Big budget rise keeps NIH on course to double in five years

Washington The US Congress and President Bill Clinton's administration have agreed a budget for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) that will give the research agency a $2.5 billion increase in funding for the 2001 fiscal year, which began on 1 October.

The 14% increase is the third substantial increase for the agency in as many years, and keeps the NIH on course to double its budget over five years.

Researchers were beginning to worry that the expected rise would not materialize (see *Nature* **408,** 627; 2000), but the agreed increase is only marginally below the $2.7 billion increase Congress had supported.

Telecoms mogul pays for photonics research centres

San Diego Two research centres specializing in photonics are to be established at Stanford University in California and Duke University, North Carolina, using a $50 million gift from a telecommunications executive.

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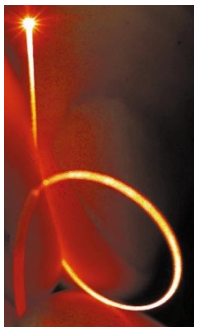

Singled out: $50m bequeathed to fibre-optics research.

Each university has received $25 million from Michael Fitzpatrick, a former chief executive of E-TEK Dynamics, which makes parts for fibre-optic networks. The centres will look at the use of light in telecommunications, and will emphasize research collaboration with photonics-related corporations, university officials say.

Russia and China sign materials science deal

Tokyo The Russian Academy of Sciences and the Chinese Academy of Sciences have signed a memorandum agreeing to cooperate in materials science research.

Under the agreement, nanotechnology research centres will conduct joint projects, facilitate scientific exchange and promote the industrialization of their results. Leaders of the academies plan to meet regularly to ensure that the agreement is being followed.

CERN council pulls plug on its Higgs-hunting collider

Geneva Last week the council of CERN, the European Laboratory for Particle Physics, approved the dismantling of the laboratory's Large Electron–Positron (LEP) collider. During the summer the LEP, almost at the end of its planned lifespan, glimpsed signs of the Higg's boson, a fundamental particle. This prompted many physicists to call for an extension to the collider's life.

Construction of the LEP's more powerful successor, the Large Hadron Collider, will start in the spring. With seasonal joviality, CERN's president, Luciano Maiani, proclaimed: "*Le roi est mort. Vive le roi!*"

Million-dollar prize for Canadian chemist

Montreal Howard Alper, a chemist at the University of Ottowa, has been named as the first winner of a Can$1 million (US$660,000) prize for achievement in Canadian science.

The Gerhard Herzberg Canada Gold Medal for Science and Engineering has been awarded to Alper for his work on synthesizing and modifying molecules.

The award, made by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council and named after the 1971 Nobel prizewinner in chemistry, will give Alper money for research over the next five years, in addition to his existing grant support.

US government harmonizes gene-therapy regulations

Washington The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has proposed altering its requirements for the reporting of adverse events during clinical gene-therapy trials to match those of the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Under the proposals, scientists would have 15 days to report unexpected reactions to an experimental treatment. Currently, they are supposed to report such reactions immediately — but do not always do so. NIH officials say the change should improve compliance with the rules.

Scientists had complained that the separate reporting requirements at the NIH and FDA were an unnecessary burden. Unlike the FDA, the NIH makes public all reports of such events that it receives.

Ireland upgrades Internet connections

Dublin Ireland is seeking to reinforce its position as a high-technology economy by boosting the speed of its researchers' Internet connections with the United States by a factor of 20.

The move will connect Irish research institutions to 180 US universities that are already participating in the high-speed Internet2 and Next Generation Internet projects. Ireland's participation was announced last week by Bertie Ahern,

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Hands-on: Ahern (left) and Clinton last week.

the prime minister, during a visit by US president Bill Clinton.

The change will underpin Ireland's IR£1.95 billion education and research plan, which was announced earlier this year.

Japan brings in measures to prevent spread of BSE

Tokyo Japan's ministry of health has taken steps to stop the circulation of products made with "dangerous" parts of cattle, sheep and goats. It is responding to new concerns about the spread of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and cases of the human form of the disease, variant Creutzfeldt–Jakob disease, in Europe.

The ban requires makers of cosmetics, medical devices and pharmaceuticals to inspect any products made using brains, eyes or intestines of animals from 29 countries, mostly in Europe.

The government says this is a preventive measure. There have been no known cases of variant Creutzfeldt–Jakob disease in Japan.

Michigan's tobacco payouts go to science

Washington The state of Michigan has launched a billion-dollar effort to build up its life-sciences research. The programme will be funded by tobacco corporations under a legal settlement (see *Nature* **400,** 391; 1999).

Michigan has 20 years to spend the money; some $90 million in projects has been allocated so far. The University of Michigan in Ann Arbor will get $48 million, with $12 million for a proteomics facility and $9 million to set up a bioinformatics centre. Michigan State University in East Lansing gets $26 million to set up a structural-biology centre. Wayne State University in Detroit and the Van Andel Institute in Grand Rapids are also involved in the state's plan.

Correction The recent Opinion article "Rays of hope in eastern Europe" (*Nature* **408,** 625; 2000) should have included an acknowledgement of the European Science Foundation as a co-sponsor of *Nature*'s Dresden meeting on that topic.

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