Drug dropped
IF ANYONE detonates a nuclear bomb in a US city those affected by radiation shouldn’t expect an instant remedy. In a shock move, the government has dropped plans to buy a novel drug to treat radiation sickness.

Last week Hollis-Eden, a start-up firm in San Diego, California, expected a government order for a million self-injectable doses of Neumune, a drug that stimulates bone marrow growth (New Scientist, 3 March, p 7). The US Department of Health and Human Services now says that no drug meets its requirements. Richard Hollis, CEO of Hollis-Eden, calls this “difficult to understand”, especially since government officials told him last October that Neumune was what they wanted.

This is the second cancellation under the $5.6 billion Project BioShield, the US government’s plan to defend against biological, chemical and radiological attacks. Last December it dropped its biggest contract, for an anthrax vaccine, with VaxGen, another California firm.

“The US government now says no radiation drug meets its requirements”

Extinct after all
The best evidence for the continued existence of the ivory-billed woodpecker, believed extinct for decades until “captured” on video two years ago, has been discredited. A video analysis of the common piliated woodpecker to be published in BMC Biology shows it has the colour pattern and wingbeat frequency thought to be unique to the ivory-bill.

Even earlier humans
Modern humans were around at least 100,000 years earlier than we thought, if the teeth in a fossil jawbone are anything to go by. The 160,000-year-old teeth, found in Morocco, show growth patterns more similar to living Homo sapiens than fossil Homo species (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, DOI: 10.1073/pnas.0700747104).

Dwarf no more
Pluto’s no planet – unless you live in New Mexico. The star-struck state, home to a host of observatories, was this week considering reinstating Pluto as a full-blown planet, rather than the dwarf status assigned it by the International Astronomical Union last August. Why? Pluto’s discoverer, Clyde Tombaugh, hailed from New Mexico State University.

Hot money
In open defiance of attempts to restrain its nuclear programme, Iran unveiled new banknotes on Monday bearing the nuclear symbol of electrons orbiting a nucleus. Worth about $5, the notes carry a saying from the prophet Mohammed: “Men from the land of Persia will attain scientific knowledge even if it is as far as the Pleiades.”

Bound to cut carbon
The UK has become the first country to propose legally binding national limits on greenhouse gas emissions. The draft Climate Change Bill, published on Tuesday, requires cuts in carbon dioxide emissions of 60 per cent by 2050, relative to 1990 levels.