

NEWS BRIEFING

● RESEARCH

Ice satellite launched: Four and a half years after a launch failure saw its first incarnation splash into the Arctic Ocean, the European Space Agency's ice-measuring CryoSat-2 has successfully made it into orbit. Launched from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan on 8 April, the space probe will monitor variations in the extent and thickness of polar ice. The information it provides about the behaviour of coastal glaciers that drain thinning ice sheets will be key to better predictions of future sea-level rise (see also *Nature* 464, 658; 2010).

Gulf War diagnosis: After examining some 400 studies published since 2005, the US Institute of Medicine said in a report released on 9 April that a complex of symptoms including joint pain and fatigue, popularly known as Gulf War syndrome, is associated (but not necessarily causally) with service in the Gulf War. The 12 authors called for further research refining the diagnosis and developing treatments for Gulf War syndrome — which it dubs “multisymptom illness”. Of nearly 700,000 US personnel who were deployed to the Gulf region, more than 250,000 suffer from persistent, unexplained symptoms.

Deepest vents: The deepest underwater hydrothermal vents ever found have been spotted by a robot exploring waters off the Cayman Islands in the Caribbean. The black smokers are 5 kilometres down in the Cayman Trough, more than 900 metres deeper than previously known. The vents consist of spires of copper and iron ores erupting superheated water from the sea floor, at temperatures hot enough to melt lead. Scientists from the University of Southampton, UK, who are leading the Cayman expedition on the research ship RRS *James Cook*, announced the find on 11 April.



R. BECK/AFP/GETTY

RESEARCHERS RALLY

A rally in defence of scientists who use animals in research drew between 300 and 400 supporters at the campus of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) on 8 April. Organized by the group Pro-Test for Science — founded by UCLA neuroscientist David Jentsch — it follows a similar rally in 2009. Since Pro-Test has begun confronting anti-research protesters on campus and organizing dialogue with peaceful groups who oppose animal research, animal-rights activists have stepped down attacks on UCLA researchers, Jentsch says. “They still come to my house and scream obscenities at me. But the most important objective has been achieved, which is that nothing has been burned or blown up.” See go.nature.com/54MVKO for more.

Element 117: A new superheavy element with atomic number 117 has been synthesized at Russia's Joint Institute for Nuclear Research in Dubna, an international team of researchers announced on 6 April (Y. T. Oganessian *et al. Phys. Rev. Lett.* 104, 142502; 2010). Six atoms of ‘ununseptium’ (the element's temporary name) were made by smashing calcium-48 into a berkelium-249 target that was made at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Tennessee.

● BUSINESS

Wind energy: The US wind-energy industry installed more than 10 gigawatts (GW) of new wind-power-generating capacity in 2009, bringing the total capacity (all onshore) to some 35 GW — about 1.8% of the country's electricity generation.

Texas has installed the largest capacity (9.4 GW),

whereas Iowa is the state most reliant on wind energy: its 3.7 GW generated 14.2% of its electricity last year.

The figures come from a report released on 8 April by the American Wind Energy Association, an industry group based in Washington DC. An inadequate transmission grid threatens further expansion of the industry, the report said.

SOUND BITES

“Both are correct heights. No measurement is absolute. This is a problem of scientific research.”

Raja Ram Chhatkuli, director general of Nepal's survey department, confirms that China and Nepal have agreed to disagree over Mount Everest's exact height.

Source: Reuters

Software merger: Two large producers of scientific software, Accelrys and Symyx Technologies, will merge, the firms announced on 5 April. Symyx, headquartered in Santa Clara, California, produces electronic laboratory notebooks and chemical informatics software. Accelrys, headquartered in San Diego, California, offers modelling and simulation software. The combined firm will be based in San Diego.

● POLICY

Royal Institution coup: The council of the UK's Royal Institution successfully fought off a coup attempt this week.

Members of the UK's oldest scientific research organization, founded in 1799, overwhelmingly rejected proposals put to a special general meeting that the entire governing council, bar the president, be removed.

The move was sparked by a group of members lamenting the removal in January of former director Susan Greenfield, a high-profile neuroscientist at the University of Oxford, and the multimillion pound funding shortfall that prompted the redundancy.

