

Iran to Bail Out Physics Center

Threatened by financial disaster, the International Center for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) in Trieste, Italy, may close its doors at least temporarily on 1 January, unless it receives an emergency loan. It now looks as though a bailout may be on the way, coming from a surprising source: Iran's minister of education.

The physics center, brainchild of Nobel laureate Abdus Salam—one of the three creators of the electroweak theory of fundamental forces—has long been plagued by tight budgets. Earlier this year, ICTP officials began tightening the purse strings by cancelling scientific workshops and delaying staff pay raises. But this bought

only a few months' relief for the ICTP, which hosts symposia and conferences for roughly 4000 scientists a year and runs microprocessor, high-temperature superconductor, and laser experiments. The center is primarily used by scientists from developing countries.

The ICTP staff decided to alert the world to the funding crisis, warning in a widely circulated 4 November letter that the center would run out of money by year's end and remain closed for up to 6 months. The doors would reopen, the letter said, only after the Italian government provided new funds. Later this month the Italian senate is expected to ratify a measure that would authorize 90% of the center's 1991-1998 budget, or about \$15 million a year, says an ICTP spokeswoman, but the funding won't become available for 3 to 6 months.

However, the Iranian loan will enable ICTP to avoid a shutdown. Rescue will arrive in the form of a \$2.5-million loan, which the Iranian government granted after a plea from Iranian physicist Daemi Ranjbar, who heads ICTP's Center for High-