

Institute of Microbiology and Epidemiology, a People's Liberation Army hospital, and the Beijing Genomics Institute. Wadia believes that China's Ministry of Health was unaware of this case until news of the *NEJM* paper started circulating just before its publication. WHO has asked the ministry to investigate. "There is a public health significance [to the timely sharing of information] that can't be stressed too strongly," says Wadia.

A prominent Chinese military biologist who asked not to be identified says that

Chinese civilian and military researchers often do not share key research results because of fears that findings will be poached. Although he has no direct knowledge of the *NEJM* letter, he speculates that "it is most likely that the H5N1 patient was hospitalized in a military hospital"; otherwise, the military-affiliated research group would never have acquired the tissue samples.

—DENNIS NORMILE

With reporting by Gong Yidong and Jia Hepeng in Beijing.

## WAR ZONE

# Targeted for Murder, Iraqi Scientists Named on a Hit List

If you want to know how bad it is for scientists in Iraq these days, just ask Nazar Al-Anbaky. In the spring of 2005, a close friend, agronomist Awad Esa, director general of the Ministry of Agriculture's extension division, was gunned down by masked men as he was leaving work. Another colleague, Rafid Abdal Alkareem, head of the animal-welfare board, fled Iraq after surviving two assassination attempts. Faced with persistent threats, the ministry last fall dispersed most personnel around Baghdad. "I wasn't able to do my work. The danger was everywhere," says Al-Anbaky, who was deputy chief of the ministry's plant

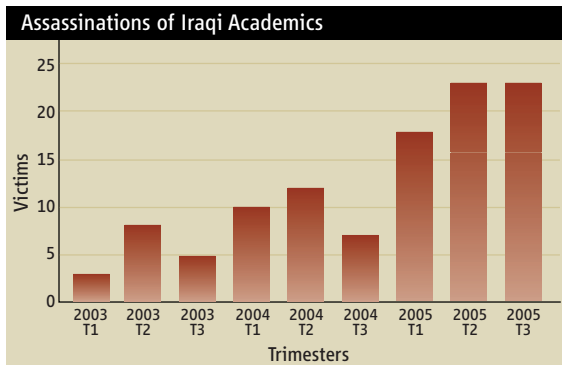
verified by several Iraqi scientists as authentic. Last week, rectors of six universities in Spain issued a statement warning of "a very grave outrage against the cultural and scientific development" of Iraq and urging authorities to investigate "the killing campaign."

For Iraq's beleaguered scientists, the hit list aggravates a desperate situation. Since the U.S.-led coalition invaded in April 2003, at least 188 Iraqi academics have been slain, according to a tally by the Spanish Campaign Against Occupation and for the Sovereignty of Iraq, based in Madrid. Over the past 3 years, the pace has increased (see graph). In that period, some 220 doctors have been killed and more than 1000 have left Iraq, the health ministry reported last February. Hundreds of scientists have fled the country. "This brain drain will adversely affect Iraq's development for years to come," says Jafar Jafar, head of Iraq's nuclear program under Saddam Hussein. Jafar, general manager of Uruk Engineering Services in Dubai, says he has helped "many friends and acquaintances" find jobs elsewhere.

The killers are largely unknown. Some murders are sectarian: Sunni militias targeting Shiite academics

and vice versa. Overall, however, the assassinations "do not follow any religious or sectarian pattern," says Ismail Jalili, an ophthalmic surgeon who presented an in-depth analysis at a conference in Madrid last April.

In some cases, money is a motive. One recent victim was Ali Hassan Mahawish, dean of engineering at Al-Mustansiriya University in Baghdad, who told *Science* last September how several professors in his department had gone overseas on sabbatical, depleting the faculty. He was seized by gunmen in March. ▶



**Mounting toll.** The murder rate of Iraqi academics has risen steadily since the April 2003 invasion.

protection research department. So in March, he too quit Iraq.

