

# Business Briefs

## Space

### Shuttle flight will include three space walks

The maiden flight of the Space Shuttle *Endeavour* is an ambitious one, which will include three extravehicular activities, or space walks. The first, on flight day four, will be to rendezvous with, repair, and reboost an Intelsat-VI communications satellite, which is stranded in a useless orbit.

On two additional space walks, the astronauts will practice and evaluate construction methods being developed for the deployment of the pieces of Space Station Freedom. The crew will practice techniques to manipulate large, heavy objects in space, and test five different prototype devices to assist a spacewalker whose tether has come loose to get back to his spacecraft.

Scheduled for a May 9 launch, the *Endeavour* will become the fourth orbiter in the U.S. space shuttle fleet, replacing the destroyed *Challenger*. This will be the 47th Space Shuttle mission since the program began in April 1981.

Each Shuttle is named for a sea vessel used in research and exploration. The name of the new orbiter was chosen by school children in a nationwide competition.

## Russia

### Finance Ministry and IMF will wreck infrastructure

A commentary by Russian Deputy Finance Minister and chairman of the Committee for Foreign Investment Leonid Grigoriev, reveals a significant opposition to infrastructure projects within the Finance Ministry, which translates into a willingness to cooperate with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) against such projects.

Grigoriev explains that Russia's IMF partners, in "putting up this money . . . are supporting our reforms carried out under difficult conditions, and nothing else. In order to re-

ceive these \$18 billion, our enterprises will have to enter into 1,500 contracts, [which] should meet the standard requirements of efficiency used by the World Bank and will be controlled both by the Russian government and the World Bank."

These contracts, says Grigoriev, must not revive significant water infrastructure projects like the Volga-Chograi canal, or the Ob-Irtysh river water diversion project, which would have provided a water flow for the Aral Sea. He also denounced the "Baikal-Amur railway which cost several times the estimated amount, and carries a fraction of the amount of cargo of the projected targets. . . . In any market economy, any such projects, constructed at the expense of the state, that is, the taxpayer's money, would bring the government down."

These projects "were born of a centrally planned economy, not a market economy. They relied on governmental property, not private property. They were developed with fixed prices in view, rather than liberalized prices. . . . Common sense suggests that, for example, if oil and gas prices are freed, projects that promise energy savings will look rather efficient."

## Science

### Cosmic background appears to have fluctuations

Evidence of temperature fluctuations in the cosmic background radiation was reported by a team of scientists at the Washington meeting of the American Physical Society on April 23. The finding is hailed as a major boost for Big Bang cosmology, but, if confirmed, is important from any standpoint, as an important feature of the cosmos.

The cosmic background radiation (CBR) is in the microwave range—its intensity peaks at a wavelength of 1 millimeter—and is much less intense than the beams in microwave cookers, its temperature being 2.730° above absolute zero. The radiation comes to us in virtually equal intensity from all directions, the reported temperature fluctuations being only six parts per million.

The cause of the CBR is unknown, but is assumed by most scientists to have arisen with the "origin of the universe" in a primordial explosion, derided as the "Big Bang" by the original opponents of the theory. According to Big Bang theory, there must be fluctuations in the CBR if structures such as galaxies were ever to form.

The announcement that there are apparently fluctuations in the CBR is based upon extensive computer analysis of hundreds of millions of measurements by the Differential Microwave Radiometer aboard NASA's Cosmic Background Explorer satellite, launched into a polar orbit in 1989.

The team of scientists announcing the result, led by George Smoot of Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, says the evidence for the existence of fluctuations is statistically "not strong." Smoot says there is a "10-20% chance the finding is wrong, and predicts a "gold rush" of physicists trying to confirm or disconfirm it.

## Europe

### West breaking promise on medicine to the East

The ambassadors of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland told a Washington press conference in mid-April that the West is not keeping its promise to finance the delivery of medicine from East European producers to the Community of Independent States (CIS) through triangular trade, a plan which is already two years old. As a result, "the population is dying" in the CIS states, the ambassador of Hungary, Pal Tar, is quoted in the German press.

"We have the medicine and want to help," he said, but none of the three East European countries are wealthy enough to deliver the medicine free of charge. While the European Community has put up \$500 million for such triangular trade, the United States has set aside nothing so far.

Czech ambassador Rita Klimova reported that she has contacted 25 U.S. congressmen. "We have a lot of promises. We are waiting now for actions."

