

FACILITIES

Netting neutrinos

Officials in China broke ground at the Jiangmen Underground Neutrino Observatory (JUNO) in Jinji Town on 10 January. The underground experiment, an international collaboration designed to succeed China's Daya Bay Reactor Neutrino Experiment, is scheduled to begin taking data in 2020. JUNO aims to shed light on the relative masses of the three known types of neutrino by studying particles emitted by nearby nuclear reactors or coming from space. Earlier last week, India's government approved the India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO), at an estimated cost of US\$240 million.

POLICY

Pipeline gets closer

On 9 January, the Nebraska Supreme Court dismissed a lawsuit that had sought to block the planned route of a controversial oil pipeline. The Keystone XL pipeline is intended to transport up to 830,000 barrels of crude oil per day from the tar sands of western Canada to the US Midwest, where it would connect with existing pipelines to refineries along the Gulf of Mexico. US President Barack Obama has not said yet whether he will approve the project, but on 7 January his administration said that he plans to veto legislation introduced by Republicans in Congress that would circumvent an ongoing review and fast-track construction.

Nuclear disposal

The private consortium charged with cleaning up a huge nuclear-waste repository in Sellafield, UK, has lost its contract, the UK



ALFRED ROSENBERGER

Divers find ossuary in Madagascan cave

A giant trove of bones of extinct lemurs and other animals has been found in an underwater cave in Madagascar's Tsimanampesotse National Park, researchers announced last week. The specimens recovered so far include the 30-centimetre-long head of a massive 'koala lemur' (*Megaladapis*) and dozens of giant lemurs (*Pachylemur insignis*), but thousands of bones may still lie on the silty floor. Lemurs are unique to the island country, and the

anthropologists estimate that two-thirds of the species that existed only a thousand years ago are now extinct. The cave, which can only be reached by skilled divers, also contains remains of other large extinct animals, including elephant birds (*Mullerornis*), giant fossa (*Cryptoprocta spelea*), horned crocodiles (*Voay robustus*, pictured) and pygmy hippos (*Hippopotamus lemerlei*). The team hopes to return to retrieve more specimens this summer.

government announced on 13 January. Last year, a cross-party group of politicians complained that costs had increased at the site and that targets for the reprocessing of waste had been missed. Costs on one section of the repository alone increased by more than £300 million (US\$450 million) between March 2012 and September 2013, while estimated completion dates on another project were put back by years. Control of the company set up to manage the clean-up will now switch from the private consortium to the UK Nuclear Decommissioning Authority.

EVENTS

Philae still missing

The search for Philae, the robotic lander that had a bouncy touchdown on a comet on 12 November, has become more difficult. The European Space Agency lost contact with the probe after it came to rest in a shaded spot away from its planned landing site and went into hibernation after its solar-powered batteries ran out. Rosetta, the spacecraft that deployed Philae, is currently in a higher orbit around comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko than it was in December, meaning that its photographs of the comet's

surface are fuzzier. Mission scientists hope to perform a fly-by, which would afford Rosetta a better view.

SpaceX rocket crash

The first attempt to land a reusable rocket on a boat has ended in a crash. The private company SpaceX, of Hawthorne, California, successfully launched an unmanned resupply ship to the International Space Station on 10 January — but failed to land the first stage of its Falcon 9 rocket on a floating platform in the Atlantic Ocean as planned because the fins that helped to stabilize its descent ran out of hydraulic

fluid. SpaceX is one of two companies tasked with flying cargo to the space station for NASA. Among other supplies, the ship carried an instrument to measure particulates in the atmosphere (see *Nature* <http://doi.org/x83>; 2014).

Parasite in decline

A global campaign to eradicate guinea-worm disease is getting closer to its goal. The Carter Center, a medical charity in Atlanta, Georgia, announced on 12 January that only 126 cases of the disease were reported in 2014, a 15% drop from the previous year. All of the 2014 cases occurred in one of four African countries. The majority — 70 cases — were in South Sudan. The Carter Center said that when it first launched its campaign in 1986, 3.5 million people were afflicted with the tropical disease every year in Africa and Asia.



research organization, through a modernization effort. He closed poorly performing institutes in the country's west and opened new ones in the east, often with prominent foreign scientists as directors. Markl also launched an independent study of the society's activities during the Third Reich and formally apologized for the society's Nazi-era crimes.

