



main under government authority, reportedly was rejected in June, and when PHYSICS TODAY went to press SAGE scientists were still waiting for

ministry that tried to take the gallium." Nor, say Russian and American SAGE scientists, is Bulgak's support for SAGE assured. **TONI FEDER**

word on a new petition. Says Gavrin, "The SAGE gallium problem can be solved finally and completely only if the government decrees that the gallium be transferred to the Russian Academy of Sciences." But convincing Kiriyyenko to do so could be "a big problem," Gavrin says, noting that Kiriyyenko previously headed the fuel and energy ministry, "the very

might recall that Montero is one of the scientists who was denied a visa a year ago, and there was a lot of protest over the State Department's action," says Carlos Handy, a physics professor at Clark Atlanta University. "I don't know if the calls helped, but anyways it worked out."

Montero received his US visa on 26 June, the day before his flight. During his four-week stay, he gave talks at Clark Atlanta and Cornell University and visited a former student who's now at the University of Arkansas.

Copies of *The Effect of Travel Restrictions on Scientific Collaboration between American and Cuban Scientists* are available from the Science and Human Rights Program, AAAS, 1200 New York Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20005; phone 202-326-6790; e-mail shrp@aaas.org.

JEAN KUMAGAI

As US-Cuba Ties Improve, Scientists Ask that Travel Restrictions be Lifted

The easing of political tensions between the US and Cuba following Pope John Paul II's trip to Havana last winter has brought with it greater freedom for American and Cuban scientists pursuing joint collaborations. Nevertheless, policies in both countries continue to restrict scientists' travel, "a freedom fundamental for scientific enterprise," states a report issued last month by the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

A particular concern is the arbitrariness that seems to govern the granting of licenses and visas required for travel between the two countries, notes AAAS's Elisa Muñoz, the author of the report. Among the report's 23 recommendations is that both governments abolish the travel license requirement and cease applying "political criteria" in judging visa applications.

The number of US and Cuban scientists being barred from travel "seems to be declining a little bit," observes Irving Lerch, the American Physical Society's director of international affairs. Physicists have learned, for example, that travel applications containing words like "nuclear" or "quantum" tend to get rejected, he says. "It's a game, and we're becoming more sophisticated at it," adds Lerch. "But if you don't know the ins and outs, your ability to travel can be abridged."

US scientists may rule out traveling to Cuba simply because they don't know how to go about it, Muñoz says. And so, despite having one of the largest science establishments in Latin

America—it is one of only five countries in the region to belong to the International Union of Pure and Applied Physics—Cuba is seldom tapped to host international meetings, out of fear that Americans won't attend. AAAS now plans to set up a clearinghouse for information on US-Cuba scientific exchanges. Among other things, it will assist those whose visa or license requests have been denied.

Of course, travel restrictions are not the only impediments to scientific collaborations. The report also touches on the detrimental effects of the US's longstanding trade embargo on Cuba, and on grosser human rights violations in Cuba, such as the firing of dissident scientists.

Down to the wire

According to the US State Department, 82% of Cuban scientists who applied for visas between January 1997 and March 1998 got them. However, the AAAS report notes, "many [visas] were received too late for the intended travel to take place."

Such late-hour decisions are common fare, confirms Luis Montero Cabrera, a Cuban quantum chemist whose visa rejection last year was vigorously disputed by APS leaders (see PHYSICS TODAY, July 1997, page 55). At the end of June, he was again preparing to visit the US, but several days before his scheduled departure, he had received no word on his visa. Two of his American hosts then called the State Department. "I told them, 'You

University of Texas Opens Materials Institute

The University of Texas at Austin has started up a multidisciplinary research center, the Texas Materials Institute. Among the research areas that TMI is stressing are electronic materials, polymers, structural and mechanical studies of materials, materials chemistry and electrochemical and photochemical processes, says Donald Paul, TMI's director, a chemical engineer who for 17 years headed the university's Center for Polymers, which is now a part of the institute.

A joint undertaking of UT-Austin's Colleges of Engineering and Natural Sciences, TMI draws its 75 or so members from the university's physics, chemistry and engineering faculties. UT-Austin "felt that we really needed to give a big push to materials science because our program has not been highly ranked in the past," says Sanjay Banerjee, an electrical engineer who serves on TMI's steering committee. "We want a more visible and cohesive program." The university will provide the institute, which opened in April, with \$600 000 annually for instruments, technical and administrative personnel and other infrastructure.

TMI is housed in several existing departments at the university and is



DONALD PAUL