

POLICY

Libel reform

Freedom of speech in academic debate can expect stronger protection in proposed reforms to English libel laws. A defamation bill introduced in Parliament on 10 May gives explicit protection (among other changes) to peer-reviewed statements in scientific or academic journals, and to fair and accurate reports of proceedings at academic conferences. The bill has strong support across political parties, so is likely to pass. The issue was propelled to national attention by campaigners after a 2009 libel case involving the British science writer Simon Singh. See go.nature.com/ml3ia for more.

Conflict of interest

Diána Bánáti, chairwoman of the European Food Safety Authority's management board, resigned on 8 May to move to the International Life Sciences Institute, a non-governmental organization based in Washington DC and funded by large food and chemical companies. Bánáti has been accused of having a conflict of interest previously, and her move fuelled criticism about the closeness between European science agencies and industrial interest groups. See page 294 and Editorial, page 279, for more.

Global Fund revived

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria seems to be emerging from a fund-raising crisis, after a thorough restructuring following the resignation of its executive director. General manager Gabriel Jaramillo, appointed in February to overhaul the organization, announced on 9 May that the fund could resume supporting new grants using around



One million species online

The Encyclopedia of Life, an online database that hopes to create a record of each of the 1.9 million species currently known to biologists, has passed the 1-million species milestone, it announced on 9 May. The project launched in 2008, when it contained just 30,000 species, but over the past few years it has persuaded partners worldwide to upload their databases. The latest jump was provided by data and images from the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History in Washington DC; one of the new additions, the dragonfly known as the Sioux Snaketail (*Ophiogomphus smithi*), is pictured. See go.nature.com/2cwvf6 for more.

US\$1.6 billion that will be available up to 2014. The fund, which is based in Geneva, Switzerland, will hand out around \$3 billion this year. Five months ago, it had frozen new grants until 2014 after struggling to raise cash from donors, and finding corruption affecting some of its grants.

Nuclear clean-up

Japan's government has announced a ¥1-trillion (US\$12.5-billion) plan to bail out the owners of the stricken Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO), effectively nationalizing the firm. The deal — inevitable as TEPCO struggled to shoulder the financial burden of cleaning up the plant — will see the

government take control of the utility, holding a significant amount of stock and more than half of the voting shares. See go.nature.com/lrbo9f for more.

India drug scandal

India's health ministry has said that it will reform its drug-approvals process and scrutinize clinical trials more closely, after a parliamentary investigation published on 8 May revealed major flaws in the way medicines are tested and cleared for sale. The report said that India's drugs regulator, the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization, was understaffed, lacked expertise, approved drugs that had not been sufficiently tested, and colluded with pharmaceutical companies to speed approvals.

RESEARCH

Mars rover lives

NASA's Mars rover Opportunity is up and about again, having survived a fifth Martian winter. On 8 May, the rover drove about 3.7 metres downhill from an outcrop called Greeley Haven, on the rim of a massive crater named Endeavour. It had stayed there, low on solar power, since 26 December 2011; in January, it marked its eighth anniversary on the red planet. See go.nature.com/v2olc2 for more.

The end for Envisat

The European Space Agency (ESA) has officially declared its premier environmental satellite dead. ESA unexpectedly lost contact with the €2.3 billion (US\$3 billion) Envisat on 8 April (see *Nature* **484**, 423–424; 2012). Images taken by a French satellite showed that Envisat was in a stable orbit, but all attempts to contact it have failed. Mission engineers believe that a critical electrical failure is the most likely cause of its demise, announced on 9 May. Envisat had already operated for more than ten years, double its planned lifetime. See go.nature.com/9ltbg4 for more.

Carbon capture

After years of delays and cost overruns, Norway has opened the world's largest laboratory for testing methods to capture carbon dioxide. The 5.8-billion kroner (US\$1-billion) centre in Mongstad, a joint venture between Norwegian energy company Statoil, oil giant Shell and South African petrochemical firm Sasol, was unveiled on 7 May. It can scrub up to 100,000 tonnes of carbon-dioxide emissions from a nearby oil refinery

D. P. MORRIS/BLOOMBERG/GETTY

and a gas-fired power plant, but will vent any carbon dioxide it captures back to the atmosphere. See go.nature.com/wgqg1k for more.