## Environment

### Bacteria found to 'eat' CFCs

Scientists have discovered bacteria that eat chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), according to an Associated Press wire printed in the May 2 *Washington Post*. The bacteria are found along the Potomac River in Virginia and in swamps and marshes in Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina, according to a spokesman for the U.S. Geological Survey. Derek Lovley, a USGS microbiologist says the CFC-eating bacteria work only in the absence of oxygen, such as landfills, swamps, marshes, rice paddies, and other wetlands.

According to Lovley, "mechanisms that remove even a minor fraction of the CFC-11 and CFC-12 in the lower atmosphere will have a significant long-term impact on the amounts that reach the stratosphere." Lovley said the bacteria could be used to dispose of leftover CFCs, breaking down the chemicals into carbon dioxide and chloride or fluoride salts.

## Ecological Holocaust

### Rate of cholera infection in Ibero-America soars

The latest Ibero-American country to fall to the cholera contagion is Costa Rica, which now reports at least two separate outbreaks of the disease. A special fund has already been earmarked to try to contain its spread, but authorities are especially worried because the origin of the contagion has not been located.

According to the World Health Organization, during the period from Jan. 1 through April 23 of this year, 119,000 cases of cholera were recorded in Ibero-America. That figure, reported April 24, is a 59% increase over the 75,000 cases reported March 26. The majority of these were in Peru, with 93,136 infected and 328 dead. However, most of the increase in cases over the past month came in Brazil, where the government has acknowledged that cholera cases in the Amazon region are 2-3

times the original estimates, and where intense poverty in the northeast is yielding cholera mortality rates of 2-2.5%.

According to an April 23 United Nations Development Program report, Argentina suffers a lack of potable water and minimal health services for a full one-half of its population, posing a serious risk that the cholera contagion now spreading across the country will be next to impossible to contain. The UNDP report claims that these deficiencies in water infrastructure and health care are not due to lack of financing, but to lack of "political will."

Recent revelations of two cholera victims in the Brownsville area of Texas are raising fears of an imminent outbreak of the disease in the U.S. southwest.

## Africa

### AIDS breaking down whole nations, says doctor

"AIDS is breaking out of the framework of any previously known epidemic disease and has assumed a social and political dimension," according to Lieve Franssen, Doctor for Tropical Disease and head of the Anti-AIDS Task Force of the European Community.

Looking at the explosive spread of AIDS in Africa, she comments, "In some areas of Uganda and Rwanda one can see apocalyptic scenes, which remind one of the times of plague in Europe during the Middle Ages."

In countries like Uganda, Rwanda, Zambia, and Tanzania, the population pyramid is starting to deform in a dangerous way. Children and old people nobody takes care of are left, as the "active" part of the population is dying of AIDS. In Akagera (a region of Tanzania), 30,000 orphans have to be cared for. The World Health Organization estimates that by the end of this century, more than 2.9 million women and 2.7 million children will have died of AIDS, leaving 10 million African children AIDS orphans.

In cities like Kinshasa and Abidjan, AIDS has become the major cause of death. In Kampala and Kigali in Rwanda, 20% of the population is HIV-infected.

● **ROMANIAN** economist Iulia Traistaru told a Loccum conference on the post-communist world that "the reforms of the International Monetary Fund were announced top down without any public debate, no democratic debate whatsoever," and that this could lead to the "economic colonization" of Romania and internal strife worse than anything suffered under the communists.

● **IRAN** will supply Ukraine with 4-5 million tons of oil this year, and has also agreed to supply 25 billion cubic meters of natural gas. A joint company to be set up by Iran, Ukraine, and Azerbaïdzhân will carry the gas to Ukraine, and some will then be reexported to Europe.

● **THE GERMAN** business magazine *Impulse* has attacked the DuPont Corporation for promoting a ban on chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) in order to make enormous profits by cornering the market on CFC substitutes. The article quotes from the book *Ozonloch—das missbrauchte Naturwunder*, by Roger Maduro and Ralf Schauerhammer. The English version of the book, *The Holes in the Ozone Scare*, will appear in May.

● **THE NETHERLANDS** has secured \$1 billion in sales contracts from China for Fokker aircraft, dredging vessels, industrial machinery, an ethylene plant, telecommunications equipment, a salt-making factory, and chemical supplies. Economic Affairs Minister Koos Andriessen announced after a six-day visit to Beijing. He indicated that the deals were a reward for halting submarine sales to Taiwan.

● **BANGLADESH** has launched a birth control project aimed at cutting its birthrate in half, from the present 2.17% to 1.08% by 1995, Reuters reported from Dhaka.

● **6,000 CHILDREN** are sick with meningitis in Cameroon and 500 have already died as a result of the epidemic, reports the World Health Organization.