

# NEWS BRIEFING

## ● POLICY

**Unethical research:** Medical personnel on the payroll of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) participated in experimentation on detainees — to refine torture techniques such as waterboarding — during interrogations, according to Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), an advocacy group in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The actions during the administration of former president George W. Bush, which included gauging prisoners' pain tolerance, contravened the Nuremberg Code of research ethics for human experimentation and other accepted standards, says the PHR. The White House, the CIA and the Department of Justice had not responded to comment requests as *Nature* went to press. See [go.nature.com/5ZxcYY](http://go.nature.com/5ZxcYY) for more.

**REACH breach:** The European Chemicals Agency revealed last week that nearly a quarter of the companies it inspected last year were not fully complying with Europe's stringent REACH legislation on chemical safety. The agency inspected 1,543 firms in 25 European Economic Area states between May and December 2009 and found 378 breaches such as not providing appropriate safety data.

**Food research:** The food-safety research programme at the US Food and Drug Administration is "fragmented and poorly managed", lacks strategic planning and is badly coordinated, according to a report from the Institute of Medicine. The report was requested by Congress in the wake of several contamination incidents, including melamine in pet food in 2007 and *Escherichia coli* in cookie dough in 2009.

## ● PEOPLE

**NSF director:** Subra Suresh has been nominated by the US government to lead the US\$6.9-billion National Science



KYODO

## CHANGES AT THE TOP FOR JAPAN

Japan's prime minister, Yukio Hatoyama, resigned on 2 June. Hatoyama's Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) instigated controversial but largely popular budgetary reforms and a frugality in scientific budgets (see *Nature* 462, 258–259; 2009). But his popularity has plummeted since he backtracked in May on election promises to remove a US military base on Okinawa. The future of those reforms, and plans to overhaul the Council for Science and Technology Policy, will depend on upper-house elections this July and on the performance of his successor Naoto Kan (pictured, centre, with DPJ party members), Japan's sixth prime minister in four years.

Foundation (NSF) in Arlington, Virginia. Suresh is currently dean of the engineering school at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge. Until he is confirmed by the Senate, the NSF will be led by acting director Cora Marrett. See page 673 for more.

## ● RESEARCH

**Earthquake model:** Results of the pilot phase of the Global Earthquake Model were announced at a meeting in Washington DC on 3–4 June. Funded by partners including national governments and the World Bank, the project aims to predict the risk from earthquakes to different communities. The model is expected to be fully working by the end of 2013. See [go.nature.com/CY2Qj4](http://go.nature.com/CY2Qj4) for more.

**Biotech complex:** The city of Cambridge, Massachusetts, has approved construction of a billion-dollar biotechnology complex. The Binney Street Project in East Cambridge, near

the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, will be developed by California-based firm Alexandria Real Estate Equities, which specializes in providing life-science laboratory space. The firm says that the complex will include 160,000 square metres of office and lab space.

## ● AWARDS

**Kavli prizes:** This year's three prizes, each worth US\$1 million, have been shared between eight scientists. Jerry Nelson of the University of California, Santa Cruz, Roger Angel of the University of Arizona in Tucson, and Ray Wilson, formerly of the European Southern Observatory in Garching, Germany, share the astrophysics prize. In neuroscience, the prize goes to Thomas Südhof, Richard Scheller and James Rothman of Stanford University School of Medicine, Palo Alto, California, biotech company Genentech, based in San Francisco, California, and Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut,

## SOUND BITES

**"Bavaria has a clear position — the plants will have to be destroyed."**

The Bavarian environment minister's spokesperson comments on the discovery of trace-level contamination of crops around Germany with a banned genetically modified variety of maize.

Source: Süddeutsche Zeitung

respectively. The nanoscience prize was awarded to Donald Eigler of IBM, headquartered in Armonk, New York, and Nadrian Seeman of New York University, New York.

● **EVENTS**

**Space boost:** Commercial space-flight company SpaceX successfully sent its flagship Falcon 9 rocket into Earth orbit on 4 June from Cape Canaveral, Florida, carrying a mock-up version of its Dragon cargo capsule. Its launch bodes well for NASA science-mission managers, who desperately need a cheap supplier of medium-sized rockets (see *Nature* 465, 276–277; 2010).

● **BUSINESS**

**Commercial space flight:** Satellite-phone operator Iridium of McLean, Virginia, has awarded what is currently the world's biggest commercial space-flight contract to Thales Alenia Space, headquartered in Cannes, France. Thales Alenia will build 81 satellites for the telecommunications network: 72 for launch and 9 ground-based spares. Iridium says that the development, manufacture and launch of these satellites will cost US\$2.9 billion.

