

POLICY

Offshore drilling

The Obama administration has lifted its temporary ban on deep-water exploratory oil and gas drilling, which was imposed after the explosion of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico. Announcing the decision on 12 October, it said that new safety measures were in place. The next day, Günther Oettinger, the European Union's energy commissioner, said the European Commission would not demand a ban on offshore oil and gas drilling, although it intends to roll out the region's toughest regulations Europe-wide next year. European parliament members had voted against a moratorium on drilling earlier in the month.

Science advice

The Intelligence Science Board, an advisory panel established to ensure independent scientific advice to the US Director of National Intelligence (DNI), is being disbanded. The abolition — part of an efficiency sweep by newly appointed DNI James Clapper — raises concerns about a possible loss of independent advice to government on topics ranging from nuclear physics and forensics, to the psychology involved in interrogation practices. See go.nature.com/b1fx6z for more.

Tidal block

The UK government will not fund a huge tidal-power project that could have provided up to 5% (around 17 terawatt-hours) of the country's annual electricity supply, energy minister Chris Huhne announced on 18 October. Fears for the local environment and a potential cost of £30 billion (US\$48 billion) for the 16-kilometre-long Severn



D. HILL/UPPI PHOTO/EVINE

Mountain mining project 'unacceptable'

One of the largest projects ever proposed to mine for coal by stripping the tops off mountains — in the Appalachians (pictured) — looks set to be derailed after the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was told it would have “unacceptable” effects on wildlife. On 15 October, the agency released a recommendation from Shawn Garvin, an

EPA regional administrator, that it veto a 2007 decision from the US Army Corps of Engineers permitting mining company Arch Coal to go ahead with the project in West Virginia. The EPA is expected to make its decision by the end of the year. The coal industry and conservation groups regard its decision on the project as a bellwether for future mountain-top mining policy.

River barrage made other projects better options, said Huhne in a statement laying out the coalition government's energy policy. He also confirmed the suitability of eight sites for constructing new nuclear-power stations, and said that contractors hoping to build the new plants should not expect government subsidies.

China's strategy

Alternative energy, biotechnology, advanced materials and fuel-efficient vehicles will be promoted in China's newly mapped 2011–15 development plan, according to a report published by the country's state council on 18 October. Output of these 'new strategic industries', which also include information technology, high-end manufacturing, energy

saving, and environmental protection, would account for 8% of gross domestic product by 2015 and 15% by 2020, the report promised; media reports suggested that the industries would be backed by 4 trillion renminbi (US\$600 billion). The five-year plan was set at the nation's annual meeting of the Communist Party's Central Committee in Beijing. Full details will not be finalized until March 2011.

RESEARCH

Scourge wiped out

Cattle plague has gone the way of smallpox. Officials at the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome announced the end of a 16-year-long vaccination and surveillance campaign

for the disease, also known as rinderpest, on 14 October (see *Nature* **462**, 709; 2009). The last known outbreak occurred in Kenya in 2001. “This is the first animal disease virus that's been eradicated through vaccination,” says Chris Oura at the Institute for Animal Health in Pirbright, UK.

Primate radiation

Debate surrounding a proposed radiation experiment involving squirrel monkeys at Brookhaven National Laboratory (BNL) in Upton, New York, and funded by NASA was reignited last week. Documents obtained by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) under the Freedom of Information Act were made available on 14 October; they revealed little new detail on the experiment,

which was mooted last year. BNL spokesman Pete Genzer says that the proposal is still pending. The test would expose the animals to charged-particle radiation of a similar level to that which an astronaut would receive on a Mars mission. See <http://go.nature.com/qctzcg> for more.

