

Business Briefs

Energy

China plans to sell nuclear plants

China plans to sell nuclear plants to Egypt, Iran, and Bangladesh, reported the *China Daily* July 30. Chinese officials said emissaries from the three countries were now "exploring deals" to buy 300-megawatt Chinese nuclear reactors.

"The export of Chinese nuclear power plants will promote the peaceful use of nuclear energy in the world and environmental protection," the newspaper quoted one official. All sales would take place under guidelines set down by the International Atomic Energy Agency, the official said.

Last year, Beijing concluded a deal with Pakistan to export a 300-megawatt plant for an undisclosed sum. China has also presented Algeria with a much smaller 15-megawatt nuclear power plant for research purposes.

The *China Daily* said Chinese nuclear power stations were best suited to the energy needs of poorer states. "Although the 300-megawatt nuclear power plant is smaller than similar plants currently constructed in western countries—many of them with 1,000-megawatt capacity—it is compatible with the small power grids of developing countries," it said.

Science

New results confirm cold fusion

Dr. Edmund Storms of Los Alamos National Laboratory has reported achieving excess heat in a cold fusion experiment, which confirms the results reported by Japanese cold fusion researcher Akito Takahashi.

Takahashi toured the United States in mid-April of this year. Speaking before a packed audience at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and also at Texas A&M University, he gave a detailed explanation of how he was able to obtain high excess heat in a cold fusion experiment.

At the time of his trip to the United States, Dr. Takahashi urged U.S. investigators of the new phenomenon of test-tube fusion, to collaborate with him in determining the reliability of his experiment. Not only did he fully share information about his experiment, but American scientists were freely offered the use of the same palladium which Takahashi uses. Tanaka Metals, which supplies Japanese scientists working in the field free of charge, has extended that offer to the United States.

One researcher who accepted the offer immediately was Dr. Storms at Los Alamos. He has now revealed results from two experiments. In the first instance, he was able to successfully replicate Dr. Takahashi's experiment and he found excess heat of about 20% at an excess power density on average of 7.5 watts. Unfortunately, after 10 days, because of a flaw in his apparatus—a failure of the recombiner—he had to stop the experiment.

Space

Shuttle flight finds immune system disturbances

Some disturbing new results from a recent Space Shuttle flight are outlined in a paper presented July 27 at a workshop on Cellular Response to Microgravity during the Fifth International Congress on Cell Biology in Madrid, Spain. Though the STS-45 mission flown in March was mainly concerned with remote sensing of Earth's atmosphere, a new piece of equipment, called the Space Tissue Loss Module, allowed life scientists to make new observations of the metabolism of cells.

Dr. Gerald Sonnenfeld of the University of Louisville reported that after the nine days in space during STS-45, human immune cells failed to differentiate into mature cells. Many scientists believe that it is the increased stress of space flight that lowers immune system activity. "The failure of the body to produce mature, fully differentiated cells in space may lead to health problems, including impaired healing abilities and increased risk of infection."

Determining the mechanisms responsible

for this abnormal condition may also shed light on other immune system dysfunctions.

Dr. Emily Morey-Holton of NASA's Ames Research Center reported that disturbing changes were also found in the bone cells of rats on board. A significant number of bone-forming cells were observed floating dead in the tissue culture. "Bone cells die if they can't attach to something," she said. "That we found so many unattached, dead cells may indicate that gravity is required to show the cells where to attach. These findings could be significant since many biological processes . . . depend on cell attachment."

Attached bone cells, although healthy, showed no signs of producing minerals. "It may be that bone cells don't need to form mineral to support themselves in microgravity," she said. This finding raises obvious questions about people who might in the future be born in space.

Great Britain

Major called 'powerless' in face of recession

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) has declared Great Britain to be in a deep recession with no recovery in sight in its latest quarterly survey. The bleak picture of falling output and order indicators adds to the deepening gloom in the City of London, as the financial district there is called, over the state of the economy.

CBI director general Howard Davies accused the government of Prime Minister John Major of appearing powerless in the face of recession.

CBI economist David Wigglesworth said the economy was locked in a "vicious circle," with no confidence to stimulate demand and no demand to stimulate confidence. The findings have prompted the CBI to revise downward its 1992 growth forecast, anticipating a further fall in output this year.

Conservative Members of Parliament are beginning to cast doubt on the future of Chancellor of the Exchequer Lamont and the prime minister, wrote the London *Independent* recently in a front-page article. John Carlisle, the

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right-wing MP for Luton North, said of the chancellor, "If this particular doctor cannot cure the patient, then obviously he must go." He added in a BBC radio interview, "I think the prime minister has got to take some drastic decisions, because I fear that his position itself may be under some threat if he doesn't do so." One unnamed moderate Tory MP warned, "What happened to Margaret Thatcher could happen to him. And he has far fewer friends than she had."

