

## Big increases in funding for NIH and bioterrorism labs

**Washington** Funding for the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) is to increase by 15%, after Congress decided on 20 December to raise the institutes' budget for this year to just over \$23 billion.

The budget — part of a larger bill on education, labour and health — had been held up by debates over matters unrelated to the NIH. Research leaders and lobbyists had been confident of a substantial increase, but warn that next year will present a bigger challenge. Some fear that the current economic climate may threaten the five-year plan to double the NIH's budget to \$27.3 billion by 2003.

In a separate defence-spending bill, \$170 million was awarded to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases in Bethesda, Maryland, for projects to tackle bioterrorism and for the construction of additional biosafety level 4 labs, which are used to study dangerous pathogens. The same bill also allocates \$25 million to improving security at the NIH and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta. The CDC has already been allocated \$100 million to upgrade its research facility in Fort Collins, Colorado.

## Fate of Japan's sleeping satellite is in lap of the gods

**Tokyo** Japan's Yohkoh satellite looks set to sleep through its tenth birthday party. The satellite's observations of the Sun came to a surprise halt on 13 December, just weeks short of this month's planned celebration of a decade of data collecting.

Yohkoh's operators at the Institute of Space and Astronautical Science (ISAS), Japan's main space science organization, were left helpless when Yohkoh's solar panels unexpectedly swung away from the Sun, cutting off the satellite's power supply. The lack of power means that the position of the satellite cannot be corrected.

Engineers now hope that the satellite will reorient itself long enough for its batteries to recharge. "We need to wait for the gods to give us a chance," says Takeo Kosugi, who works on the Yohkoh project. ISAS planned to keep Yohkoh running until 2005, when its successor, Solar-B, is due to be launched.

► [www.solar.isas.ac.jp](http://www.solar.isas.ac.jp)

## Nevada takes nuclear waste case to court

**San Francisco** In a last-ditch effort to avoid becoming North America's main repository for nuclear waste, the state of Nevada is suing the US Department of Energy (DOE) over its



Deep trouble: plans to store nuclear waste under Yucca Mountain are to be tested in the US courts.

proposed storage facility at Yucca Mountain, 145 kilometres northwest of Las Vegas.

The suit, filed on 17 December, asks the US Court of Appeals in Washington DC to block the project on the grounds that the DOE has changed its own rules. The waste was originally to be sealed off inside caves 300 metres below the mountain. But after studies found that water could seep in from rainfall and dormant volcanoes in the region could erupt, the DOE decided to put the waste inside the caves in metal containers.

According to Nevada state officials, this breaches a requirement of the 1982 Nuclear Waste Policy Act for a permanent repository to rely on geological containment. Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham is to decide whether to recommend the site to President George W. Bush in the coming weeks.

## Standard-model violation 'a mistake', say physicists

**London** Reports of a violation of the standard model of particle physics made last February by a group at the Brookhaven National Laboratory in New York may have their origin in an algebraic error.

The Brookhaven group measured the magnetic moment of a particle known as a muon, and found it to differ from the predicted value. They then claimed that their findings could violate the standard model, although some physicists disputed this (see *Nature* 410, 291; 2001).

However, Marc Knecht and Andreas Nyffeler of the Centre for Theoretical Physics in Marseille have now revealed a mistake in the predictions: theorists were using a value for a factor called the pion pole contribution as  $-55.6 \times 10^{-11}$ , when it should have been  $55.6 \times 10^{-11}$ . Use of the correct value increases the probability that the difference between the theoretical and experimental values could be due to a statistical fluke from 1% to 13%. Nyffeler and Knecht have submitted their findings to the journal *Physical Review D*.

## Bomb tests may have led to pilot's death

**London** British police are investigating claims that a military pilot was ordered to fly his unprotected plane through the mushroom cloud created by a 1958 nuclear-weapons test.

The test was one of several carried out during the 1950s in Australia and small Pacific islands by the British government. Eric Denson, a squadron leader in the Royal Air Force, fell ill in subsequent years and committed suicide almost 20 years after the test. Denson's widow claims that he was illegally exposed to high radiation levels and that this eventually led to his death.

The inquiry — which the police say is a "preliminary assessment" at this stage — could lead to criminal charges against the Ministry of Defence and the scientists involved in the tests. The British government already faces the threat of court action by Australian and New Zealand servicemen who claim to have been exposed to high levels of radiation during the testing programme (see *Nature* 412, 5 & 670; 2001).

## US drops case against Russian programmer

**San Diego** The US government has dropped criminal charges against Dmitry Sklyarov, the Russian computer scientist who was arrested when he attended a Las Vegas hackers' convention in July.

Software written by Sklyarov, known as the Advanced eBook Processor, can be used to read encrypted versions of electronic books. The software was deemed to violate the US Digital Millennium Copyright Act, a controversial law designed to protect digital commerce. Freedom-of-speech advocates argue that the act limits the traditional fair use of copyright materials, such as for education or research purposes.

Charges against Sklyarov were dismissed on 13 December on condition that he agreed to cooperate with the case against the software's distributors Elcomsoft, a Moscow-based computer company where he worked while studying for his doctorate.



Free speech: Dmitry Sklyarov, left, with Elcomsoft president Alexander Katalov.