Neutrino lab

India's particle physicists have won permission to build a US\$225-million neutrino laboratory — one of the country's biggest physics projects — under the Bodi West Hills in the state of Tamil Nadu. The environment ministry approved the site on 18 October. The laboratory has suffered lengthy delays. Last year, the ministry rejected a proposal to locate the site below the Nilgiri corridor in the same state, because it would endanger local wildlife (see *Nature* **462**, 397; 2009). Construction will start after formal clearance by the cabinet, and is due to be completed by 2015.

Missing planet?

Gliese 581g, the planet announced on 29 September as the first outside our Solar System to be potentially habitable, may not exist. Last week, Francesco Pepe from Switzerland's Geneva Observatory told an extrasolar-planet meeting

in Turin, Italy, that his team could find no evidence of the planet after combing through star velocity measurements from HARPS, an instrument on the European Southern Observatory in Chile. Steven Vogt from the University of California, Santa Cruz, and his colleagues, who reported the original finding, had looked at fewer HARPS measurements, but combined them with data from HIRES on the Keck 1 telescope in Hawaii.

PEOPLE

Pachauri stays

Rajendra Pachauri will remain chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which held its 32nd plenary session in Busan, South Korea, last week. Delegates discussed how the panel should change after embarrassing errors in its latest assessment report came to light last year, leading to calls for Pachauri to stand down. See page 891 for more.

Father of fractals

Mathematician Benoît Mandelbrot (pictured), widely known as the father of fractal geometry, died on 14 October, aged 85. Working at IBM's research labs at Yorktown Heights in New York from 1958, he discovered the mathematical formulae that describe fractal shapes,



in which each part mimics the pattern of the whole. Fractal geometry is used to model physical, biological and financial systems, and underpins the physics of disordered systems and chaos theory. The beautiful images produced by Mandelbrot's mathematics brought him wider fame.

BUSINESS

Neglected diseases

More donations are needed to tackle 17 neglected tropical diseases that affect around one billion of the world's poorest people, the World Health Organization said in a 14 October report. In response, GlaxoSmithKline said it would spend an extra £60 million (US\$95 million) over five years to increase annual donations of the drug albendazole, used to treat intestinal worms, by 400 million treatments; Sanofi-Aventis renewed a five-year \$25-million commitment to treat diseases including sleeping sickness

COMING UP

21–24 OCTOBER

The Infectious Diseases Society of America holds its 48th annual meeting in Vancouver, Canada. go.nature.com/TqskmZ

24–28 OCTOBER

The World Climate Research Programme — a forum that pulls together the work of thousands of climate scientists — holds a conference in Denver, Colorado, to summarize the state of climate science and its translation for policy-makers. go.nature.com/Zs7Z6r

26–27 OCTOBER

Politicians, researchers and industry meet in Brussels to discuss Europe's space policy. Topics include the status of the Galileo satellite-navigation system and the GMES Earth-monitoring satellite programme. go.nature.com/9vbkv

and leishmaniasis; and Novartis renewed a five-year \$26-million commitment to treat more than one million people with leprosy.

Drug deal

International drug giant Pfizer announced on 12 October that it would pay US\$3.6 billion for Tennessee-based King Pharmaceuticals. The acquisition will give Pfizer access to King's pain medications and animal-health business, and comes less than a year after it paid \$68 billion for Wyeth of New Jersey. The company is trying to bolster revenues because generic forms of Lipitor (atorvastatin), the blockbuster cholesterol medication that achieved \$11.4 billion in sales last year, are due to enter the market in 2011.

BUSINESS WATCH

Venture-capital funding in the United States dropped by 31% in the third quarter of 2010 to US\$4.8 billion, cutting short a second-quarter rise that had hinted at investment returning to pre-financial-crisis levels. The young and volatile clean-technology sector fell by 59% to \$625 million. Biotechnology did not fare well either: investment dropped 32% to \$943 million. The figures were published on 15 October by the National Venture Capital Association and PricewaterhouseCoopers.

UPS AND DOWNS OF VENTURE CAPITAL

An apparent recovery for US venture-capital funding has stalled, third-quarter figures suggest.

