

## Italian laboratory escapes quake damage

The Gran Sasso National Laboratory, a particle-physics research centre 15 kilometres northeast of L'Aquila in central Italy, has survived without damage the earthquake that devastated the region on 6 April, although experiments have been suspended.

The laboratory, 10 kilometres east of the quake's epicentre, is a large underground facility built deep inside the Gran Sasso mountain. Its surface structures will be used to shelter some of those left homeless by the quake, which measured 6.3 on the Richter scale and killed at least 179 people.

## US AIDS programme 'essential and expensive'

Between 2004 and 2007, the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) cut deaths from AIDS by about 10% in 12 African countries, at a cost of \$2,700 per life saved. So say researchers who published an independent analysis of the programme this week (E. Bendavid and J. Bhattacharya *Ann. Int. Med.* 150, 60520-117; 2009).

## Costs for airborne telescope spiral upwards

An airborne observatory developed by the United States and Germany is running 10 years behind schedule, has more than tripled in budget, and continues to have cost-control problems, according to an independent NASA audit.



T. TSCHIDA/NASA

The Stratospheric Observatory for Infrared Astronomy (SOFIA) boasts a 2.5-metre-diameter telescope that peers out of a hole cut into the side of a 30-year-old Boeing 747 aeroplane (pictured). The partners in the project are NASA and the German Aerospace Center, or DLR.

In 1997, NASA estimated that SOFIA could start limited scientific operations by 2001 for \$265 million. It now says it will cost \$840 million to reach a similar point in 2011.

The 27 March audit from the NASA inspector general's office adds that SOFIA's management still cannot accurately assess the observatory's long-term costs. SOFIA's current schedule is under review, a NASA spokesman says.

PEPFAR has pumped \$15 billion into aid-recipient countries since 2004, and in 2008 was authorized to spend a further \$48 billion over five more years (see *Nature* 457, 254-256; 2009). It did not reduce the number of people living with HIV, nor the proportion of the population with the

disease, note Eran Bendavid and Jayanta Bhattacharya of Stanford University in California.

The researchers, who call the programme "essential and expensive", say they hope that their work will spur PEPFAR to evaluate the effectiveness of its spending.