

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

POLICY

EU funding reform

The European Commission has launched a public consultation on the future of Europe's main research-funding mechanism. The current system, the 7-year, €50.5-billion (US\$68.3-billion) Seventh Framework Programme, will end in 2013. A green paper released on 9 February asks what the next programme might be called, and how it might be restructured to broaden participation, lower administrative burdens and mesh with national policies. Contributions are invited until 20 May. The Commission's top science advisory group, the European Research Area Board, has already recommended that there be less political interference in the framework programme (see *Nature* 470, 16; 2011).

US budget clash

Battle-lines have been drawn over the future of science funding in the United States, after US president Barack Obama released his 2012 budget request on 14 February. With increases sought for several science agencies, it sets Obama on a collision course with the Republican-controlled House of Representatives, which hopes to cut funding for many of the same organizations. See pages 313–315 for details.

Vaccine initiative

Kenya became the fifth country to roll out a new pneumococcal vaccine this week, under a plan to help developing countries adopt new vaccines as speedily as the developed world. Pharmaceutical companies usually have little incentive to research and produce affordable vaccines for poor nations. But the initiative, led by the GAVI Alliance, breaks



AP PHOTO/K. HAMRA

Egypt's revolution offers hope to science

Elated scientists joined celebrations throughout Egypt following the resignation of Hosni Mubarak on 11 February, after 30 years of presidency. With the military in interim control, the country's future is unclear, but academics are already hoping to improve its moribund research system. Egyptian-born scientist Ahmed Zewail, winner of the 1999 Nobel Prize in Chemistry, told state television that he would present a plan to overhaul research

and education. Mohamed El Raey, a physicist at the University of Alexandria, told *Nature Middle East* that support for education, science and technology should be Egypt's "first line of defence" (see Editorial, page 306). Valuable treasures did not survive the revolution unscathed; it emerged on 12 February that eight objects were missing from Cairo's Museum of Egyptian Antiquities. For the latest news and interviews, see nature.com/arabawakening.

this impasse by guaranteeing firms a market for their products, and cuts vaccine prices further using public subsidies. If more money can be raised, more than 40 developing countries are expected to roll out the vaccine by 2015. See go.nature.com/hmkyod for more.

Grants glitch

Computer glitches forced Australia's National Health and Medical Research Council to shut down its online system for accepting funding applications last week. The council's chief executive, Warwick Anderson, said that deadlines for some research

grants would be extended to April. As *Nature* went to press, the system was still down. The council awards AUS\$700 million (US\$700 million) in grants each year.

BUSINESS

Biofuel offering

Gevo, a company that genetically modifies microbes to produce chemicals from plant sugars, raised US\$107 million at \$15 a share in an initial public offering on 9 February. The company, headquartered in Englewood, Colorado, saw its shares rise about 10% on the opening day's trading.

Using technology in part licensed from metabolic engineer James Liao at the University of California, Los Angeles, Gevo plans to make and sell isobutanol, which could replace ethanol as a fuel additive, but which is also used to produce plastics and rubber.

Pollution fight

US oil giant Chevron of San Remon, California, says that it will appeal a US\$8.6-billion fine imposed for environmental damages by an Ecuadorian court on 14 February, calling the judgment "illegitimate and unenforceable". The lawsuit was brought on behalf of thousands

of Ecuadorians, who claim that the company should be held responsible for pollution stemming from drilling in the Amazon during the 1970s and 1980s. The drilling was carried out in part by the oil company Texaco, which Chevron later purchased.

RESEARCH

Comet flyby

NASA's Stardust spacecraft sped past comet Tempel 1 on 14 February. The probe, which had previously collected dust from the Wild 2 comet, snapped images of Tempel 1 five-and-a-half years after the agency's Deep Impact mission visited and shot a projectile into the same comet. Researchers hope to spot differences that will reveal how comets change with each orbit round the Sun, and will zero in on the Deep Impact crater to determine more about the strength and stability of Tempel 1's upper layers. See go.nature.com/fhikl9 for more.

Peruvian artefacts

Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, is to establish a museum and joint research centre with the University of Cusco in Peru, to house a collection of tools, ceramics and bones from the Inca site Machu Picchu. The Peruvian government had long been demanding the return of

the objects, excavated by US archaeologist Hiram Bingham in the early 1900s; last November, Yale agreed to send them back to South America. Details of the formal accord, including plans for a laboratory for collaborative investigations, were unveiled on 11 February.



Trip to virtual Mars

Humans have walked on the surface of Mars — in a simulated expedition (pictured). For 520 days, the Mars500 mission is cooping up six men in three small rooms at the Institute of Biomedical Problems in Moscow, simulating the isolation of a journey to Mars and back. Eight months after 'launch', the expedition reached orbit and three crew members were selected to enter a lander on 8 February. Four days later, they walked on reddish sand resembling that of Mars's Gusev crater. After two more

sorties to the surface, the virtual journey back to Earth will start on 1 March.

Animal diseases

Livestock plagues are on the rise globally, owing to increasingly intensive farming practices and the world's growing taste for meat and other animal products. The warning came from scientists at the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), based in Nairobi, Kenya, at a conference in New Delhi on 10–12 February. Developing countries, including many in Africa and Asia, lag “dangerously behind” in controlling these diseases, says John McDermott, deputy director-general for research at the ILRI. See go.nature.com/bhbgby for more.

Forest rights

The intensifying hunt for land for agriculture and biofuels threatens the rights and livelihoods of millions of people who live in tropical forests, according to a report launched in London on 8 February. The Rights and Resources Initiative, a coalition of advocacy groups and non-governmental organizations based in Washington DC, found a “disturbing tendency of some governments to roll back hard-won local land rights” as forests become more valuable. The rights of local

COMING UP

22–23 FEBRUARY

In La Jolla, California, leading genetics researchers gather to discuss the promise of human genomics over the next decade.

go.nature.com/w8zssx

23 FEBRUARY

NASA's Glory probe is scheduled to launch. It will monitor aerosols in the atmosphere and the Sun's radiation output.

go.nature.com/z3cke6

people in African countries have the least recognition, the report says. See go.nature.com/ayiyo3 for more.

PEOPLE

Stolen secrets

A former research chemist at the chemical giant Dow was last week found guilty of stealing trade secrets, and of perjury. Wen Chyu Liu, also known as David W. Liou, conspired with “at least four” current and former Dow employees to steal details on the industrial polymer chlorinated polyethylene. The information was then sold to companies in China, according to the US Department of Justice. Liu, who retired from Dow in 1992, faces a maximum of 15 years in prison on the charges; he has not yet been sentenced.

NAS president

Ralph Cicerone was re-elected president of the US National Academy of Sciences (NAS) on 10 February. Cicerone, an atmospheric scientist who was chancellor of the University of California, Irvine, before his NAS presidency began in 2005, will serve a second six-year term at the top, beginning on 1 July this year.

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TREND WATCH

Funding for work on neglected diseases totalled US\$3.26 billion in 2009 — an 8% rise in real terms over 2008, according to the third annual ‘G-Finder’ investment survey by Policy Cures, a health-policy analysis firm based in London and in Sydney, Australia. Funding for basic research jumped by 21%; but for product development, it rose only 5%. And funding for organizations that manage private–public partnerships to develop drugs dropped by 8.6%, which the report terms a “troubling trend”.

FUNDING FOR NEGLECTED DISEASES

HIV, malaria and tuberculosis commanded 72% of funding for neglected diseases in 2009.

