

Japan's 'red bird' telescope flies into Earth orbit

It took two tries, but Japan finally launched a long-awaited X-ray telescope into orbit on 10 July. The Astro-EII mission is a replacement for the original Astro-E satellite, which was lost after a rocket failure during its February 2000 launch.

Astro-EII soared into space from the Uchinoura Space Centre on Kyushu Island aboard an M5 rocket. Once the spacecraft had reached orbit, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency announced that it had been given the nickname Suzaku, which means 'red bird of the south'.

Mission controllers will now test its five X-ray telescopes, which are designed to detect radiation coming from the matter swirling around black holes and other energetic cosmic phenomena. Suzaku's findings will complement those of two other major X-ray satellites, NASA's Chandra X-ray Observatory and the European Space Agency's XMM-Newton mission.

Rising tide of polio leads to pledges of extra funding

Polio is spreading in Yemen and Indonesia — countries once free of the disease — even as global leaders redouble their efforts to fight these and other polio outbreaks.

Yemen, which now has 300 polio cases according to the World Health Organization (WHO), was due to begin a large vaccination campaign this week. In Indonesia, at least 122 people are infected, and the government plans a push to vaccinate more than 24 million children in August, UN officials report.

Last week the UK government pledged

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Fight-back: Yemen is stepping up polio vaccination

£60 million (US\$108 million) to the WHO's polio eradication campaign, an amount that would more than fill the initiative's 2005 budget deficit. Leaders of the G8 nations, in their statement on Africa issued after their summit last week, agreed to work towards finding the funds necessary to meet the campaign's budget from 2006 to 2008.

Lab monitoring ecology of nuclear site faces closure

Budget cuts are threatening to shut down a respected US ecological research facility. The Savannah River Ecology Laboratory in South Carolina is laying off nearly a third of its scientific staff and may be closed permanently if more money cannot be found.

For 50 years, the research laboratory near Aiken has monitored the environment around the US Department of Energy's Savannah River nuclear plant, where five now-deactivated reactors generated plutonium and tritium for bombs. But in the spring, the Bush administration moved to cancel the department's US\$8 million contract with the University of Georgia to operate the facility next year.

Regional Congressmen have cobbled together about \$4 million for the lab in

2006, but 50 of the approximately 150 scientific positions have been axed. Many staff are looking for jobs elsewhere. "It is very disturbing," says Whitfield Gibbons, a snake expert at the lab.

K. PALZMAN/AP/GETTY

Signatories widen scope of nuclear materials treaty

The world's only legally binding agreement to monitor the whereabouts of nuclear materials may soon have a wider scope. On 8 July, a majority of the member states of the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material agreed to amend the convention to include nuclear facilities and material for peaceful domestic use, both in storage and while it is being transported.

The convention, created in 1980, previously applied only to nuclear material in international transit. To come into effect, the new rules will have to be ratified by two-thirds of the convention's 112 member states. The process could take several years, according to a spokesman for the International Atomic Energy Agency based in Vienna, Austria.

Cancer-vaccine researcher censured over misconduct

After an investigation lasting almost three years, a German researcher was last week held to be responsible for serious scientific misconduct.

In 2000, Rolf-Herrmann Ringert, head of urology at the University of Göttingen, co-authored a *Nature Medicine* paper that claimed a significant advance in cancer vaccination: that patients' kidney tumours regressed after they were vaccinated with a cocktail of tumour cells fused with immune cells (A. Kugler *et al. Nature Med.* 6, 332–336; 2000). An internal university investigation found the paper's first author, Alexander Kugler, guilty of negligence, while clearing Ringert and all the other co-authors (see *Nature* 420, 258; 2002).

But the DFG, Germany's main research funding agency, carried out its own investigation and came to a harsher conclusion. It argues that as corresponding author and head of the urology department, Ringert was responsible for the false methods, data and claims in the paper. He is now barred from applying for DFG grant money, acting as a referee for the agency, or participating in DFG elections for the next eight years.

In an unrelated case, the DFG announced on 5 July that it had cleared molecular cardiologist Stefanie Dimmeler — winner of the agency's €1.5-million (US\$1.8-million) Leibniz Prize — after anonymous allegations of scientific misconduct (see *Nature* 434, 130; 2005).

Camera millionaire snaps up a week's break on space station

Just don't call him a space tourist: a rumoured US\$20 million has bought Gregory Olsen a ticket to the International Space Station, but unlike previous visitors Dennis Tito and Mark Shuttleworth, he prefers to be called a 'private researcher'. Olsen, an American who founded companies that make electronic imaging equipment, says he plans to "do a lot of science up there". Having signed a contract on 6 July with the Russian space agency, he

could fly to the station in October for eight days.

One of his experiments will reportedly grow semiconducting crystals of the type used in his company's products, which include infrared cameras used for night-vision equipment.

Olsen says he will also use a miniaturized camera to observe crops from space, look at the effect of pollution on the atmosphere and conduct near-infrared astronomical studies.

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