PEOPLE

Policy leader dies

Hubert Markl (pictured), one of the most influential figures in German research policy, died on 8 January, aged 76. Markl was president of the DFG, West Germany's major funding agency for basic research, during the reunification with East Germany in 1990. From 1996 to 2002, he led the Max Planck Society, a leading

FUNDING

Ebola vaccine trials

Clinical trials of Ebola vaccines could begin in West Africa within a few weeks, officials of the World Health Organization in Geneva said after a high-level meeting on 8 January. The trials will test the efficacy of up to three different vaccines at preventing infection in people in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. On 12 January, the

Wellcome Trust, a London-based biomedical-research charity that is involved in the trials, released a 'road map' on Ebola vaccines, emphasizing the need to involve local communities in organizing the trials.

Stimulating Japan

The Japanese government approved a ¥3.1-trillion (US\$26-billion) supplementary budget on 9 January, to jolt the economy. The government will spend ¥351.5 billion to boost energy efficiency in the industrial sector and ¥5.2 billion on research related to developing energy sources. The package reportedly included ¥1.2 billion for efforts to develop next-generation power semiconductors at Nagoya University. Another ¥3.7 billion will support increased monitoring of Japan's volcanoes.

BUSINESS

Genome deals

The personal-genetics start-up 23andMe of Mountain View, California, has entered the first two of what it promises will be a series of agreements with major pharmaceutical companies. On 6 January, Genentech of South San Francisco, California, disclosed that it will pay up to US\$60 million to access part of

23andMe's database containing the genome sequences of 3,000 people with Parkinson's disease. And on 12 January, New York City-based Pfizer announced a broad agreement to access the collected genetic information of 800,000 23andMe customers. Both deals were seen as motivated by the companies' interest not only in 23andMe's genetic data, but also in the personal data that its customers share with 23andMe, which could accelerate and improve clinical trials.

Pharma deal

Swiss pharmaceutical giant Roche announced on 12 January that it will spend more than US\$1 billion to purchase more than half the shares of biotechnology firm Foundation Medicine. The firm, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, generates genetic profiles of cancer tumours with the aim of finding treatments that can be personalized to patients. Roche, headquartered in Basel, says that it wants to sell Foundation's DNA tests outside the United States, and will work with the firm to create tests that use blood samples, rather than a tissue biopsy.

Diversity push

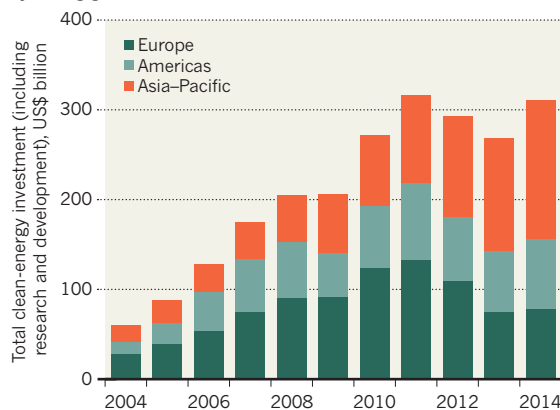
Computer-chip giant Intel on 6 January pledged to spend US\$300 million by 2020 to boost the diversity of the technology industry's workforce. The company plans to invest in recruiting and retaining engineers and computer scientists who are women or from under-represented ethnic groups and to expand its educational programmes at schools and universities. Chief executive Brian Krzanich said that Intel aims to raise the representation of women and minorities at the company, in part to better cater to Intel's diverse customer base.

TREND WATCH

Global investment in clean-energy projects and research surged in 2014, according to figures released on 9 January by Bloomberg New Energy Finance. Almost half of spending was on solar power, which rose by 25% from 2013 to US\$149.6 billion. Clean-energy investment in China, the sector's leading spender, grew by 32% to a record \$89.5 billion, whereas spending in Europe rose by only 1% to \$66 billion. The recent slump in the prices of oil and natural gas is expected to slow global investment in renewables.

CLEAN-ENERGY INVESTMENT REBOUNDS

Global spending on renewables grew by 16% in 2014, boosted by strong growth in Asia.



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