

German prize winner misses ceremony after misconduct allegation

Munich One of the ten winners of Germany's most prestigious scientific prize was absent from the prize-giving ceremony last week in Berlin. The DFG, the country's main funding agency, withdrew its invitation to Stefanie Dimmeler, a molecular cardiologist at the University of Frankfurt, after anonymous accusations of scientific misconduct.

Dimmeler, who studies atherosclerosis, was selected in December for the DFG's €1.5-million (US\$2-million) Leibniz Prize. The agency subsequently received letters pointing to identical figures in at least three of her publications. Dimmeler admitted a "mistake" in a paper published in *Nature Medicine* in 2003, but says she informed the journal, which published a correction in September 2004.

The DFG says it will decide whether to award the prize money after an investigation by the University of Frankfurt. The DFG's ombudsman for scientific misconduct, Hans-Heinrich Trute, says Dimmeler has been open about errors in her publications, but the allegations must be fully investigated.

Mine hosts detector to put neutrinos to the flavour test

Washington Scientists at Fermilab in Chicago have begun an experiment that they hope will help them to understand the properties of one of the most mysterious subatomic particles, the neutrino.

Neutrinos are generated in some nuclear reactions, rarely interact with any kind of matter, and come in three different types, or 'flavours'. In 1998, researchers unexpectedly found evidence that neutrinos from the Sun may spontaneously switch from one flavour to another — a fact not predicted by the standard model of particle physics.

To study this flavour switching, Fermilab physicists have constructed a \$170-million neutrino beam and detector. The project, known as MINOS, will hurl trillions of neutrinos each year through 735 km of solid rock to a detector in the Soudan iron mine in Minnesota. Just a few thousand neutrinos will be detected, but scientists hope this will be enough to catch flavour switching in action. They believe the study may ultimately allow them to revise the standard model.

Parliament plans move to make 'European MIT'

Strasbourg A cross-party group of 130 European politicians has proposed turning the parliament building in Strasbourg into a European Institute of Technology (EIT).

Marmoset heads queue for genome sequencing

Washington Twelve more organisms have been selected for genome sequencing by the US National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI) in Bethesda, Maryland — all chosen for the insights they can provide into human genetics. The marmoset (*Callithrix jacchus*, pictured), is the first New World monkey to get the treatment. The list also includes the skate (*Raja erinacea*), which sits at a pivotal node of the evolutionary tree, and the insect *Rhodnius prolixus*, which carries the parasite that causes Chagas' disease.

The other species are the sea slug *Aplysia californica*, the pea aphid *Acyrtosiphon pisum*, the insects *Nasonia vitripennis*, *N. giraulti* and *N. longicornis*, the soil amoeba *Acanthamoeba castellanii*, and the fungi *Schizosaccharomyces octosporus*, *S. japonicus* and *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*.

Don't expect the results overnight, warns a



spokesman for the NHGRI, which does a large chunk of the world's public sequencing. "It takes a while, once an organism is approved, to find the right strain or the appropriate sample, and then to make libraries and do some preliminary testing." The NHGRI adds species to its list two to three times a year.

The idea of creating the EIT, modelled on the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was put forward last month by European Commission president José Manuel Barroso as part of his strategy to make Europe more competitive.

A parliamentary group known as the Campaign for Parliament Reform leapt on the idea. The group campaigns for an end to



Strasbourg: a chance to swap politics for science.

the notorious 'travelling circus' that occurs when the entire European Parliament moves from Brussels to Strasbourg for a few days every month to hold some sessions.

Abandoning the Strasbourg building would save €200 million (US\$260 million) every year in travel costs, the group says, but is politically sensitive. It hopes Strasbourg might accept the EIT as adequate compensation for losing the parliament.

India builds up research base with two institutes

New Delhi The Indian government is to create two new research institutes and establish an autonomous funding agency under the aegis of the prime minister, Manmohan Singh.

The chairman of the prime minister's science advisory council, C. N. R. Rao, says he has been pushing the scheme for more than a decade. "I am happy that it has finally

come through," he told *Nature*. The agency, the National Science and Engineering Research Foundation, is to be modelled on the US National Science Foundation and will have an initial annual budget of Rs10 billion (US\$230 million). The two new institutes — in Pune and Kolkata — will each cost Rs5 billion and be modelled on the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore.

In another effort to build up basic science, research funding in some of India's seven institutes of technology will be increased.

Environment agency gets scientist as head

Washington For the first time in its 35-year history, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is to be run by a scientist.

Stephen Johnson, a pathologist by training, was last week nominated by President George Bush as the successor to Mike Leavitt, who left the EPA for the Department of Health and Human Services in January.

Johnson, a career employee at the EPA, had been acting head of the agency since Leavitt's departure. He ran the agency's pesticide programme before becoming deputy administrator in 2003.

Bush has come under fire for opposing environmental regulation, and his first EPA administrator, Christine Todd Whitman, resigned in 2003. She has since criticized the Bush administration for being too ideological.

Even groups usually critical of the Bush administration cautiously welcomed the choice. "We're hopeful that Johnson's nomination means that the administration will make decisions based on science and protective of public health and the environment," said the US Public Interest Research Group in a statement.