Adding to the general gloom is a report from the British building industry that it expects to lose 40,000 jobs this year. Sir Brian Hill, the Building Employers Confederation president, said the building industry had already lost 260,000 jobs since the middle of 1989. He added, "We are in favor of strong medicine to beat inflation, but it is no use if the patient dies in the process."

Health

CDC calls meeting on non-HIV AIDS

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta, Georgia has called a meeting in August to discuss the discovery of patients who have AIDS symptoms but who do not have human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), the virus thought to cause AIDS. Cases of people who have exhibited AIDS symptoms but test negative for the virus, and who also do not fit into any of the official risk groups, were brought to the public eye during the Eighth International AIDS Conference in Amsterdam at the end of July.

The CDC has admitted knowing of five such cases since 1989, but suppressed the information, believing it not to be a threat.

Meanwhile, the National Commission on AIDS announced on July 30 its determination that medical workers should not be forced to disclose whether they have been infected with HIV. Robert Montgomery, attorney for the late Kimberly Bergalis, who contracted AIDS from her dentist, called the decision abominable, according to AP.

The commission cited statistics from the

CDC showing that 360 surgeons, 5,000 physicians, 1,200 dentists, and 35,000 other health care workers are infected in the United States.

Rather than see that as a cause for concern, the commission stated that mandatory testing and restrictions on practice "may be counterproductive" by "focusing public attention on something of slight risk, thus diverting people from avoiding riskier practices."

Environmentalism

Jastrow scores global warming hoax

"Apocalyptic predictions about global warming are 15 years out of date," stated Dr. Robert Jastrow during a presentation at a conference in Washington July 31, sponsored by the Heritage Foundation. Dr. Jastrow, who heads the George C. Marshall Institute, revealed that the only correlation between a slight rise in Earth's temperature and any other phenomenon, is that with increases in solar activity.

Showing a chart comparing Earth's temperature and solar activity, Jastrow explained that turbulence on the Sun's surface, and changes in the magnetic structures of the Sun which increase its energy output, correlate almost exactly with temperature changes.

When asked how many of his colleagues would also attack greenhouse gas theories about global warming, Jastrow said that scientists have been hesitant to speak out because they have an "understandable reluctance to be tarred and feathered by the media." Jastrow pointed out that actual observations disagree with model predictions in almost every instance, and that those pushing climate models change their assumptions every time their data is challenged.

When asked shouldn't the United States take "precautionary" steps in case global warming and ozone holes really do exist, Jastrow said that that would "be okay if it didn't have negative benefits." He cited a Department of Energy study which said that with a carbon tax, the price of oil would double, the cost of coal triple, and the cost of electricity would increase at least twofold.

● **THE NUCLEAR** Regulatory Commission has ordered owners of 11 boiling-water reactors built by General Electric to propose "corrective action" on alleged defects in their water-level measuring systems. The NRC claims that the devices might overestimate the amount of water covering the fuel rods, causing operators to allow "water to drop to the point where fuel is uncovered. If it is uncovered for long enough, it could overheat and melt," said a spokesman. GE Nuclear Energy has denied the claim.

● **TAIWAN**, which did not sign the Montreal Protocol calling for a ban on chlorofluorocarbons, will try to phase out CFCs anyway, its Industrial Development Bureau has announced. It has adopted a plan for reducing the consumption of refrigerants, foaming agents, aerosols, and cleaning solvents in 1993, 1994, and 1995.

● **GREECE** has been urged by the International Monetary Fund to cut its public deficit by \$8 billion to meet the currency convergence timetable set by the Maastricht Treaty. The annual IMF report also demands a reform of the state pension system.

● **A RAIL LINK** between Belarus and Poland has been agreed to by leaders of the Belarus Railway and the Central European Commission meeting in Minsk July 23. The high-speed line will be completed by the year 2000.

● **THE IMF** was criticized by the U. S. at a meeting of the Fund's board in July, for taking what it believes is an over-optimistic view of Japan's troubled economy. The United States argued that the IMF staff was fixated on the need for Japan to fight inflation, and ignored the dangers posed to the U. S. economy by slower Japanese growth, sources said.

● **FLORIDA RESIDENTS** receiving food stamps jumped 42% between April 1991 and April 1992, compared to an 11% national rise. The Department of Agriculture has launched investigation of possible fraud.