

# Business Briefs

## AIDS

### Sabin doubts vaccine will ever be possible

The developer of the oral polio vaccine, Dr. Albert Sabin, said that he doubts that a vaccine can ever be found to halt the spread of the AIDS virus, Reuters reported Sept. 12. "In my judgment, the available data provide no basis for testing any experimental vaccine in human beings or for expecting that any HIV vaccine could be effective in human beings," Sabin wrote in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

Sabin said he is pessimistic about the chances for a vaccine, because the way the AIDS virus behaves in cells makes it very difficult to halt its spread, unlike with polio or measles where spread can be checked by a vaccine. He urged scientists to concentrate on killing the virus rather than preventing infection.

Sabin criticized scientists for disregarding the major method of transmission, anal intercourse, in which large numbers of cells containing the AIDS virus are transmitted to the recipient through the thin walls of the rectum and into the intestines. The AIDS virus is one of a group of viruses that reproduce themselves inside cells. Sabin said vaccines have been developed for viruses but not for virus-containing cells. He said a vaccine being tested in monkeys protected them from the simian immunodeficiency virus, which is related to the human AIDS virus, but not from infection from cells containing the virus.

## Labor

### IMF praises Polish government austerity

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has said that the Polish government is on the right road, staying firm on budgetary consolidation and not giving in to "pressures," i.e., the ongoing strikes, to change its policy. IMF representative Michel Deppler, who has been in Warsaw recently, gave high marks to the strike-breaking policy of Prime Minister Hanna Suchocka and the austerity approach of Finance

Minister Jerzy Oziatinski, and mooted the opening of an IMF credit line to Poland in the "near future."

Oziatinski said he was hopeful that agreement on such a credit line, which has been frozen since October 1991 when the Polish government "violated" the IMF target of a 5% budget deficit, could be signed by early October.

A precondition for the credit line, however, is the collapse of the ongoing strike wave. Pressure from the government against coal miners resulted in the strike at the Rozbark coal mine in southern Poland being called off on Sept. 7. Workers there had been threatened with police action after the expiration of a government ultimatum. As a "concession" to workers, the government promised not to put them on trial for the "illegal" strike, and promised not to replace some plant managers.

The official jobless rate in Poland is now 13.4%, leaving more than 2.5 million unemployed at the end of August. Unemployment is expected to increase by at least another 50,000 each month, and to hit an estimated 3 million by year's end. Independent estimates say that the government's figures are much too rosy and that the real jobless rate is already close to 20%.

## Aviation

### Germany and Japan to cooperate in space

Germany's Minister of Research and Technology Heinz Riesenhuber returned from a trip to Tokyo recently, during which a number of agreements for cooperation in space were signed. *Aviation Week* on Sept. 7 reported that the two space-faring nations will join forces in automation and robotics, environmental research, remote sensing, and space transportation.

Most interesting is the work on a reusable manned spacecraft, which each country has been pursuing separately. The Japanese project, HOPE, is a small shuttle designed to be launched on a Japanese H-II rocket. Germany has been designing the Sanger Aerospace Plane, and the European Space Agency has been developing the French-designed Herm-

es. But neither European reusable spacecraft is being fully funded.

The German-Japanese project, called Express, will also have input from the former Soviet space program. The Community of Independent States will contribute work on reentry vehicle technology and manned life support development. Unlike the other contenders, Express would not be an aircraft-type design, but a capsule-type ballistic vehicle, similar to the concept of the Apollo capsule.

These arrangements for space research could make Japan less dependent upon the U.S. space program, Germany less dependent upon the European Space Agency, and give Russia more leverage in negotiating space agreements with the United States.

## Water Management

### Drought hits African industry

The drought is ravaging not only the food supply but the infrastructure and power requirements of Africa. Zambia faces a power crisis with falling water levels threatening its hydroelectric supply, John Wright, of the Zambia Electricity Supply Corp. (Zesco), said on Sept. 8. Zambia depends totally on waterpower for electricity.

Wright warned of a major crisis if rain does not fall by December. He said Zesco had cut output and was carrying out compulsory industrial and domestic electricity consumption cuts.

Zimbabwe, also suffering from the worst drought of the century, has plans to introduce electricity rationing.

## Infrastructure

### Iraq considers expanding irrigation project

Iraqi engineers are conducting a feasibility study into expanding Iraq's showpiece Third River irrigation project, by drawing off fresh water from the Tigris River and mixing it with

salty water from the Third River.

