

Roche launches hostile bid for Genentech shares

Swiss pharmaceutical giant Roche made a second attempt on 30 January to capture the 44% of US biotechnology firm Genentech that it does not already own.

The board of the highly successful Genentech, based in San Francisco, California, had rejected Roche's offer of US\$89 a share in summer 2008 as too low (see *Nature* 454, 381; 2008). But after the turmoil of the global financial markets saw Genentech's share value fall from a high of \$99 in August last year to \$84 on 29 January, Roche cut its offer to \$86.50 a share and bypassed directors, going straight to shareholders.

Some analysts say that the Basel-based firm is trying to force a deal ahead of clinical-trial results expected in April that could substantially expand the use of Genentech's blockbuster anticancer drug Avastin and drive up Genentech's value. "If the trial works, Genentech is out of Roche's reach," argues Geoffrey Porges, a biotechnology analyst with Sanford Bernstein, an investment-research firm in New York.

Ebola virus hits more pig farmers in the Philippines

Four more workers at pig farms in the Philippines have contracted the Ebola-Reston subtype of Ebola virus, in addition to a case reported two weeks ago.

All five, identified by the presence of antibodies to the virus in their blood, worked with sick pigs and were probably infected more than six months ago. Ebola Reston was discovered last year in pigs on Luzon, the largest island in the Philippines (see *Nature* 457, 364–365; 2009). The virus has yet to trigger any symptoms in humans, but could mutate into more virulent forms inside pigs or other animal carriers.

Refitted drilling ship sets sail

A year later than planned, the US research vessel *JOIDES Resolution* has been rebuilt. The ship departed from Singapore for Hawaii on 25 January after two years of overhaul and laboratory additions costing US\$130 million (see *Nature* 453, 7; 2008).

With more than 20 years of research-cruise experience, she is the sole US ship in the Integrated Ocean Drilling Program, which also includes the Japanese vessel *Chikyu* and European platforms. The *JOIDES Resolution* will drill cores in the bed of the equatorial Pacific to document extreme climate-change events.



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Health authorities are now testing acquaintances of the infected five to see whether human-to-human transmission might have occurred.

Austrian scientists rattled by threat to funding

Jittery Austrian scientists have been assured that their ongoing research projects will continue to be financed, despite uncertainties over whether this year's science budget will be slashed by 40%.

The letter from Christoph Kratky, the president of the FWF, Austria's research agency, also said that no one will get a pay rise, and no new projects will be approved until the government makes its intentions clear.

Austria has been pumping up its research expenditure with special funds for several years. In 2006 it ranked fifth in research intensity among the 27 member states of the European Union. But plans to eliminate these funding pots to help fight the financial crisis were leaked from the new government when it took office in December. It is scheduled to make a final decision in April.

World's largest telescope under construction

China has begun building the biggest radio telescope in the world, the Five-hundred-meter Aperture Spherical Telescope (FAST). Sitting in a natural bowl-shaped depression in a remote region of Guizhou province, southwestern China, FAST is due to be completed in 2014.

China's National Astronomical Observatories will use the exquisite resolution of the 700-million-yuan

(US\$102-million) facility to identify distant pulsars and galaxies in the low-gigahertz range of the radio spectrum.

FAST will unseat the Arecibo radio telescope in Puerto Rico as the biggest single eye on the sky — although it will not be able to match the resolution of multiple-antenna telescopes such as the Very Large Array in New Mexico and the Atacama Large Millimeter/submillimeter Array (ALMA) in Chile (currently under construction).

New York tops US technology-transfer league

A survey has ranked high earners from technology-licensing income among US universities, hospitals, research institutions and investment firms during fiscal year 2007.

Of the 185 respondents that allowed their data to be published, New York University earned the most at \$791 million, much of it from selling partial royalty rights to the autoimmune-disease drug Remicade. Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston was second with \$346 million. Columbia University in New York, which has licensed drug therapies, medical devices and consumer electronics technologies, took in \$136 million.

Research at the institutions surveyed resulted in the creation of 555 start-up companies, led by the University of California System with 38. The survey, released on 26 January, was conducted by the non-profit Association of University Technology Managers.

Correction

In the article 'China targets top talent from overseas' (*Nature* 457, 522; 2009), we cited an incorrect salary for Shi Yigong of Tsinghua University, Beijing. *Nature* apologises for the mistake, and for any distress caused.

R. RANOCO/REUTERS



Five people have caught the Ebola virus from pigs.