

Company decodes human DNA

■ Celera Genomics cracks pattern before Human Genome Project.

WASHINGTON (AP) — A private company mapping the human genetic blueprint said Thursday it has completed a major step: decoding all of the DNA pieces that make up the genetic pattern of a single human being.

The milestone puts the company, Celera Genomics of Rockville, Md., far ahead of an international government effort to map the human genome using a different method.

"We've now completed the gene sequence plan of one human being," said Craig Venter, chief scientist for the company. He said the human being was an unidentified male, adding, "By the end of next week, we will have finished the gene sequence for a female."

There are about 3 billion DNA subunits in virtually every human cell. This DNA contains about 100,000 genes. The gene sequencing done thus far lines up small segments of the DNA.

Assembly of the entire genome will involve putting these segments in proper order.

This process, said Venter, will take several weeks. But he said the Celera work is far ahead of a similar effort by the government-funded Human Genome Project.

"We don't want to declare absolute victory yet, but call me in three or four weeks when it is all assembled," said Venter.

Dr. Francis Collins, the Human Genome Project's chief, said, "I'm happy to hear that Celera has completed this part of their business plan. We look forward to hearing how the assembly process goes and ultimately seeing the sequence made available" to the public.

Venter said the ordered sequence of the human genes will not be released to the public until it has been completely assembled.

"I don't believe a genome is done until there is an attempt to identify the genes and the linear sequence along all of the chromosomes," he said. "We will not have that completed until later this year."

The announcement by Celera

"We've now completed the gene sequence plan for one human being."

Craig Venter

chief scientist of Celera Genomics

drew a quick response from Wall Street investors. Shares of PE Corp., Celera's parent company, rose 26 7/8 points to 139 7/8 by midafternoon.

President Clinton's press secretary, Joe Lockhart, said the Celera announcement "marks a ... significant point in what the president has talked about extensively as ... one of the most important scientific developments of our time."

The Human Genome Project is expected to complete a "rough draft" of the human gene sequence this spring, but this will not be assembled into a finished order for several more years.

The federal project is using a different method than that used by Celera, which is using a technique developed by Venter.

But, in contrast to Celera, the federal project is releasing to the

public the genetic sequences as they are identified. The federal project thus far has put on the Internet the codes for about 2.3 billion subunits of the DNA.

Clinton recently announced that the United States and Britain have agreed to share data from their efforts to decode the human genetic pattern.

A U.S.-British statement urged private companies to follow the lead of government laboratories in sharing data.

To decode the genetic sequence, Venter said his company drew specimens from 30 different people. One specimen was then used to draw up the completed sequence. A male was chosen because only males have at least one copy of all the chromosomes, including the X and Y sex chromosomes.

World and Nation

Datelines

■ Washington, D.C.

New device may help those with rare stomach condition
WASHINGTON (AP) — The government has approved a novel pacemaker-like device to zap the stomachs of a few thousand Americans a year who are at risk of literally starving to death from a mysterious stomach disorder.

Patients with severe gastroparesis cannot eat, sometimes even drink, because of continual nausea, vomiting and pain. Their stomachs do not churn properly to move food down the digestive tract. Until now, the sickest patients have survived only with feeding tubes inserted into the intestine or total intravenous nutrition.

The Food and Drug Administration approved Medtronic Corporation's Enterra implant to help patients by zapping the stomach muscle with tiny electric shocks.

The shocks are supposed to stimulate nerves lining the stomach that control how it digests food.

■ Pakistan

Former prime minister gets life prison sentence

KARACHI, Pakistan (AP) — Pakistan's former prime minister on Thursday received a life prison term but escaped the death penalty for trying to down a passenger plane carrying the man who unseated him in last year's army coup.

An antiterrorist court found Nawaz Sharif guilty of hijacking and terrorism for the events of Oct. 12, when he refused to let a commercial airliner with army chief Gen. Pervez Musharraf aboard land in Pakistan. The army deposed Sharif the same day.

The court acquitted Sharif of two other charges — attempted murder and kidnapping.

Prosecutors had sought death sentences for all the defendants, and both sides quickly said they will appeal.

■ Washington, D.C.

Gonzalez's father declares love for his son

WASHINGTON (AP) — On U.S. soil, Juan Miguel Gonzalez said Thursday he was "truly impatient" to reclaim his son Elian, but his hopes for a quick transfer of custody were dashed when government negotiations with the 6-year-old Cuban boy's Miami relatives broke down.

The father declared his love for son Elian and chastised those who are trying "to obtain political advantage" from the custody battle over the shipwreck survivor.

Gonzalez received immediate assurances that the U.S. government is eager to reunite him with his son.

