AN INDEPENDENT auditing body has said that Britain’s largest collaborative research effort in information technology, the Alvey programme, has failed to meet some of its key objectives. In a report published last week, the National Audit Office said that the Alvey programme suffered from poor financial control and that the next few weeks are an inadequate monitoring of progress and delays to many of the programmes. The report also said that the rate at which industry had exploited the fruits of the research had been “below that expected by the Alvey committee”.

The government set up the Alvey programme in 1983 to rival Japan’s plans for developing a fifth-generation computer. A committee chaired by John Alvey recommended a programme costing £350 million over five years that would unite researchers in academia and industry. Funds from the

Secrets of star wars remain censored

A SECTION of the US’s Strategic Defence Initiative Organisation (SDIO) is blocking publication of part of a technical report on star wars by the Office of Technology Assessment.

Congressional sources say that the OTA assumed wrongly that it had permission to publish an unclassified version of its assessment of the SDI. Now, the Pentagon, at the instigation of the SDIO, wants to classify three chapters central to the report. These deal with survivability of the system and countermeasures that the Soviet Union could take to invalidate the technology of star wars.

This week, the Pentagon may overrule the classifiers in the SDIO. Otherwise, the OTA’s report will not appear publicly until some time after congressional committees have decided on the SDIO’s budget for 1989. The OTA’s report is already nine months late, following delays resulting from wrangles about which parts of the report could be unclassified. The OTA’s report will not appear publicly until some time after congressional committees have decided on the SDIO’s budget for 1989. The OTA’s report is already nine months late, following delays resulting from wrangles about which parts of the report could be unclassified.

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NASA has a new safety device to save the lives of astronauts if their journeys into space aboard a shuttle are aborted in the moments after launch. The astronauts will slide to safety down a pole.

The telescopic pole, which NASA decided on last week, is the final piece in a jigsaw of new safety measures for shuttle crews, developed in the aftermath of the destruction of the shuttle Challenger, with the loss of all hands on board, in January 1986.

If, in an emergency during launch, the orbiter must separate from its fuel tanks and solid rocket boosters, but lacks the power to reach a landing strip, the crew will slide out down the pole. NASA chose the

Hooker seeks charity

A BAND of astronomers in the US hopes to raise enough money to reopen the 250-centimetre Hooker telescope on Mount Wilson, overlooking Los Angeles. The Carnegie Institution once ran the telescope, but closed it in 1985 to release funds for developing an 8-metre telescope in Chile.

The redundant telescope is important to astronomers because it allows them to

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