

PEOPLE

Plagiarism claims

Hanover Medical School in Germany is examining allegations that German defence minister Ursula von der Leyen committed plagiarism in her 1990 medical dissertation in obstetrics. The claims originated on 'VroniPlag Wiki', a website that scours academic theses for plagiarism. Two federal ministers have lost their PhD titles and posts following evidence of misconduct: Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, a defence minister, in 2011, and education and research minister Annette Schavan in 2013. The university says that it has launched a formal, preliminary investigation at the request of von der Leyen, who denies the scientific misdemeanour. See go.nature.com/dkpafr for more.

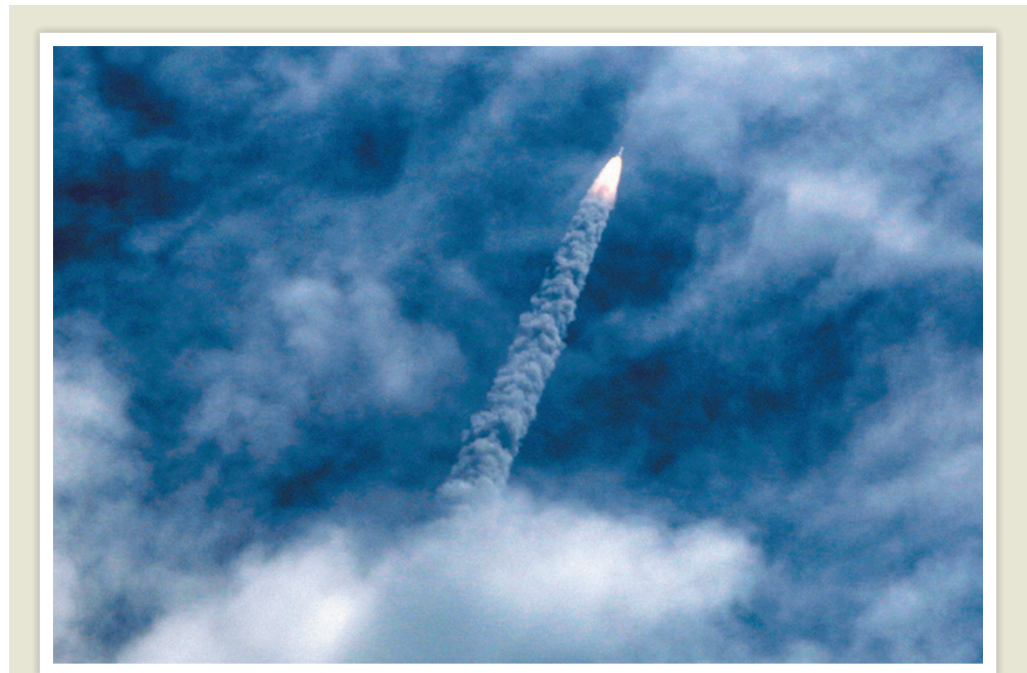
Greek governance

Laser physicist Costas Fotakis remains the minister for research and innovation in Greece's new government, after the left-wing Syriza party won a snap election. Fotakis, whose role was announced on 22 September, is expected to push forward his plans to turn around the country's moribund research landscape — goals that he has been developing since January, when he was first appointed to the position. The minister's promises include major calls for research proposals in October and, in the long term, the creation of Greece's first dedicated research fund.

EVENTS

Emissions scrutiny

Car makers in North America face increasingly stringent emissions testing in the wake of the news that Volkswagen fitted cars with software to



ARUN SANKAR/AP/PA

India's astronomy ambitions take flight

The Indian Space Research Organisation's first satellite dedicated to astronomy, ASTROSAT, launched on 28 September from the Sriharikota spaceport in the Bay of Bengal. With its five instruments, the observatory aims to study star-birth regions and high-energy processes, including binary star systems of neutron stars

and black holes, during its five-year mission. ASTROSAT has four telescopes that will simultaneously study space in visible light, ultraviolet and low- and high-energy X-rays, as well as a sky-scanning monitor to detect transient X-ray emissions and γ -ray bursts. See go.nature.com/ago5tf for more.

cheat tests. Additional checks for 'defeat devices' will mean that approvals for compliance with US emissions regulations will take longer, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced on 25 September. The EPA will also work with Californian authorities and with Environment Canada to ensure that vehicles already on the road comply with emissions regulations under regular driving conditions. See go.nature.com/hz72x3 for more.

Polio-free Nigeria

The World Health Organization in Geneva, Switzerland, has officially

removed Nigeria from the list of countries where wild poliovirus still circulates. As of the 25 September announcement, Afghanistan and Pakistan are the only remaining countries that harbour the virus. In July, Nigeria celebrated a full year without a single new case of the disease.

Research at sea

The RV *Neil Armstrong*, a state-of-the-art research vessel, arrived at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Massachusetts on 23 September. The ship is a gift from the US Navy, part of the force's 70-year tradition of supporting

marine studies by giving select institutions research vessels. The 73-metre ship, which can carry a 20-person crew and 24 scientists, is gearing up for its first science mission, planned for May 2016 in the North Atlantic. The *Neil Armstrong* replaces the RV *Knorr*, which has been used since 1970.

