

# SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

## POLICY

### Indian report row

Accusations of plagiarism greeted a report on the safety of genetically modified (GM) crops, released last week by India's top six science academies. Environment minister Jairam Ramesh requested the report after placing an indefinite moratorium on the cultivation of insect-resistant aubergine, or brinjal, in February 2010. But the report lacks any citations or references, and contains data and several lines copied from two reports that were contributed to by GM advocate Anand Kumar, director of the National Research Centre on Plant Biotechnology in Delhi. Ramesh told the media that the report lacked "scientific rigour". See [go.nature.com/RFi9u3](http://go.nature.com/RFi9u3) for more.

### Regathering storm

Despite increases in funding for basic scientific research and education, the United States is losing its global competitiveness, says a report released on 23 September by the US National Academies. The document is an update to the National Academy of Sciences' 2005 landmark report *Rising Above the Gathering Storm*. That publication led to the 2007 America COMPETES Act, which put key science agencies on a path to double their funding over ten years, but which is set to expire at the end of this fiscal year. Reauthorization of the act is proceeding sluggishly in Congress. See [go.nature.com/81m66C](http://go.nature.com/81m66C) for more.

### Pakistan funds

After a widespread faculty strike in Pakistan's universities, the federal government agreed on

23 September to raise its higher-education budget by 5.8 billion Pakistani rupees (US\$67 million) to provide teachers with a long-promised 50% salary boost. Previously budgeted money was also released to Pakistani students abroad who had not been receiving their scholarships. Most of the funding for Pakistan's public universities is channelled through the country's Higher Education Commission, which has seen its budget heavily cut (see *Nature* 467, 378–379; 2010).

### UK funding fight

Researchers and the heads of universities in Britain continue to urge against extreme cuts to government funding of science. The House of Lords

Science and Technology Committee wrote to science minister David Willets on 22 September, warning that university vice-chancellors expected a 'brain drain' if cuts took place. That message was reiterated later in the week by committee member Martin Rees, who is also president of the Royal Society in London. The government's spending plans are scheduled for release on 20 October.

### Spanish budget

Scientists in Spain may be spared the severe cuts they had feared. Although Spain's 2011 draft budget, unveiled on 24 September, would give government ministries on average 16% less to spend, education and research

funding would be the "least affected", said the country's vice-president, María Teresa Fernández de la Vega. Detailed figures will not be made public until the draft is presented to parliament on 30 September. But science minister Cristina Garmendia told the media that cuts would not affect projects, fellowships or research institutions that depend on the central government for their funding.

## AWARDS

### Lasker award

The US\$250,000 prize for basic medical research — which often presages a Nobel prize — was this year awarded to Douglas Coleman at the Jackson Laboratory in Bar



T. SLOAN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

## Summit pushes for development goals

Participants at last week's United Nations Millennium Development Goals Summit in New York City took stock of stalled progress on objectives set a decade ago to ease global poverty by 2015. At the close of the summit on 22 September, UN secretary-

general Ban Ki-moon announced a pledge of US\$40 billion, donated by numerous nations and organizations, that he said would help to prevent the deaths of as many as 16 million mothers and children in the world's poorest countries over the next 5 years.

Harbor, Maine, and Jeffrey Friedman at Rockefeller University in New York, for their discovery of the appetite-regulating hormone leptin. See [go.nature.com/DCVjjj](http://go.nature.com/DCVjjj) for more.

## BUSINESS

## Avandia endgame

The European Medicines Agency and the US Food and Drug Administration effectively pulled the plug on GlaxoSmithKline's Avandia (rosiglitazone) on 23 September, removing the once-dominant diabetes drug from the market in Europe and severely restricting its use in the United States. In simultaneous news releases, the drug agencies said that recent information suggesting elevated risks of heart attack and stroke in users of the type-2 diabetes drug led to their decisions. Avandia brought its UK-based maker £1.8 billion (US\$3.3 billion) in 2006, the year before its cardiovascular risks became public.

## Nestlé research

Swiss food giant Nestlé said on 27 September that it would invest 500 million Swiss francs (US\$507 million) over ten years in an Institute of Health Sciences currently being built at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology



(EPFL) in Lausanne, where the company, based in Vevey, already endows research chairs. About 200 scientists are to be hired for the institute, which will focus on obesity, diabetes, neurological disorders and aging. Nestlé said that the investment is part of a wider strategy to expand its business in medical nutrition — foods that help to treat diseases.

## RESEARCH

## Arctic land rush

Russia will spend an extra 2 billion roubles (US\$64 million) in the next three years on geological research in the Arctic Ocean, said Yuri Trutnev, the country's minister for natural resources, on 21 September. Russia wants new data to support its 2001 claim — rejected for lack of evidence

by the United Nations — that the Lomonosov ridge, a submarine mountain range, is an extension of Siberia's continental shelf. Canada and Denmark are also making territorial claims on the ridge (see map). The Arctic seabed near the ridge is suspected to be rich in oil and gas.

## Children's study

There was a growth spurt last week for an ambitious US government project that aims to track environmental effects on the health of more than 100,000 people from before birth to age 21. The National Children's Study announced the launch of 30 new study locations, adding to the seven centres already established. The programme ran into trouble last year (see *Nature* 462, 20–21; 2009) when senators learned that it might cost more than

## COMING UP

### 3 OCTOBER

Brazilians go to the polls to elect a new president; front-running candidates are expected to continue the science-friendly policies of the incumbent, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

See full story, p.511

### 4–6 OCTOBER

The winners of the 2010 Nobel prizes for physiology or medicine, physics and chemistry are announced in Stockholm.

[www.nobelprize.org](http://www.nobelprize.org)

### 4 OCTOBER

The Census of Marine Life — a decade-long initiative to assess life in the oceans — splashes out with a news conference at the Royal Institution in London, launching books and maps from the project.

<http://coml.org> and see News Feature, p.514

double its US\$3.1-billion estimate. Last month, those same senators said that they “appreciate” improvements made to the study's management and oversight.

## Plant grants

Plant scientists who tackle basic biological questions often feel they miss out on funding. But on 29 September, two private US foundations said they would dedicate a total of US\$75 million to plant-biology research. The Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI), based in Chevy Chase, Maryland, called the area an “underfunded field”. Together with the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation in Palo Alto, California, it will award up to 15 plant researchers with 5-year appointments to the HHMI. Applications are due by 9 November.

## BUSINESS WATCH

Claims for patents in clean energy technologies such as wind, photovoltaics and geothermal more than doubled from 1997 to 2006, according to a global analysis published on 30 September. Patent activity related to fossil-fuel and nuclear-energy technologies fell some 50% in the same period, the study reports, suggesting a role for the 1997 Kyoto Protocol on climate change. The study was by the European Patent Office, the United Nations Environment Programme and the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development.

## PATENTS AND PROTOCOLS

A global analysis of patents for clean energy technologies (CETs) shows the effect of the Kyoto Protocol's ratification in 1997.

