Recent developments in genome research in Japan /[British Embassy, Tokyo].

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN GENOME RESEARCH IN JAPAN

I am writing to report on two new genome related venture companies which will be set up by the Japanese government next year.

The 23 October issue of the Japanese economic daily newspaper *Nikkei Shimbun* reported that two companies will be set up with funds provided by the Ministry of Health & Welfare (MHW*) and the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI*) in March 1996. The background to this is the feeling that Japan is lagging five years behind other countries in genome research. In the absence of a mature venture capital sector, government has stepped in to help with funds to set up these companies.

The **Helix Research Institute** aims to establish generic technologies to "translate" how DNA arrangements are equipping functions to living things. The institute will be funded for seven years of operation with total investment of about ¥7.0 billion (about £45 million). 70% these funds will come from the by Key Technology Centre*, an organisation affiliated with MITI. The remaining funds will be contributed by a group of 15 private firms. These including Yamanouchi (drugs), Hitachi (electronics), Mitsubishi Chemical, Toray (fine chemicals and textiles) and Kyowa Hakko (drugs and enzymes). The president of the institute is likely to be Dr Teruhisa Noguchi, Vice President of Yamamouchi.

The **Pharma-Genocyte Institute** (provisional) will explore genes associated with diseases. Researchers will elucidate the mechanism of how disease states are initiated and will translate these results into the development of a new generation of drugs. The institute will also be funded for seven years. Total investment will be ¥4.0 billion (about £26 million), shared by the MHW's Organization of Adverse Drug Reaction Relief Research & Development (OADR*) and a group of ten firms including Eisai, Yamanouchi (drugs), Kirin Brewery and Olympus. Eisai will provide the president. The institute will concentrate on genetic diseases of childhood, such as cancers and immune

deficiencies. The MHW National Children's Medical Research Centre will cooperate in this research effort.

On 23 October, MHW set up a panel to put together a long term vision for new drugs development based on human genetic information. The panel will report in the spring of 1996. There are nine panel members, including Dr Noguchi (Yamanouchi), Dr Terada (MHW National Cancer Centre) and Professor Nagao of the University of Tokyo Faculty of Pharmacology.

British Embassy, Tokyo.

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