Nuclear review: Nuclear-weapons research could benefit from the US Nuclear Posture Review. The policy, unveiled on 6 April ahead of both an agreement signed with Russia on 8 April to reduce nuclear stockpiles and a nuclear-security summit in Washington DC this week, tempers the threat of nuclear attacks against other countries and repeats that no new nuclear weapons will be built. But it may also boost basic research at national-security laboratories. See page 965 for more.

Climate deadlock: At the latest round of United Nations climate talks last week in Bonn, Germany, delegates from 175 nations failed to break the impasse in international climate diplomacy. Delegates agreed to hold two additional meetings before the next UN

NUMBER CRUNCH
1.2%

The average salary gain for a full-time US faculty member in 2009-10, over 2008-09; a 1.5% decrease when adjusted for inflation.

Source: American Association of University Professors survey, 12 April

climate summit in late autumn in Cancun, Mexico. Even so, prospects are "slim" that a new climate agreement can be reached by the end of the year. Yvo de Boer, head of the UN's Framework Convention

on Climate Change, told the meeting on 11 April.

Ethiopian science academy: The Ethiopian Academy of Sciences (EAS) was launched on 10 April in Addis Ababa. A growing number of African countries — most recently, Zambia, Mauritius and Mozambique — are establishing such organizations to promote research quality and offer scientific advice. The EAS starts with 50 fellows from both the natural and social sciences; its elected president is Demissie Habte (pictured below), former dean of medical research at Addis Ababa University. Its funding structure is not yet clear, but the founders hope the government will support the body. See go.nature.com/K6tBzV for more.



Food failures: A US government report has found "significant weaknesses" in the inspection of domestic food facilities by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The agency has also failed to take adequate regulatory action against some facilities, said the report, released on 6 April by the Office of Inspector General for the Department of Health and Human Services, the

THE WEEK AHEAD

17-21 APRIL
Studying the genomes of individual cancer types is a hot topic at the American Association for Cancer Research's 101st annual meeting, in Washington DC.

go.nature.com/IDRmCV

19-22 APRIL
The World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth is held in Cochabamba, Bolivia. The country's president, Evo Morales, announced the summit, which expects thousands of attendees, after the failure of talks in Copenhagen.

http://pwccc.wordpress.com

19-20 APRIL
New ways of measuring biological diversity — and of conserving it — will be discussed at the Royal Society in London.

go.nature.com/eqb5BD

20-23 APRIL
Barcelona, Spain, hosts the first ever European Energy Conference — an interdisciplinary meeting focused on energy technology research.

www.e2c-2010.org

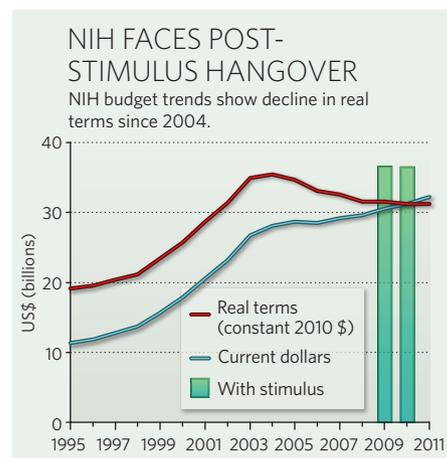
FDA's parent agency. Legislation that would boost the FDA's food-safety inspection powers has stalled in the Senate. The FDA says it had already addressed many of the issues in the report, which covered 2004-07.

FUNDING WATCH

A call for more research funding for the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, Maryland, shows how much the agency has relied on the national stimulus package to boost its spending power. The Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB) — an advocacy group based in Bethesda that represents 23 biomedical societies — has published trends summarizing how the NIH's budget has been falling in real terms since 2004, taking into account the rate of inflation for biomedical-research costs (see chart).

The stimulus bonanza brought the NIH's budget up to US\$36.4 billion in 2010 (above that of 2004, in real terms). US President Barack

Obama's 2011 budget request (see *Nature* **463**, 594-595; 2010) boosted the agency's basic budget by \$1 billion to about \$32 billion — an increase of 3.2%. But with no stimulus, that represents a 14.3% decrease from the 2010 purchasing power of the NIH. FASEB calculates that the total number of research-project grants that the NIH will be able to support may drop from 39,579 in 2010 to 35,202 next year. The federation also expressed concern that the NIH's assumption used for that calculation — a 1.4% rise in average research-grant costs — is too low. Fearing the looming cliff of the post-stimulus sag, the group recommends that Congress appropriate \$37 billion for the agency in 2011.



SOURCE: FASEB