

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

POLICY

Shutdown avoided

With two days to go before funding legislation expired, the US Congress averted a shutdown of government by voting through a continuing resolution on 2 March that funds most science agencies at fiscal year 2010 levels. But battles over cuts are far from over; the new bill expires on 18 March and two weeks may not be enough to bridge the gulf between the Republicans in the House and Democrats in the Senate on a bill to fund the government for the rest of the 2011 fiscal year. See page 144 for more.

China's power plan

China aims to reduce its energy intensity — energy consumption per unit of economic output — by 16–17% by the end of 2015, Premier Wen Jiabao announced last week. To help meet that target, Wen said that the budget plan for the next five years has lowered the economic growth target to around 7% a year. According to China's National Bureau of Statistics, the country has nearly met the 20% target for reducing energy intensity set five years ago. See go.nature.com/g2vbke for more.

Emergency advice

Scientists should have much more input into the 'National Risk Assessment', a classified document that examines all the risks facing the United Kingdom, according to a 2 March report from the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee. It calls for John Beddington, the government's chief scientific adviser, to be moved from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to the Cabinet Office, the most central part of the British



NASA

Shuttle bids farewell to space station

The Space Shuttle *Discovery* departed from the International Space Station for the last time after completing its final mission on 7 March. During the mission, the shuttle delivered Robonaut 2, a humanoid robot designed to

work alongside the astronauts on the station. In its 27-year career, *Discovery* made more space flights — 39 — and carried more crew members than any other NASA shuttle. NASA will retire all of its shuttles by the end of the year.

government, to facilitate scientific advice in advance of emergencies. See go.nature.com/52hjqb for more.

Spanish protest

More than 2,500 Spanish scientists, including 150 full professors and 4 research-centre directors, have sent a petition to Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero asking for changes to a science and technology law being debated in the country's parliament. The letter, delivered on 22 February, requests among other things that the law include a plan to give researchers the chance to win five-year, tenure-track contracts. The provision was present in previous drafts but then abandoned. See go.nature.com/rurt2w for more.

RESEARCH

EU mega-projects

The European Commission has shortlisted six projects to compete for two €1-billion (US\$1.4-billion) grants under the Future and Emerging Technologies Flagship Initiative to apply information and communication technologies to societal problems. Ideas include cuddly robots to mitigate the loneliness of ageing and a computer simulation of the human brain. Two winners will be selected at the end of the year. See go.nature.com/ukbzed for more.

Glory crash

NASA's Glory mission, intended to study solar radiation and the effects of airborne particles on climate,

crashed shortly after it launched from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California on 4 March. The protective fairing surrounding the satellite failed to separate from the Taurus XL rocket that carried it, dragging the craft into icy waters near

SOUND BITE

“2011's biggest problem will be food.”

John Beddington, the UK government's chief scientific adviser, at a meeting on agricultural greenhouse-gas emissions.

Antarctica. The failure is the second major loss for NASA's Earth-observation programme in as many years, following the crash of the Orbiting Carbon Observatory — also borne on a Taurus rocket — in 2009. See page 143 for more.

UK health cash

British medical researchers will benefit from a 30% boost to a key translational medicine fund, the country's coalition government announced this week. Starting in April 2012, up to £775 million (US\$1.2 billion) will be awarded over five years via collaborations established by the National Institute for Health Research between universities and the National Health Service for research on new medical treatments. This is a 30% increase on funding over the previous five years of the programme, says the government, which promised last year to increase health-care research spending.

French loan

The French government announced a total of €260 million (US\$360 million) over 10 years for 11 science projects on 4 March. The money is part of a €35-billion stimulus package, revealed by President Nicolas Sarkozy in December 2009, to boost the country's long-term competitiveness.

The 11 schemes include 9 national infrastructure projects for medical and life-sciences research and 2 biotechnology demonstration projects. See go.nature.com/ustnas for more.

PEOPLE



Academy president

Chemist Bai Chunli (pictured) was named the president of the Chinese Academy of Sciences on 28 February, succeeding Lu Yongxiang, who has led the institution for the past 14 years. Bai, the academy's executive vice-president since 2004, is widely credited for the rapid development of nanotechnology in China. He will lead the academy through an ambitious ten-year scheme known as Innovation 2020 (see *Nature* 470, 15; 2011).

Director resigns

Howard Davies stepped down as director of the London School of Economics (LSE) on 4 March, citing the university's connections with Libyan leader Muammar al-Gaddafi.

The LSE has commissioned an external inquiry into its relationship with Libya, including a £1.5-million (US\$2.4-million) donation to the school from the Gaddafi International Charity and Development Foundation in Tripoli. The inquiry will also look into the validity of the PhD thesis written in 2008 by Gaddafi's second son, Saif, while at the LSE.

Fraud conviction

A former biologist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Cambridge was convicted of fraud in a US district court in Boston on 3 March. Luk Van Parijs was fired in 2005 for falsifying data. The fraud conviction arises from a 2003 grant application to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), in which Van Parijs falsely claimed that his lab had developed a transgenic mouse. Van Parijs could face jail time, and has agreed to pay US\$61,117 to MIT, which had reimbursed the NIH for money spent from the grant. He will be sentenced on 14 June.

Minister quits

Archaeologist Zahi Hawass, who was appointed Egypt's minister of antiquities in the dying days of the Mubarak regime, said on 3 March that he would not take a position in

COMING UP

9–10 MARCH

The European Union (EU) Competitiveness Council of science and research ministers meets in Brussels, where they will discuss progress towards a common EU patent system.

14–16 MARCH

Second International Conference on the exploration of the Martian moons Phobos and Deimos is held at NASA's Ames Research Center in Moffett Field, California.

go.nature.com/Gufzqa

the new government. Hawass, who also quit as head of the country's Supreme Council of Antiquities, claims that he is leaving because the security services could no longer adequately ensure the protection of archaeological sites and museums under his jurisdiction. Meanwhile, Essam Sharaf, a pro-science reformist, was named the country's new prime minister on 3 March. See go.nature.com/a62e6t for more.

BUSINESS

Biotech buyout

Daiichi Sankyo, a pharmaceutical company based in Tokyo, has agreed to pay up to US\$935 million for Plexxikon, a biotechnology firm in Berkeley, California, it announced on 28 February. Plexxikon has no medicines on the market, but has drawn attention for its lead drug candidate, PLX4032, which has shown promise in patients with advanced melanoma. Daiichi Sankyo will pay \$805 million up front, and as much as \$130 million more if PLX4032 is approved.

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TREND WATCH

Food and oil prices are rising again, after the steep drop that followed the global financial crisis in 2008. The food price index compiled by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in Rome has already surpassed its previous record high. The price of crude oil is lagging — it has not yet equalled its 2008 peak of US\$145 a barrel — but it did breach the \$100-a-barrel mark on 2 March. The two are tightly linked; the cost of transportation fuel is one of the main drivers of food prices.

DOUBLE TROUBLE

The prices of food and oil are rising in tandem, heading towards a peak last seen in 2008.