For months, Iraqi academics have denounced what they view as an unspoken campaign to cripple the country's intellectual elite (*Science*, 30 September 2005, p. 2156). Now they face an overt new threat. An unidentified group is circulating a hit list of 461 Iraqi intellectuals. The existence of leaflets calling for the assassination of named individuals was reported by the newspaper *Az-Zaman* last month; *Science* has obtained a copy of the list,

## Denice Denton (1959–2006)

Denice Denton, chancellor of the University of California (UC), Santa Cruz, and a champion of diversity in science and engineering, jumped to her death from a San Francisco apartment building on 24 June.

An electrical engineer, Denton became the first female dean of engineering at a major research university when she came to the University of Washington (UW), Seattle, in 1996. At UW, she established programs to bring more women and



minorities into engineering and introduced policies to enable female faculty members to balance work and family. "She had the ability to make everyone feel included," says Eve Riskin, an electrical engineering professor at UW.

In February 2005, she moved to UC Santa Cruz, where she was criticized for helping her partner, materials scientist Gretchen Kalonji, get a UC administrative job and for the \$600,000 spent on renovations to her campus home.

Last fall, Denton expressed frustration about her job during a meeting on women and science at the U.S. National Academies. "It's lonely at the top. No one has on their list of things to do, 'Be nice to the dean or the provost today. [Ask yourself] what can I do to support them in their endeavors for social justice?'" A colleague said Denton confided on 3 June that she was "very demoralized" and "didn't know how much more she could take."

"Denice was an accomplished and passionate scholar whose life and work demonstrated a deep commitment to public service and to improving opportunity for the disadvantaged and underrepresented," says UC President Robert Dynes. An interim chancellor is expected to be appointed soon.

—YUDHIJIT BHATTACHARJEE

## A Taste for Variety

**MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA**—The Human Variome Project—a planned database of all variant forms of human genes and their phenotypes—got off the ground here last week. Fifty-five international experts met to lay out a framework and name geneticist Richard Cotton their chief. Cotton says the project, which aims to cull global mutations data from databases and medical records to understand disease, needs \$60 million.

—ELIZABETH FINKEL

“The ransom was paid, but his family got a dead body,” says a colleague in Baghdad who asked to remain anonymous. The latest drama involves petroleum scientist Muthna Al-Badery, a top official in the Oil Ministry, who was kidnapped earlier this month. “Bargaining is still continuing for his life,” the Baghdad scientist says.

The hit list includes scientists, university

officials, engineers, doctors, and journalists in Baghdad and other cities. “The list is part of an organized, foreign-backed campaign to terrorize Iraqi brains,” an official with the Iraqi Writers Union told *Az-Zaman*. No one contacted by *Science* knows who issued the list. One prominent scientist with ties to Iraq’s intelligence community says that Iraqi investigators are probing claims that Iranian intelli-

gence agents are involved. The U.S. Embassy was not aware of the list, says spokesperson Dennis Culkin.

One thing is certain: The campaign has cast a pall over Iraqi academia. Says one engineering professor who is sticking it out in Baghdad, “We carry our coffin every day we go to work.”

—RICHARD STONE

## ETHICS

# Blocking a Book, Dutch University Rekindles Furor Over Nobelist Debye

A controversy about the alleged Nazi sympathies of Dutch chemistry Nobel laureate Peter Debye has escalated. Utrecht University last week halted publication of a pro-Debye book by an employee and ordered staff not to discuss the issue with the press. The move follows a university decision last February to strip Debye’s name from its institute for nanomaterials.