BUSINESS

Alaska drilling ends

The oil company Shell has halted its controversial offshore exploration in Alaska for the foreseeable future. The firm said on 28 September that mineral fuel reserves in the Burger J exploratory well in the

NASA/JPL/UNIV. ARIZONA
Chukchi Sea are too limited and costs too high to warrant further oil and gas exploration in an “unpredictable federal regulatory environment”. The US approval in August of Shell’s drilling operations in the fragile Arctic region had caused an outcry among environmental groups that were concerned about a possible oil spill.

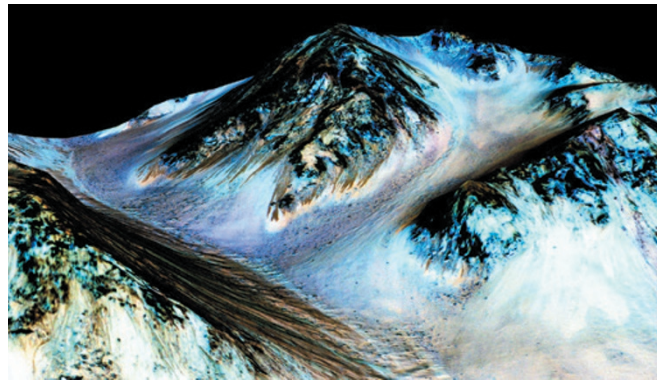
RESEARCH

Drug-study launch

The US National Institutes of Health has kicked off the largest-ever longitudinal study of adolescent drug use. On 25 September, the agency announced a US\$300-million award to 13 institutions for the Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development study, which will track substance use, mental health, brain structure and other factors in 10,000 children for 10 years (see *Nature* 512, 123–124; 2014). The study, led by researchers at the University of California in San Diego, will track participants from age nine or ten, before they have started using drugs and through the period of highest risk for mental-health disorders.

Brine on Mars

Salty water exists today on Mars, NASA announced on 28 September. Data from the agency’s Mars Reconnaissance



Orbiter show that dark, shape-shifting streaks on some Martian slopes contain hydrated salts (L. Ojha *et al.* *Nature. Geosci.* <http://doi.org/7xw>; 2015). The streaks (pictured) have long been linked to the possible flow of water on the Martian surface, but the latest chemical analysis has produced the strongest evidence yet that there is liquid water on the red planet today — probably in damp, salty soil.

POLICY

China carbon plan

Chinese President Xi Jinping announced plans on 25 September to establish a national trading system to curb greenhouse-gas emissions, during a visit to US President Barack Obama in the White House. The cap-and-trade system, which sets a national ceiling on emissions and

allows companies to buy and sell emissions allowances as needed, will begin in 2017. The system is expected to cover emissions from the electricity sector and other energy-intensive industries, and will be larger than that of the European Union, which currently hosts the world’s largest carbon market. See page 13 for more.

Animal research

Transparency about UK animal research is improving, but several institutions are still not complying with a voluntary code of practice introduced last year, according to the London-based Understanding Animal Research (UAR) group. In its first annual report, published on 28 September, the group says that “clear progress” has been made since the May 2014 ‘concordat’ that commits signatories to openness. Of

COMING UP

4–8 OCTOBER

The International Society for Pediatric Neurosurgery meets for the 43rd time in Izmir, Turkey.
ispn2015.org

5–6 OCTOBER

Politicians and academics gather in Valparaíso, Chile, to discuss the future of the world’s oceans.
go.nature.com/rjxfdr

6–9 OCTOBER

The International Conference on Man–Machine Interactions convenes in the Beskid Mountains, Poland.
icmmi.polsl.pl

the 92 signatory universities and institutions reviewed in the report, 85 provided the UAR with details of their compliance. Although most institutes met or exceeded the required reporting standards on issues such as having public policy statements on animal use, several did not. UAR says that, by next year, non-compliance will result in expulsion from the concordat.

Emissions pledge

Brazil committed on 27 September to reduce its greenhouse-gas emissions to 37% below 2005 levels by 2025, aiming for a 43% reduction by 2030. Brazil is the first major developing country to commit to reducing absolute emissions, but environmentalists say that the pledge could have been stronger — the bulk of the reduction has already been achieved owing to a roughly 82% drop in Amazon deforestation since 2004. Brazil also promised to increase energy efficiency and expand renewable energy.

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TREND WATCH

The field of ‘sustainability science’ is growing twice as fast as the average growth rate of research. A 24 September report by Elsevier and SciDev.Net used the Scopus database of research publications to identify trends based on six of the scientific themes that underpin the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals. Environment-related research (under the ‘planet’ theme) dominates overall, and ‘partnership’ research for catalysing global collaboration has seen limited growth.

SUSTAINABILITY RESEARCH MAKES PROGRESS

Publications on sustainability science have risen since 2009. Research in the ‘planet’ category has seen the biggest increase.