**Litigation liquidated:** The London-based drug company GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) announced last week that it has settled litigation related to its diabetes drug Avandia (rosiglitazone), which was due to go to trial in Philadelphia on

**NUMBER CRUNCH**  
**520 days**

**The length of time a six-man crew will spend locked away in Moscow on a simulated mission to Mars. The crew entered their craft on 3 June and won't leave until November 2011.**

Source: European Space Agency

1 June. GSK still faces thousands more cases alleging that Avandia caused heart attacks and strokes, but analysts say that its costs may eventually be less than the \$4.85 billion incurred by pharmaceutical firm Merck to settle lawsuits related to the painkiller Vioxx.

**Guilty plea:** The former head of research at Sequenom, a biotech company based in San Diego, California, has pleaded

guilty to conspiring to defraud the company's shareholders. Elizabeth Dragon was charged by the US Securities and Exchange Commission on 2 June with lying about the accuracy of the company's prenatal test for Down's syndrome. She acknowledged that she publicly stated that the test was nearly 100% accurate while knowing that this was not the case on three occasions between June 2008 and January 2009.



**Delayed justice:** A court in Bhopal, India, has sentenced seven men to two years each in jail after finding them guilty of criminal negligence over an accident that spewed tonnes of poisonous gas from a chemical plant run by Union Carbide India in 1984, killing thousands. These are the first convictions related to the Bhopal gas accident, which continues to spark protests (pictured). Activist groups say they will appeal to higher courts for larger penalties for the seven and push for the extradition of Warren Anderson, head of Union Carbide at the time, from the United States.

**THE WEEK AHEAD**

**12-15 JUNE**  
**Researchers convene at the Genetics Society of America's biennial meeting in Boston, Massachusetts, to discuss model organisms and human biology.**

www.mohb.org/2010

**13 JUNE**  
**Japan's Hayabusa space probe, which may be carrying a sample grabbed from the asteroid Itokawa, should land somewhere in south Australia.**

http://hayabusa.jaxa.jp/e

**15 JUNE**  
**The committee that is independently reviewing the way the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change produces its reports holds its second meeting at McGill University in Montreal, Canada.**

go.nature.com/onAkRb

**15-17 JUNE**  
**Preclinical drug development is the theme at the 9th Annual World Pharmaceutical Congress in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.**

www.worldpharmacongress.com

**16-19 JUNE**  
**San Francisco, California, hosts the 8th annual meeting of the International Society for Stem Cell Research, co-sponsored by the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine.**

www.isscr.org/meetings

**BUSINESS WATCH**

Oil giant BP's share price has been hit hard as the company fights to stem the flood of oil from its ruptured well in the Gulf of Mexico. Since the explosion on the Deepwater Horizon oil rig on 20 April, the company's shares have lost about 30% of their value.

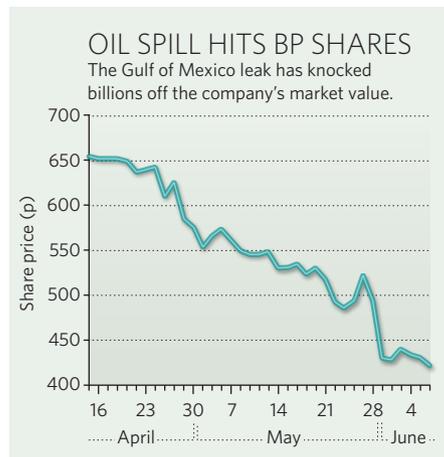
Just before the accident, shares were riding at a four-year high of 653 pence, but had fallen to 495p by the end of May as the situation worsened.

The biggest plunge came on 1 June, after the company confirmed that its 'top kill' operation to staunch the oil had failed (see graph).

On 2 June, global financial-services company Credit Suisse estimated that clean-up costs

alone could rise to US\$23 billion, with lawsuits adding \$14 billion to BP's spill bill. However, shares rallied briefly on 7 June after the news that BP was siphoning about 1.67 million litres of oil per day from the leak, 55–90% of the total official estimated flow.

BP is not the only oil-industry company to take a plunge on the stock markets. Transocean, the offshore-drilling contractor which owned the rig, has seen its shares lose about half of their value in the past six weeks, and the share prices of other oil companies dropped after the 27 May announcement by the administration of US President Barack Obama of a six-month moratorium on deep-water oil exploration.



SOURCE: GOOGLE FINANCE