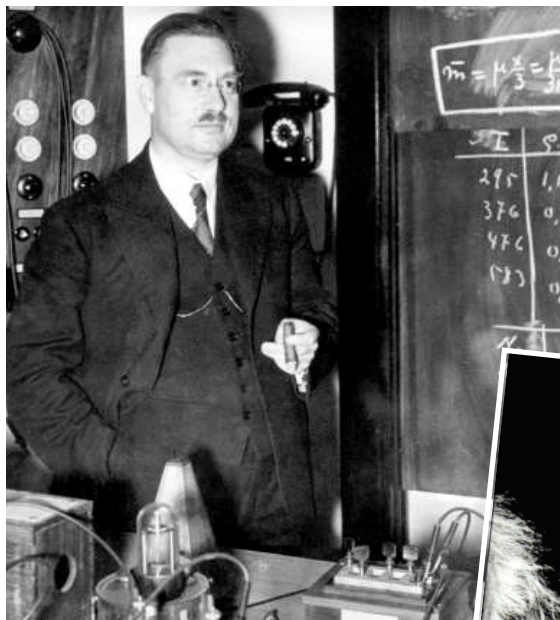
A science historian, meanwhile, has spoken out in Debye’s defense, as has another Dutch Nobel laureate, Martinus Veltman. Cornell University, where Debye was a professor from 1940 until his death in 1966, has concluded from its own 3-month investigation that there’s no reason to distance itself from him, as has the American Chemical Society (ACS).

The flap erupted after the publication of a harsh view of Debye—a physical chemist who led the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Physics in Berlin from 1935 to 1939—in *Einstein in Nederland: Een intellectuele biografie* by Berlin-based journalist and science historian Sybe Rispens. One chapter, excerpted in a weekly magazine, documented that Debye, as president of the German Physical Society (DPG), asked Jewish members to resign in a 1938 letter signed “Heil Hitler!” It also claimed that Debye stayed in touch with German authorities while at Cornell, even offering to return to Berlin in June 1941.

In a brief statement issued on 16 February, Utrecht University’s board said it would rename the Debye Institute, and Maastricht University said it would no longer award the Peter Debye Prize (*Science*, 3 March, p. 1239). Gijs van Ginkel, managing director of the “former Debye Institute,” as it now calls itself, responded by writing a book containing an

analysis of historical documents, his view of the affair, and a sharp attack on Rispens.

But the university has halted its publication. Van Ginkel referred questions to university spokesperson Ludo Koks, who denies that academic freedom is at stake; Koks says Van



**Counter-counterattack.** Utrecht University has halted the publication of a book that countered allegations about Peter Debye published in an earlier book (*inset*).

Ginkel had broken an agreement not to include personal comments in the publication. Koks confirms that institute staffers have been ordered not to talk to the press to “streamline communications.”

Mark Walker, a historian at Union College in Schenectady, New York, who studies science and technology in the Nazi era, says that although Debye “didn’t show civic courage, ... all the evidence is that he was not a Nazi sympathizer.” For example, the DPG purged its Jewish members much later than most other

scientific societies did, and without any enthusiasm whatsoever, he says. Signing official letters with “Heil Hitler!” was nothing unusual, even among those openly opposed to the regime. That Debye tried to keep communication channels to Germany open while at Cornell is also “absolutely reasonable,” Walker says, because his daughter still lived there.

Walker recently gave a lecture about Debye at Cornell, where the affair “was something we just couldn’t ignore,” says Héctor Abruña, chair of the Department of Chemistry and Chemical Biology. “Debye has had such a huge influence here.” In a 1000-word letter submitted for publication to *Chemical and Engineering News*, Abruña says a review shows that removing Debye’s name from a professorship and a lecture series would be “unwarranted.” Banning books is “not what universities should be about,” Abruña adds.

ACS sees “no compelling reason to do anything” about its Peter Debye Award in Physical Chemistry either, says Gordon McCarty, chair of ACS’s Committee on Grants and Awards;

DuPont, the awards sponsor, is “quite comfortable” with that stance, he adds.

Rispens says he opposes silencing different views on Debye and would welcome a study that went beyond his own focus on Albert Einstein’s circle. But the affair has cost Rispens the support of one enthusiastic fan: Veltman, who, in a foreword to Rispens’s book, praised it as “a nugget of gold.” In a

5 May open letter to Debye Institute staff, Veltman says he took Rispens’s assertions “at face value” at the time but now realizes “they should be assigned to the realm of fables.” The foreword will not appear in new editions or translations of the book, Veltman continued; the two universities “should admit their error, revoke their decision, and forget the matter,” he says.

—MARTIN ENSERINK