■ Washington, D.C.

General accused of sexual harassment gets office job

WASHINGTON (AP) — The two-star general accused of sexual harassment by the Army's highest-ranking female had been chosen for the No. 2 job in the Army office responsible for investigating wrongdoing, officials said Thursday.

Since the accusation was leveled last fall, Maj. Gen. Larry G. Smith's move into the job of deputy inspector general has been on hold, even though the Army publicly refuses to say that he is the subject of investigation.

The accusation of sexual harassment was made by Lt. Gen. Claudia Kennedy, the Army's only female three-star general and its top intelligence officer.

Cult leaders issued warrants for murder

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP) — Uganda issued arrest warrants Thursday for six doomsday cult leaders believed to have survived their sect's fiery end, which killed hundreds of their followers.

Police have failed to identify the bodies of Joseph Kibwetere, Credonia Mwerinde, Dominic Kataribabo and three less prominent leaders among the cult's dead, although many of the victims' corpses were burned or rotted beyond recognition.

"We believe they are alive and in hiding," said Erasmus Opia, acting director of the Criminal Investigation Division in Kampala. "We have no evidence to the contrary."

The six have been charged with murder, said Richard Buteera, director of public prosecution. Police have uncovered at least 924 bodies at several cult compounds.

The suspects face death by hanging if caught and convicted.

Uganda also has obtained international warrants through Interpol, in case any have fled the country, Opia said. No sightings of the cult leaders have been reported since the March 17 fire at the sect's chapel — and investigators have given no sign of having clues as to their whereabouts.

An explosive chapel fire in

Kanungu burned 530 people alive, revealing to the world the deadly activities of the doomsday cult.

Subsequent searches of sect compounds in southwestern Ugandan villages turned up 394 bodies, many of them children, piled in mass graves and thrown into a pit latrine.

Buteera said there was no breakthrough that led to the charges — only an accumulation of details already disclosed.

"We now have enough information to take this action," the prosecutor said.

Only one sect follower is known to have survived the church fire, a 17-year-old boy who slipped out that morning.

Among those with warrants against them, Kibwetere, a 64-year-old excommunicated Roman Catholic, was known as "The Prophet" to his followers, and the sect's official leader.

Mwerinde, however, was suspected to be the true mastermind of the cult. Known as "The Programmer," the 48-year-old ex-bar worker wielded clout in part by claiming to have direct contact with God and the Virgin Mary.

Kataribabo, 32, was an excommunicated Roman Catholic priest. Some local residents believe he died in the gasoline-fueled fire at the church.

American citizen accused of spying

■ Man's arrest is latest in series of spy arrests in Russia and the U.S.

MOSCOW (AP) — U.S. officials said Thursday they were following closely the case of an American citizen arrested in Moscow on spying charges, but said the man did not have diplomatic immunity and couldn't say when he might be released.

The case was the latest in a string of spying arrests in Russia and the United States and seemed likely to further strain already tense relations between the two countries.

Russian authorities arrested the man Wednesday on suspicion that he developed contacts with Russian scientists in an effort to steal state secrets, Russia's Federal Security Service said. His name was not released.

An official at the U.S. Embassy, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the man was being held at the Lefortovo prison in Moscow. U.S. State Department spokesman James Rubin said earlier that the American had not complained of any mistreatment.

The U.S. Embassy official said Russian authorities had not filed formal charges but were investigating whether the American was guilty of espionage. He said a Russian lawyer has been appointed for the man, who was in Russia on business when he was arrested.

A Russian citizen whose name was

also kept confidential by the police was arrested after leaving the American's office, the Federal Security Service said. It said the American was believed to be interested in missile designs. He had cultivated contacts with Russian scientists and a search revealed he had "technical drawings of various equipment," security officials said.

Several Western television networks reported that the American is named Edmond Pope.

A former Navy captain by that name worked for three years with Pennsylvania State University's Applied Research Laboratory, which does research projects for the U.S. Navy. He left in 1997 to found a company called CERF Technologies International, which "has commercial contacts with organizations in Russia," a university spokesman said.

The spokesman said Pope, while working at the lab, had been an "assistant for foreign technology" who developed contacts between Russian and American research institutes and worked on converting technology for commercial uses.

When asked if Pope was the American arrested, the U.S. Embassy official said he could not confirm the name.

In an article with the journal Penn State Agriculture dated three years ago, Pope was described as a "foreign technology specialist" who obtained a lightweight, highly sensitive spectrometer from a Russian scientist.

Daily Nebraskan

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WEATHER

TODAY

Windy
high 49, low 27

TOMORROW

Sunny
high 59, low 36