

ON THE RECORD

“When we eliminate the need to launch off Mars, we remove the mission’s most daunting obstacle.”

Former NASA engineer James McLane on how Mars missions could be easier if we don’t bother making provision for astronauts coming back.

SCORECARD**Galileo Galilei**

The Vatican is finally set to recognize Galileo’s contribution to science by erecting his statue, four centuries after accusing him of heresy.

**American PhDs**

Seven US-educated scientists working at the Max Planck Society’s institutes are facing criminal charges for impersonating a doctor — under German law, a US PhD does not qualify them to use the title.

3 GOOD REASONS

... to celebrate Pi Day on 14 March

1. You can be as accurate as you like — for example, ‘pi second’ will occur on 3/14 at 1:59:26 p.m.

2. You can engage in pi-related activities, such as, erm, eating pie (circular pies only, please ...).

3. It’s more accurate than ‘Pi approximation day’, celebrated on 22 July (or 22/7 to Europeans).

NUMBER CRUNCH

5,000 cows are the newest contributors to California’s energy grid, after the opening of a new biogas facility aiming to capitalize on bovine bodily emissions.

1,200 homes per day could be powered by the scheme, which captures natural gas from manure.

16 million citizens of Karachi, Pakistan, wish they were so fortunate — the city has been plunged into blackouts after the energy company that supplies it was cut off over unpaid bills.

Sources: *The Times*, ABCNews.com, piday.org, Chem. Eng. News



M. YORK/AP

SNAPSHOT Flooding the canyon

Gushing through the bypass gates of the Glen Canyon Dam in northern Arizona, the turbid, ruddy waters that once gave the Colorado River its name poured into

the Grand Canyon last week at more than twice the usual rate.

The flush was intended to mimic floods that carried large quantities of sediment into the canyon before the dam’s construction 45 years ago, which cut the mud flow to 6% of its natural level.

The floods built sandbars and maintained the river’s

copper colour, enabling the vulnerable native fish, called humpback chub, to hide from predators.

Although the river level temporarily rose by up to 5 metres in the canyon, it is unclear whether the torrent successfully dirtied the water, as the models had predicted.

Anna Petherick

Libya progresses on HIV

Scientists and physicians meeting in Tripoli last month reported substantial improvement in the treatment of hundreds of Libyan children who had been accidentally infected with HIV in the late 1990s.

Cooperation between the European Union and Libya has also led to a new multidisciplinary, integrated approach towards HIV/AIDS treatment in Libya that could be a model for North Africa and the Middle East, according to a draft report from the meeting, which was organized by the Gaddafi International Charity and Development Foundation, headed by Seif al-Islam al-Gaddafi.

Senior Libyan, US and European health officials were joined at the workshop by scientists, such as Nobel laureate Richard Roberts and HIV researcher Vittorio Colizzi, who had agitated prominently for the liberation of six foreign medical workers jailed in Libya. The Palestinian doctor and five Bulgarian nurses were convicted of deliberately infecting more than 400 children with HIV and sentenced to death. The six were freed last July following an international outcry.

The meeting was held to examine ways of preventing future tragedies similar to the infection acquired at the al-Fateh Children’s Hospital in Benghazi, and to look generally at improving the treatment of HIV/AIDS in the country.

“Out of the disaster of Benghazi is emerging progress,” says Rafeek Hosny, a UK-based coordinator of the European Union’s €2.5-million (US\$3.9-million) HIV Action Plan for Benghazi, a humanitarian package agreed in 2004. Libya’s openness in dealing with its HIV problem — including introducing condoms and needle-exchange programmes in prisons — is now far better than any other Middle Eastern country, Hosny claims. This month, Libya is to issue national guidelines, drafted in collaboration with the European Union, for managing HIV.

But scientists at the meeting criticized lack of progress on Libya’s proposal to build an African centre for infectious disease control and research. Such a centre, they say, could potentially be of immense benefit to Libyans as well as a major resource for the whole of Africa.

Declan Butler