

## POLICY

### European budget

Sticking to pre-agreed schedules for spending €50.5 billion (US\$74 billion) on research over 2007–13, the European Commission has proposed a 13.3% rise in Europe's research budget next year, which would take it to €7.6 billion. The rise is included in the draft European Union budget for 2012, which was published on 20 April. The budget's suggested spending boost (of 4.9% from 2011) has struck some finance ministers as clashing with member states' economic austerity measures. But budget commissioner Janusz Lewandowski said that it was the "bare minimum" required to honour existing contracts. See [go.nature.com/y4rd7u](http://go.nature.com/y4rd7u) for more.

### Altering embryos

Assisted-conception techniques that transfer genetic material between eggs to produce embryos free of inherited mitochondrial diseases seem, on the evidence so far, to be safe. That's the conclusion of a scientific report from the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority in London, published last week. The report calls for additional cell and animal experiments but does not consider the ethical and legal implications of such transfers, which are not yet permitted. They would create embryos with DNA from three sources — the mother, father and a mitochondrial DNA donor. See [go.nature.com/yyp80](http://go.nature.com/yyp80) for more.

### Italy's nuclear hold

Italy has halted plans to build four new nuclear reactors. They would have been the first to be built in the country since a referendum in 1987 shut down its nuclear power industry in the wake



S. SHOSTAK/SPL

## Allen's alien hunt is halted

The Allen Telescope Array, which listens for signals of extraterrestrial life, has been shut down owing to a lack of funding. The University of California, Berkeley, has been operating the array of 42 radio dishes in northern California since 2007. But its funding from the National Science Foundation and

the state of California has dropped, so the array has been put into hibernation. The SETI Institute in Mountain View, California, which co-runs the array, informed donors of the problem on 22 April, and said that it would prepare a fund-raising campaign. See [go.nature.com/1dqfil](http://go.nature.com/1dqfil) for more.

of the Chernobyl disaster the previous year. After the accident at Japan's Fukushima nuclear plant in March, the Italian government introduced a one-year moratorium on the building plans. An amendment approved by the country's Senate on 20 April now extends this moratorium indefinitely.

### Scientific integrity

The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) last week reported mixed progress for the scientific-integrity initiative that began with a memo issued by US President Barack Obama in 2009. The office said that 30 government agencies had responded to a December 2010 memo from John Holdren, director of the OSTP, in which he asked officials to prioritize the development of

integrity guidelines and report back in the next 120 days. But only six agencies have actually delivered draft policies, and the Holdren memo was itself delayed by 17 months relative to a timetable laid out by the president. See [go.nature.com/eddwgh](http://go.nature.com/eddwgh) for more.

### Mekong dam delay

The future of a controversial hydroelectric dam on the Mekong River in Laos remains unclear after the intergovernmental Mekong River Commission couldn't agree on whether to approve it. Laos wants to build the Xayaburi dam, which would be the first on the river's main channel outside China, and likely to be followed by a string of other dams if approved. But at a crunch decision meeting on 19 April, Cambodia,

Vietnam and Thailand raised doubts about the dam's ecological and social impacts. The decision has been deferred to an as-yet unscheduled meeting of the commission's council, which would involve environment ministers of the disputing nations.

## BUSINESS

### Malaria thefts

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria thinks that around US\$2.5-million worth of its donated anti-malaria drugs have been stolen. The fund, based in Geneva, Switzerland, found the corruption among drug-procurement contracts totalling \$98 million in 13 countries (mostly in Africa) for 2009–10. It is also checking contracts in earlier years.

Documents on the thefts were leaked last week to the Associated Press; the Global Fund had hoped not to publicize the investigation until it had been completed. The fund says that it has convened an international group of drug donors, which started meeting in February, to discuss how to stop thefts.

## Oil-spill lawsuits

A year after the explosion of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico, BP is suing three firms that were contracted to operate or make parts for the oil rig. Transocean of Geneva, Switzerland, which owned and operated the rig; Cameron International of Houston, Texas, which made the blowout preventer; and Halliburton of Houston, which designed the well's cement seal, will all be pursued for the roughly US\$40 billion that BP has set aside for oil-spill costs. Companies had been given the deadline of 20 April — the one-year anniversary — to file lawsuits.

