

## News in Brief

**Nobel peace prize goes to MSF** Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), the international medical-relief organisation, was awarded the international Nobel Peace prize in Oslo, Norway, on Oct 15 "in recognition of the organisation's pioneering humanitarian work on several continents". The award honours the work of all MSF relief workers who provide medical assistance in around 80 countries, more than 20 of which are in conflict.

**Nurses strike in Ireland** The first national strike to hit the Irish health service began on Oct 19 when nurses set up pickets at hospitals. All non-emergency operations and procedures have been cancelled as well as outpatient appointments. Representatives of hospital consultants and junior doctors warn they may not be able to cope physically if the strike lasts for more than 3 or 4 days. General practitioners expect their workload to increase by at least 40%. Talks between the government and the nurses were held on Oct 18, but no formula for negotiations was reached.

**Obesity increases in Japan** The Japanese government was warned on Oct 14 that the country's children face a "tidal wave" of obesity that could have major health implications in the future. The unprecedented warning was made by the Japan Society for the Study of Obesity which said that the number of overweight Japanese has more than quadrupled in the past three decades. With 33 million people with high-blood pressure, 20 million with hyperlipidaemia, and 6.9 million with diabetes, the Society said the government had to implement measures to encourage people to exercise more and take greater care of their diet.

**Seeing red in Romania** Residents of 12 blocks of flats in Adjud, Romania, hit on the money-saving expedient of running their baths out of the heating radiators, served by a communal supply. Pressed to take action by doctors worried that the water might be contaminated, the water-supply company decided to highlight culprits by dyeing the water red. Now doctors are concerned about possible adverse effects of the dye on the unabashed and increasingly red-tinged residents.

## Global onchocerciasis programme under threat

The World Bank warned it may scale back its onchocerciasis (river blindness) control programme in Africa after programme donors failed to come up with new funding at a meeting in Paris, France on Oct 12.

"If no more money is forthcoming at the end of the year, we will begin to cut into the programme. We need \$US7.5 million to see the programme through", said Bruce Benton, Manager of the World Bank's Onchocerciasis Programme.

The African Onchocerciasis Programme was launched in 1995 as an extension of the West African Onchocerciasis Programme to control the disease in the 19 countries where the disease remains. The African Onchocerciasis Programme aims to treat 50 million people by 2002, prevent one million cases of blindness, and provide 7.5 million additional years of productive labour in these countries.

The West African Onchocerciasis Programme, which works in 11 West African countries and is now in its 25th year, is considered to be one of the most successful multi-donor programmes in the world, having eliminated the disease in an area with a population of 34 million.

When the West African programme is completed in 2002, it will have prevented 600 000 cases of blindness and added 5 million years of productive labour to the economies of these countries.

Benton said the programme has to some extent been the victim of its own success because after only 2 years of work it is already operating 57 projects. "Funding shortfalls for successful programmes, as they near their conclusion, are not uncommon because it is frequently assumed that victory has already been achieved", he added.

Khabir Ahmad



The work must continue

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## Sigmund Freud's clinic reopens in Vienna

A community clinic set up by Sigmund Freud has reopened in Vienna, 61 years after it was closed by the Nazis. The clinic was founded in 1922 by the Vienna Psychoanalytical Society (VPS) to provide a place for Freud's students to practise and to give access to psychoanalysis to the poor.

Opening the new facility, clinician Martin Engelberg said: "The aim is to offer a welcoming environment for patients who suffer from particularly severe psychic complaints and are afraid to visit [conventional] surgeries". The clinic will have a staff of ten psychoanalysts. Vienna has 180 practising psychoanalysts, a number only exceeded before 1938, when Hitler wiped out the practice as an example of the decadent intellectualism of turn-of-the-century Vienna.

The clinic's library was destroyed and Freud, who had fled

to the UK, was put on a Gestapo hit-list. The VPS was re-founded in 1946 by two original members, August Aichhorn and Alfred von Winterstein. But prejudice against the therapeutic method that had attracted controversy since the end of the 19th century continued in post-war Vienna.

"The year 1938 marked the death of psychoanalysis in Austria . . . psychoanalysts were not invited to return", said Krista Placheta, head of the VPS. "Until the 1970s one had the impression that Freud had lived everywhere except Vienna", said Engelberg, adding that the new clinic now hopes to carry the tradition of psychoanalyse forward by becoming a major centre for conferences.

Meanwhile, Vienna will honour Freud on the 60th anniversary of his death with a major exhibition opening this week.

Nigel Glass