Biodiversity map

An interactive resource for biodiversity analysis was launched on 10 May, promising a new era in visualizing species distributions around the globe. The online Map of Life, funded in part by the US National Science Foundation, will allow users to add or update species data. If the database gains traction in biodiversity circles, it aims to combine mapping with other data — from genomics to environmental variables — to analyse the drivers and impacts of biodiversity shifts over time. See go.nature.com/v8uu74 for more.

PEOPLE

Plagiarism charge

Romania's education and research minister, Ioan Mang, has been accused of plagiarism in at least eight of his academic papers. Mang, a computer scientist at the University of Oradea in Romania, has said that he will resign if experts can prove the allegations, which began circulating on 7 May, shortly after his appointment in the country's new government was announced. See page 289 for more.



Energy head leaves

The branch of the US Department of Energy that specializes in funding high-risk, high-pay-off research is losing its founding director, Arun Majumdar. A mechanical engineer who previously directed the environmental energy department at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in California, Majumdar (pictured) has headed the Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy (ARPA-E) in Washington DC since 2009. But he will leave on 9 June, energy secretary Steven Chu told agency staff on 9 May. Majumdar is moving back to California for family reasons, said agency officials. He will be replaced by Eric Toone, ARPA-E's deputy director of technology.

Physicist convicted

Omid Kokabee, an Iranian doctoral student who has been in jail in Tehran for the past

15 months on suspicion of conspiring against Iran, has been sentenced to 10 years in prison. Kokabee, who was studying laser physics at the University of Texas at Austin, was one of more than ten convicted in a 13 May trial for collaboration with Israel's secret service, Mossad. Close contacts say he was not presented with proof at the trial, and plans to appeal against the sentence. Organizations including the Committee of Concerned Scientists (a human-rights group in New York city) and the American Physical Society (headquartered in College Park, Maryland) had previously asserted Kokabee's innocence. See go.nature.com/jomkwt for more.

Texas resignation

A US\$3-billion state-funded cancer institute in Texas is defending the integrity of its grant-making process after its Nobel-prizewinning scientific leader resigned. Alfred Gilman, chief scientific officer of the Austin-based Cancer Prevention & Research Institute of Texas, said on 8 May that he would step down in October. Gilman, who shared a Nobel prize in 1994 for his research on G proteins, said that the funding programme no longer needed him — but cautioned that “negative decisions” at

COMING UP

19 MAY

SpaceX of Hawthorne, California, is scheduled to launch its Dragon capsule to take cargo to the International Space Station — a first for a private space-flight firm. go.nature.com/nosop7

21–23 MAY

Successes and failures in stem-cell therapy are discussed at the World Stem Cells and Regenerative Medicine Congress in London. go.nature.com/odilmk

22–24 MAY

The future of human space travel is the topic of the Global Space Exploration Conference in Washington DC. <http://glx2012.org/>

a July funding round could have a “fatal impact” on the institute's peer-review system. See go.nature.com/ntteta for more.

BUSINESS

HIV prevention

A pill to prevent HIV infection won support from an advisory panel to the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on 10 May. Truvada, a combination of the antiretroviral drugs emtricitabine and tenofovir, is currently marketed by Gilead Sciences of Foster City, California, to treat people with HIV. The FDA panel voted in favour of approving it to protect people at risk of contracting the virus, including men who have sex with men, and uninfected people who have HIV-positive partners. A full FDA decision is expected by 15 June. See go.nature.com/mx9xq3 for more.

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TREND WATCH

Arena Pharmaceuticals of San Diego, California, saw its stock price almost double on 10 May, when its obesity pill Lorcress (lorcaserin) was recommended for approval by an advisory panel to the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). In February the panel had backed another diet pill, Qnexa (phentermine plus topiramate), made by Vivus of Mountain View, California. Safety concerns had contributed to rejections of both drugs 18 months ago. Both now await official FDA decisions.

NEW HOPE FOR OBESITY PILLS

Stocks that fell in 2010, when the FDA rejected three companies' weight-loss pills, are surging on new backing from an FDA advisory panel.

