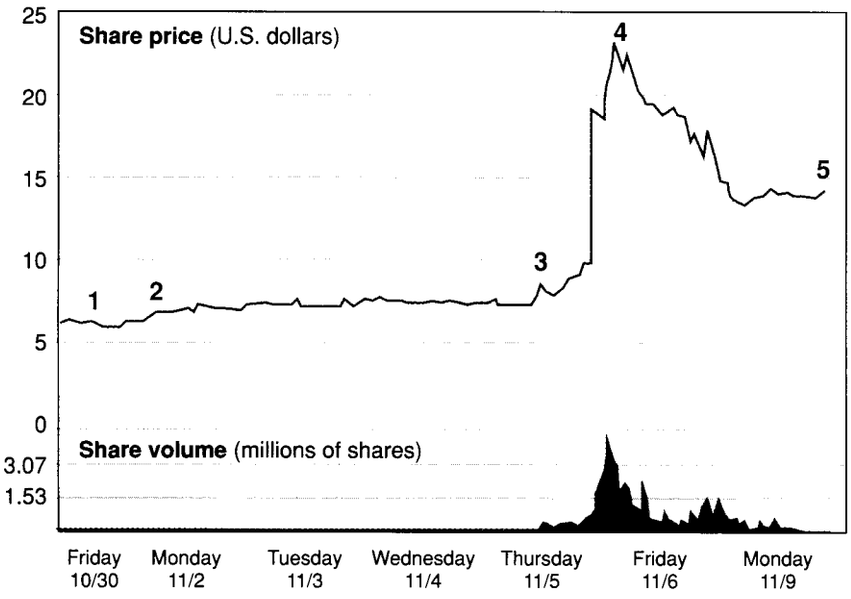
Reaction to Stem Cells: A Tale of the Ticker

For the Geron Corp. of Menlo Park, California, it was déjà vu all over again last week, as the company announced research results that sent investors into a tizzy. In January, the biotech company's stock almost doubled in price when *Science* published a paper by a Geron-funded researcher reporting a way to extend the lifespan of human cells (*Science*, 16 January, p. 349). But the price soon sank as investors realized that the scientifically interesting findings wouldn't soon lead to profitable products. Last Thursday, it happened again.

Geron, which has been operating in the red to the tune of $40 million since 1994 and is still years away from profitability, saw its stock price jump, then slump, when company-supported researchers reported in *Science* and the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* that they have cultured "immortal" stem cells in the laboratory (*Science*, 6 November, pp. 1014 and 1145). The cells could potentially be used to repair damaged organs and tissues.

The graph below tells the tale of the ticker: 1) On 30 October, *Science* sends more than 1200 reporters an "embargoed" notice of the stem cell paper a week in advance of publication. They are not allowed to report the findings publicly until the following Thursday at 4 p.m. 2) As reporters begin to prepare their stories, rumors about the findings begin to circulate and Geron's stock edges upward. On 2 November at 10:58 a.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST), an anonymous Geron investor posts this message on a Yahoo! stock buyers' bulletin board: "[Geron] stock is going through the roof this morning. ... What's the news? Does anyone know what is going on?" 3) Sometime after noon EST on 5 November, the French Press Agency puts out a story about the findings at least 3 hours early. By 1 p.m., Geron's stock price jumps by $2. By 4 p.m., when the embargo officially ends, the price is around $10. "It looks like everybody on the street knows what the news is except us," e-mails an exasperated investor, who hasn't yet seen the story. 4) On Friday, after the findings make the headlines, Geron's stock soars to $24.50, roughly four times its price a week earlier. "The reaction of the stock price is absurd," Jim McCamant, editor of *Medical Technology Stock Letter* in Berkeley, California, warns the Associated Press. 5) After a weekend of reflection, investor interest slumps and Geron prices slide to $13.75. The discovery, opines one analyst, "is a lot more significant scientifically than commercially."

–DAVID MALAKOFF



CREDIT: (TOP) IMAGE BANK/ANNE RIPPY; (BOTTOM) SOURCE: TIMELY.COM

ScienceScope

CANADIAN PANEL DIALS UP FIELDS

The Canadian government has asked a blue-ribbon panel to assess the potential health risks of electromagnetic fields (EMFs) produced by cell phones and other wireless devices. The study is meant to inform a government effort to update regulations that set limits on EMFs produced by consumer products.

"There's an awful lot of controversy around this issue," says Elizabeth Nielson of Health Canada, the nation's health agency. Although she says any risks associated with EMFs have been "difficult to prove one way or another," she hopes the panel—which will review existing studies—will address public worries about cancer and other issues. Epidemiologist Daniel Krewski of the University of Ottawa will chair the eight-member committee.

Canadian officials would like to consider the panel's findings when drafting the new regulations. But that may have to be done informally, because the panel isn't scheduled to officially release its report until March—the same time the safety code revisions are due out.

PNAS MAINTAINS EMBARGO

Biologist Nicholas Cozzarelli dreams of a world in which scientists wouldn't have to keep quiet in public about their papers in press at a scientific journal. He believes such embargo rules, which many journals use to prevent early data release, are inimical to scientific communication. So, as editor of the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (*PNAS*), Cozzarelli has proposed getting his journal out of the embargo business.

But the 50-member *PNAS* editorial board is divided on Cozzarelli's plan, which he presented at a 30 October meeting. Some members argue that *PNAS*'s competitive edge might suffer. Geneticist Arno Motulsky of the University of Washington, Seattle, also worries that the lack of an embargo might encourage commercial sponsors of research to hype findings before publication. Such concerns prompted the *PNAS* board to postpone action on making their journal embargo-free—at least until their next meeting in April.

Contributors: Helen Gavaghan, David Malakoff, Christie Aschwanden, and Eliot Marshall