

## Canada calls in police to investigate data loss in HIV blood scandal

[MONTREAL] Canada's federal government has asked the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to investigate the destruction of key documents relating to the country's scandal over HIV-contaminated blood.

The Information Commissioner, John Grace, revealed last month that federal health department officials had destroyed documents following an enquiry under the Access to Information Act from a newspaper reporter.

The result has been the loss of transcripts and tapes of meetings of the Canadian Blood Committee, which oversaw the blood system between 1982 and 1989. During that period thousands of Canadians became infected with HIV and hepatitis C.

Grace's report said the committee had been under pressure from the Canadian Red Cross Society to avoid releasing documents that could be used in lawsuits filed by individuals who had been infected. Grace said that the Access to Information Act does not provide sanctions against those found to have improperly destroyed documents.

The commissioner's report has been forwarded to Mr Justice Horace Krever, who is heading a national inquiry into the blood

distribution system. Krever's report is due on 30 April. Victims' groups have demanded that criminal charges be brought against those who destroyed the evidence.

## Russian science panel undertakes audit

[MOSCOW] Russia's state committee on science is to prepare an inventory of the country's 420 scientific organizations to find out their current activities, the scientific level of their research, whether they require state support and in what form.

As a result of this review, some institutions will be given state accreditation, bestowing certain privileges. But progress will depend on the adoption by the state Duma of a law on tax privileges for the accredited scientific organizations. This law is under discussion in committee, and will need to be approved by President Boris Yeltsin.

## 'Britain should repay £1bn bill for BSE'

[PARIS] The European Parliament's committee of inquiry into the handling of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) epidemic last week withdrew its threat to table a motion censuring the European Commission (see *Nature* 385, 101; 1997). Such a move would have created a political

crisis if it had been backed by the full parliament. The committee rejected the proposal by 16 votes to three.

The committee's final report on the handling of the BSE crisis will be submitted to a plenary session of the parliament next week. The report accuses Britain and the commission of "misdemeanours and failures", but stops short of alleging a deliberate cover-up. The committee says that Britain should be forced to repay more than £1 billion (US\$1.6 billion) it has received from the European Union as subsidies to farmers since the start of the crisis.

## India still hopes for Soviet reactors

[NEW DELHI] India has accepted an assurance that Russia will honour an eight-year-old commitment to supply two 1,000-MW light-water nuclear reactors, despite efforts by the United States to block the sale. The \$1.7-billion contract, under which the reactors were to be built as a 'turnkey' project, was signed in 1988. But the deal failed to go through following the suspension of talks after the collapse of the former Soviet Union.

Negotiations were revived three years ago after Russia agreed to build the reactors as a collaborative project at 70 per cent of the initial cost. Talks had been progressing

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