Project operations director Zuheir Abbas Mahmoud, told the government newspaper *al-Jumhuriyah* about the study in early September: "Four irrigation canals have extended into the heart of the desert taking water from Gharaf [the Tigris] and discharging it into the Third River."

The 565-kilometer (350-mile) Third River, expected to start flowing into the Persian Gulf within days, is being built to reclaim salty land by washing it with excess irrigation water from the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers. The aim of the feasibility study, Abbas said, was to look at the possibility of using the Third River itself as a future source of irrigation.

## Nutrition

### FAO sees 'paradox of plenty' in starving world

Famines kill millions of children and hundreds of millions of people are chronically undernourished, yet the U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) assume that the world has more than enough food to feed itself. This so-called "paradox of plenty" was discussed at a meeting on nutrition held by the FAO and WHO in Geneva at the end of August, which was the final meeting leading up to the International Conference on Nutrition in Rome Dec. 5-11.

The Rome conference is being touted as the most important on nutrition in 50 years. Background documents gave the latest global assessment of the state of human nutrition:

- Over 2 billion people suffer from deficiencies of essential vitamins and minerals, which can result in serious debilitating conditions including blindness and mental retardation, and death.
- One in five persons in the developing world is chronically undernourished.
- Almost 200 million children under five years of age suffer from protein-energy malnutrition, including more than 150 million children in Asia and 27 million in Africa.
- Every day 40,000 children under five years of age die, and malnutrition is a major contributing factor.

FAO reported that in about 50 of the world's poorest countries, undernutrition is widespread, causing high levels of physical wasting and stunting of children, and micronutrient deficiencies.

According to FAO, there was enough food in the world by 1988-90, if distributed according to individual requirements, to meet emergency needs. But it estimated that during that period, over 780 million people did not have enough food to meet their dietary energy needs for an active, healthy life.

By the end of the 1980s, about 60% of the world's population was living in countries which had more than 2,600 kilocalories available per person per day. But at the same time, there were 11 countries, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa, with a population of 123 million, where dietary energy supplies were grossly insufficient. Today, this number is considerably higher, with the current drought in southern Africa.

## Asia

### Mt. Pinatubo wreaks havoc in Philippines

At least a million Filipinos have been hit by floods and mudflows from the Mount Pinatubo volcano, but the government does not have the money to help them, Reuters quoted President Fidel Ramos saying Sept. 10. For the second time in four days, Ramos flew over devastated areas around the volcano and appealed for international aid.

"The relief and rehabilitation needed by the Pinatubo victims are just too massive for the government alone to address," Ramos told officials in Bulacan province. "Because of the [mudflows], we continue to see a million countrymen suffering, representing 200,000 families," Ramos said. "Many of [them] will not be able to have any normalcy in their lives for three to five years," he added.

Budget Secretary Salvador Enriquez said on Sept. 8 that the government needed at least \$20 million to repair roads, bridges, and buildings wrecked by the mudflows. The volcano has been rocked daily by hundreds of quakes during the past few weeks, possibly presaging another big eruption, scientists say.

## Briefly

● **THE WORLD** Health Organization is surveying cases of unexplained severe immunosuppression in adults without serological or virological evidence of HIV infection, the virus which causes AIDS. Since 1989, 12 medical publications have reported such cases in Australia, Denmark, France, Germany, Spain, the U.K., and the U.S.

● **IBERO-AMERICA** sold off \$40 billion in government-owned businesses in the last five years to pay foreign and domestic debts, Reuters reported Sept. 12. Reuters failed to point out that these sales have been far below the real worth of the companies. Their true value was probably more than double \$40 billion.

● **MINISTERS OF HEALTH** of the World Health Organization member states in Africa have called for a strategy to control and prevent cholera. They noted that cholera is a disease which will require extensive financial outlays to bring under control.

● **CAIRO, EGYPT** has been chosen as the site for the September 1994 Third International Conference on Population, sources report. This event follows Bucharest in 1974 and Mexico City in 1984. An initiative by the "Pintasilgo Commission," named after Maria Lourdes de Pintasilgo, former prime minister of Portugal and a leading member of the Club of Rome, will be launched soon.

● **JAPAN** and Malaysia agreed to "issue a strong warning" to the U.S. and Canada that the North American Free Trade Agreement not exclude them from North American trade, the Sept. 10 *International Herald Tribune* reported.

● **KARL MARX** was a stock speculator, the Beijing *Youth News* said in its effort to justify the development of capitalist-style stock markets, Reuters reported Sept. 8. "It doesn't take much time to do this, and, if you are willing to risk a little bit, you can grasp money away from your opponents," the newspaper quoted Marx.