

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

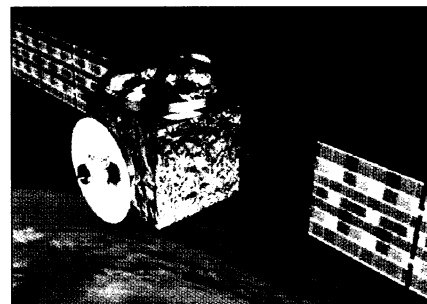
The British government is taking steps to prevent insurance companies from discriminating against people who have had genetic testing. Critics worry that insurers may use the tests, which can reveal who carries genes that increase disease risks, as an excuse to jack up policy prices or deny coverage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



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.

the Children, envisions a CURA project to examine malnutrition across the nation and the quality of food provided by breakfast clubs. Peter Dawe, head of the Newfoundland and Labrador division of the Canadian Cancer Society, can imagine a half-dozen issues that a CURA center could explore, including attitudes toward alternative health therapies, the efficacy of public education campaigns, and the degree of self-examination for breast cancer. "There's a desperate need for systematic, evidence-based problem-solving," he says.

Not everyone welcomes the new rules, however. Some university administrators worry that SSHRC's decision will further dilute the already limited resources available for academic research and may not easily fit into traditional university reward systems. "There's currently not very good means to evaluate [outreach scholarship] and certainly little recognition of it in either tenure or promotion," says University of Manitoba dean of arts Ray Currie. "If the community is the origin of these [centers] rather than the university, I think it will be harder to convince the universities that this is credible scholarship" and harder to convince campus researchers to participate.

Renaud says the potential benefits from building better "bridges" between the campus and the community are worth the risk of upsetting a few academic apple carts. "If it's a pilot, you might as well make it a real pilot," he says. "Either we're making a mistake or we're making history. You tell me."

—WAYNE KONDRÓ

Wayne Kondro writes from Ottawa.

SCIENCE EDUCATION

NSF to Send College Students Into Schools

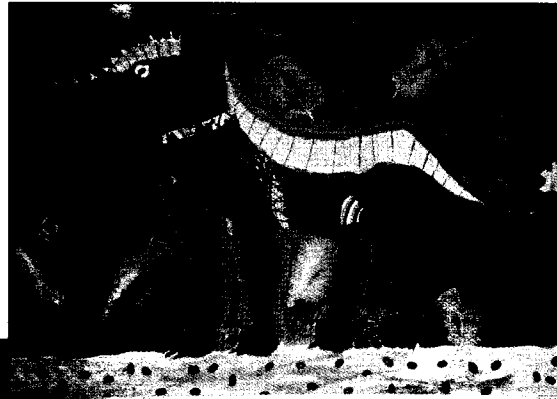
Kristin Guthrie took as few science courses as possible as a student at Iowa's Luther College. And as a second-grade teacher at Mary Lin Elementary School in Atlanta, she admits that science lessons used to get squeezed out to make room for other subjects in a crowded curriculum. But that was before her "science partner" arrived. Now her kids can't wait for their 90-minute, 2-day-a-week science lesson. And neither can she. "That time is sacred—it's when we do science," says Guthrie, a 10-year veteran at the kindergarten-to-grade-5 school, which serves a predominantly poor, minority population near downtown Atlanta. "The partner brings so much to the classroom, it's just wonderful."

Guthrie's science partners—science-literate students from one of seven Atlanta-area colleges and universities—come to Mary Lin as part of a program funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) that sends undergraduates to help as teachers'

aides in 69 elementary schools. The Atlanta program, called Elementary Science Education Partners (ESEP), is one of several such initiatives around the country, often involving scientific societies as well as universities. Now NSF has decided to go national with a variation of the concept. The new program would send graduate and upper-level undergraduate students into elementary and secondary school classrooms by offering them something on a par with the prestigious NSF graduate research fellowships.



Expanding minds. A science partner helps these Atlanta third-graders identify the chemical composition of various substances. *Inset*, a fourth-grader's vision after a lesson on animal adaptation.



who typically place research at the apex of a scientific career. "It has the promise of changing the culture," says Jan Tuomi, director of a project at the National Academy of Sciences called Resources for Involving Scientists in Education (www.nas.edu/rise). "It says this is an award for an alternative career path, not just something for scientists who have 'failed' in the lab."

Educators already involved in such projects say that they welcome NSF's heightened interest. "Any help that you can provide a teacher is useful, and anybody you can turn on to [K-12] teaching would be great," says Hewlett-Packard's Jan Hustler, director of the Bay Area (California) Schools Excellence in Education project, which has grants from HP and NSF to involve scientists from industry and academia in training teachers at 83 area elementary schools.

Hustler and others emphasize that, to succeed, such programs have to provide the teachers' aides with proper training and good mentors and place them in schools already in the midst of reforming how children learn science. In addition, success requires a commitment from the university, especially at the graduate level, where students are expected to immerse themselves in a research project. "A lot of faculty may be wary of having their students mucking around in a classroom," says Ramon Lopez, an astronomer at the University of Maryland, College Park, and head of education and outreach at the American Physical Society, whose Teacher Scientist Alliance Institute trains researchers to work in

PHOTOS BY CAMILLE COBBEL