

possible to comply with the deadline. Manufacture of the non-biodegradable component of detergents, alquilbenzene sulphonate (ABS), is a monopoly of the Atlantic Richfield subsidiary Empresa Carioca de Detergentes (EMCA). Its production at 45,000 tons a year covers all Brazil's needs. SPUMA, the only company importing biodegradable linear alquilbenzene (LAB) was forced to close down more than a year ago because of prohibitive transport costs from its factory in Manaus in the Amazon region to the main consumption centres of São Paulo and Rio 4,000 miles away. The government chose not to help SPUMA by reducing import taxes and the company's machinery was bought up by a multinational company and left idle.

The Association of Cleaning Products Industries has been accused of lobbying against the entry of biodegradable detergents on to the Brazilian market. The association pleaded for a four-year delay in passing the new law on the grounds that the cost of importing the annual requirement of 35,000 tons of LAB would amount to \$35 million in hard currency, increasing the \$3,000 million deficit in the Brazilian balance of payments.

What this ignores, however, is the fact that the Brazilian owned company DETEN is now building a plant for the manufacture of LAB in the huge petrochemical complex under construction in Salvador, Bahia. Production is to start in April, reaching 25,000 tons by the end of 1981 and satisfying the expected Brazilian requirement of 70,000 tons per year by 1983. By then the multinational-linked EMCA will also be producing LAB in Brazil at the rate of 25,000 tons per year.

The economic argument for keeping the Brazilian market open to non-biodegradable detergents is further undermined by the statement from the Health Commission of the Brazilian Congress that EMCA had received a firm offer from CONOCO, a Shell subsidiary, to buy up all of EMCA's yearly production of ABS for \$36 million for export to other even less ecologically minded countries.

When recommending the President to postpone the ban, the Minister of Industry and Commerce ignored the ecological arguments and cited only the views of the Association of Cleaning Products Industries. The Health Minister in his turn agreed to the postponement on the grounds that health issues were not involved.

The new decree leaves it up to the Ministry of Health to set "indices of biodegradability" over the next two years compatible with the proportions of LAB and ABS on the market. But the Minister of Industry has stated that the responsibility for all future regulations concerning the production, import and distribution of biodegradable products will remain with the executive branch and not with the legislature.

Maurice Bazin

Security conference

Back to Madrid

The Madrid review conference of the Helsinki Final Act reconvened on Tuesday this week for a further two months. Attention now turns from the presentation of reports on progress by the signatory states to the potentially even more acrimonious question of future prospects.

Since the previous review conference in Belgrade in 1977, East-West relations have cooled. One consequence at Madrid was the long procedural wrangle before the conference could begin, partly over whether Afghanistan should be on the agenda.

Later meetings (which were closed to the public) saw much plain speaking, notably from Dr Philip Handler, president of the US National Academy of Sciences. He pointed out that the Hamburg "scientific forum" last February had been devoid of meaning because of Western scientists' concern about "serious infringements of the human rights and freedoms of too many of their colleagues in the East". He concluded with a quotation from Sakharov: "Intellectual freedom is essential to human society — freedom to obtain and distribute information, freedom for open-minded and fearless debate, and freedom from pressure by officialdom and prejudice".

Intellectual freedom concerns only the third of the three "baskets" into which the Helsinki process is conventionally divided. The term "basket" is a relic of the Helsinki Conference in 1973 during which it was decided that there should be three large filing baskets into which delegates could drop their suggestions on, respectively, military matters, trade/technology exchange and human rights.

Western signatories have always maintained, however, that this purely practical procedure did not change the essentially indivisible nature of the process of détente. The socialist bloc, however, would prefer to deal with the three "baskets" in isolation, which, in practice, means concentrating on the military aspects. Indeed, it has often suggested that the Western emphasis on human rights is itself a breach of the Final Act, being an interference in the internal affairs of signatory states.

The discussion of human rights at Madrid has been further complicated by semantics. The United Nations has made a working distinction between "legal" rights and "programme" rights, such as the right to an adequate living standard and the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health. Western signatories insist on the narrower meaning, Soviet spokesmen on the broader.

Proposals tabled for discussion in the next two months are of two kinds, concrete and declaratory. The French, for example, will urge that military "confidence building measures" should be extended to cover the whole of Europe as far as the

Indians home from home

Lucknow

In an attempt to recoup some of the talent lost through its relentless "brain-drain", the Indian government has reached an agreement with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to implement a project known as TOKTEN, or the "Transfer of Know-how Through Expatriate Nationals".

Under the project, which it is hoped will further India's National Development Plan, Indian expatriates who are specialists in various technical and sociological fields will be invited to return to India for periods ranging from one week to three months. During their stay contributors would be expected to pass on their skills, act as consultants in their specialist field and make suggestions on issues of policy. They would help put their ideas into practice while in India and continue to give advice afterwards.

Responsibility for running the project will lie with a committee specially formed by the government's Council of Scientific and Industrial Research. Its members include representatives from ministries, government departments, public and private sector organizations, the University Grants Committee and the Indian branch of UNDP. Meanwhile UNDP has allocated an initial \$100,000 for travel and living expenses.

So far about 300 Indians — including doctors, engineers, scientists and social scientists — have agreed to take part in the TOKTEN project. **Zaka Imam**

Urals. At present, notification is required only within a frontier zone of 250 km.

The Soviets, for their part, have called for a European disarmament conference. Poland has proposed Warsaw as a suitable venue, and October 1981 as a possible date. A recent proposal by President Urho Kekkonen of Finland, which is likely to be raised again at Madrid, is known to have strong Soviet backing: the establishment of a nuclear-free zone in Northern Europe. (They are incensed, however, at Danish suggestions that "some regions of the USSR" should be included in the zone.)

Basket Two proposals (trade and technology transfer) will have to be discussed against the background of official trade sanctions imposed on the Soviet Union following its intervention in Afghanistan, and of "personal boycott" pledges by individual scientists and the United States academy's moratorium on exchanges. Major advances are unlikely.

Basket Three will carry a whole range of proposals, from the easing of visa restrictions and the "reunification of families" (the clause of the Final Act most frequently invoked by Soviet Jews wishing to emigrate) to the rights of private citizens to monitor the implementation of the Helsinki accords. **Vera Rich**