### EVENTS

## Fukushima zone

The Japanese government has started to enforce a 20-kilometre exclusion zone around the Fukushima nuclear plant, to stop people from returning to irradiated land. Roughly 27,000 households



are included in the zone. From 21 April, unauthorized entry was declared illegal; checkpoints block the routes in (pictured). At the Fukushima plant itself, robots are surveying the reactor cores while workers of the Tokyo Electric Power Company continue to inject cooling water into the reactors and to pump radioactive water out into storage buildings.

### RESEARCH

## Rhesus rewrite

Marc Hauser, an evolutionary psychologist at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, has replicated findings from a 2007 paper that had been questioned because some raw data were missing. On 25 April the journal *Science* published the replication (J. N. Wood and M. D. Hauser *Science* doi:10.1126/science.1202596; 2011), which supports the original paper's conclusion that rhesus monkeys can discern the intentions underlying another individual's actions. Last

August, Harvard found Hauser guilty of eight counts of scientific misconduct; it emerged last week that he has been banned from teaching there for the coming year. See [go.nature.com/yfifcj](http://go.nature.com/yfifcj) for more.

## Collider record

The Large Hadron Collider — already the world's highest-energy particle accelerator — has set a new world record: for beam intensity. Also termed 'luminosity', this is a measure of the rate at which protons are colliding, and in turn determines how quickly collision data are generated. On 22 April, the beam luminosity at the collider, located at CERN, Europe's particle-physics laboratory near Geneva, Switzerland, reached  $4.67 \times 10^{32}$  collisions per square centimetre per second, passing the previous record of  $4.024 \times 10^{32}$ , held by the Tevatron collider at Fermilab in Batavia, Illinois.

## Revamped ranking

The US National Research Council has revised its influential rankings of doctoral programmes in the United States after it discovered "four substantive errors" in the data. The much-studied rankings were originally released last September, and marked a major rethinking of a system that had last been updated in

## COMING UP

### 29 APRIL

NASA's space shuttle *Endeavour* launches from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida for its final flight, which will be the penultimate mission of the shuttle fleet. It will carry the Alpha Magnetic Spectrometer, an experiment to measure cosmic rays and search for dark matter. [go.nature.com/1rszlj](http://go.nature.com/1rszlj)

### 30 APRIL–3 MAY

The American Physical Society meets in Anaheim, California. Key presentations include results from the Large Hadron Collider. [go.nature.com/uhzvez](http://go.nature.com/uhzvez)

1995 (see *Nature* 467, 510; 2010). Most programmes' positions have not changed much in the revision — but in some fields, such as astrophysics and astronomy, around a third of programmes have seen their position ranges on various metrics change by more than 10%.

## Oil-spill research

After months of delay, BP's fund of US\$500 million for studies into the effects of last year's Gulf Coast oil spill has been opened up to researchers. On 25 April the Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative (GRI) announced that it was ready to review proposals from research consortia. BP announced the 10-year fund on 24 May 2010, but — apart from \$40 million of fast-track funds — the GRI's roll-out of the cash had been hindered by bureaucracy and political manoeuvring (see *Nature* 470, 317; 2011). Even now, grants will not be available until at least 30 August. See [go.nature.com/6ki8rw](http://go.nature.com/6ki8rw) for more.

### NATURE.COM

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## TREND WATCH

The World Health Organization (WHO) says that levels of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as cardiovascular conditions, diabetes and cancers, have reached 'epidemic' proportions. In a 27 April report mapping the problem (see chart), it says that nearly 80% of NCD deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries, and such fatalities will rise by 15% globally by 2020. Many are caused by tobacco use, poor diet, physical inactivity or harmful use of alcohol, and are preventable, says the WHO.

## THE CAUSES OF DEATH

Of the world's 57 million deaths in 2008, 63% were caused by non-communicable diseases (such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer).

