

## US targets roles of genes and environment in disease

The US National Institutes of Health was this week set to announce two ambitious projects in genetics.

The Genes and Environment Initiative and the Genetic Association Information Network (GAIN) are both aimed at identifying the genetic and environmental contributions to common, complex diseases.

The projects will collect genetic and environmental information — such as diet and exposure to chemicals — from thousands of patients with specific diseases and from an equal number of controls. Researchers hope that this will allow them to pinpoint factors that contribute to conditions such as heart disease and Alzheimer's.

The Genes and Environment Initiative will be wholly funded by the government, and officials in the Bush administration have asked Congress for \$40 million for the project in their 2007 budget request (see page 644). In total the NIH will seek \$160 million to fund the initiative over four years.

GAIN, meanwhile, will be funded in part by private companies. The drug firm Pfizer, for example, has so far pledged \$20 million, and biotech company Affymetrix will pay for studies of at least two diseases, which will cost \$3 million to \$6 million each. The programme is scheduled to begin this summer, once peer reviewers have selected the first diseases for investigation.

## Boston biosafety lab gets all-clear for construction

After years of protests, Boston University's high-level biosafety lab finally secured federal approval last week.

The lab will be one of two National Emerging Infectious Diseases Laboratories, and will include biosafety level 4 facilities. The \$178-million building will be located at the university's medical centre in south Boston.

The biosafety 4 lab will be used for



Protesters gather to vent their feelings about Boston University's proposed biosafety lab.

## Dwarf galaxies yield some of dark matter's secrets

Astronomers have come up with the most precise description of dark matter yet, after measuring the temperature of the invisible material holding nearby dwarf galaxies together.

Although dark matter cannot be seen, its existence can be inferred from its gravitational interactions with the stars around it. Gerry Gilmore of the University of Cambridge, UK, and his team used the Very Large Telescope array at the Paranal Observatory in Chile to find that 12 dwarf galaxies (such as the one pictured) orbiting the Milky Way each contain the same amount of dark matter — roughly 30 million times the mass of the Sun. The team concludes that this is the minimum amount of dark matter needed for a stable clump to hold together.

This implies dark matter isn't as cold as theorists had thought. Whatever the particles are made of, they must be moving at about 9 kilometres per second, equivalent to a bulk



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temperature of around 10,000 °C. "These are the first properties of dark matter, other than its existence, that we've been able to determine," says Gilmore.

research on highly infectious pathogens such as Ebola virus. When plans for the facility were announced back in 2003, they sparked protests from local scientists and residents (see *Nature* 428, 785; 2004). A state environmental review is still pending, but this is not expected to halt the project.

The university says that construction should begin later this month and is scheduled to take 30 months to complete.

## Fall-out over faked clones continues to shake Korea

A truck driver torched himself to death in Seoul last week after distributing leaflets calling for disgraced cloning expert Woo Suk Hwang to continue his research. The event was symbolic of a scandal that continues to shake South Korea.

On 31 January, two bioethicists retracted a paper in which they outlined the informed-consent procedures for egg donation that they had devised in collaboration with Hwang (*K. W. Jung and I. Hyun Am. J. Bioeth.* 6, W19–W22; 2006).

And on 2 February, Korea's National Bioethics Committee confirmed rumours about the way Hwang procured eggs. It found that Hwang had forced junior members of his lab to donate eggs, and that he used more than 2,221 eggs in his research rather than the 400 or so he acknowledged using. Thirty-five women's groups plan to sue the government for supporting Hwang's research and neglecting issues related to egg procurement. About one-fifth of the donors, many of whom weren't told of the risks, are now suffering side effects.

Hwang is being investigated over a variety of legal matters, including misuse of state funds, fraud in applying for funding based on knowingly faked results, and breaching the country's bioethics law.

## NASA press office blasted for overstepping the mark

NASA's public-affairs machine came under fire last week for allegedly clamping down on climate researcher James Hansen, of the agency's Goddard Institute for Space Studies in New York. He claimed he was prevented from speaking to reporters after he called for action to dramatically reduce greenhouse-gas emissions.

Most of the focus was on George Deutsch, a political appointee in NASA's press office in Washington, who, according to *The New York Times*, refused a reporter's request for an interview with Hansen (see [www.nature.com/news/2006/060130/full/060130-11.html](http://www.nature.com/news/2006/060130/full/060130-11.html)). In a separate incident reported by the same newspaper, Deutsch insisted that the word 'theory' accompany each reference to the Big Bang on a NASA website. "It is a religious issue," he said, as the Big Bang would discount intelligent design by a creator.

The news brought a swift response from the chairman of the House Committee on Science, Sherwood Boehlert (Republican, New York), who ordered his staff to look into the allegations. NASA administrator Mike Griffin issued his own statement, saying: "It is not the job of public affairs officers to alter, filter or adjust engineering or scientific material produced by NASA's technical staff."

### NEWS INTERNSHIP

*Nature* is seeking an intern reporter to work full-time in either its London or Washington office from July 2006 for six months. Applicants should be self-starting and have a keen news sense. This is a paid position. The intern will write news and news features for *Nature* as well as online news for *Nature's* website [news@nature.com](http://news@nature.com). Please e-mail a cover letter, resumé and three clips to Alexandra Witze, senior news and features editor ([a.witze@nature.com](mailto:a.witze@nature.com)) by 15 February. Put 'internship application' in the subject line.