

## Disgraced Korean cloner claims to be back in the lab

Woo Suk Hwang, the South Korean cloning researcher who is currently standing trial, has begun research again (see *Nature* 442, 121; 2006). According to his lawyer, Hwang started work on pig-cloning projects earlier this month.

Hwang has previously claimed to have cloned pigs and has said he hopes to genetically engineer the animals to provide organs for human transplantation. His claims have been questioned since he was shown last year to have published fraudulent papers on human cloning experiments. His group also created the first cloned dog, a finding that has held up to scrutiny.

Hwang is on trial on charges of embezzlement, fraud and violation of a South Korean bioethics law. Hwang's lawyer, Geon Haeng Lee, denied reports that Hwang's research initiative was a publicity stunt designed to affect the trial: "The first time a newspaper tried to run the story, I begged them not to, but they did it anyway."

## National Cancer Institute appoints next director

John Niederhuber will be the next director of the US National Cancer Institute (NCI), the biggest component of the National Institutes of Health. The 15 August announcement from President George W. Bush had been widely expected, as Niederhuber has been acting director of the NCI since June.

Niederhuber once led the University of Wisconsin Comprehensive Cancer Center in Madison and is an experienced cancer surgeon. He plans to continue running a lab at the NCI in Bethesda, Maryland.

Cancer researcher Mary-Claire King, of the University of Washington in Seattle, is pleased with the choice: "I knew Niederhuber long ago when he was at Stanford. He was extremely intellectually supportive."

## Clean up of Lebanon oil spill starts as guns fall silent

The ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah on 14 August has allowed work to start on a plan to clean up the oil slick created by Israeli bombing of a coastal power plant in Lebanon more than a month ago. About 15,000 tonnes of oil are believed to have spilled into the Mediterranean Sea from the Jiyeh plant, creating a slick affecting some 150 kilometres of Lebanese and Syrian coastline (see *Nature* 442, 609; 2006).

Representatives from the United Nations Environment Programme and the



Slick operation: an oil spill off the Lebanese coast can be cleaned up while the ceasefire lasts.

International Maritime Organization met in Athens on 17 August and backed a €50-million (US\$64-million) clean-up plan. The first task is an aerial survey to verify where the oil lies. Recovery of oil from high-priority sites, including ports and fisheries, will start soon. In the longer term, important habitats for birds and turtles will be protected. Experts from the European Commission and the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea are already working in the area.

## Three quit NASA science committee over budget cut

Three members of NASA's science advisory committee have resigned, two of them after being asked to leave by the agency's administrator, Michael Griffin. The departures are the latest fallout from NASA's decision to cut space science to fund plans to explore the Moon and Mars.

Harrison Schmitt, who chairs the advisory council that oversees the committees, says the science committee had some difficulty coming to grips with the agency's

new mandate. "I think they struggled to recognize that it's a whole new ballgame," Schmitt says. Earlier this year, scientists, including some on the council, spoke out against a NASA proposal to cut space science by 17% between 2007 and 2010 (see *Nature* 439, 768-769; 2006).

The departing scientists are Wesley Huntress, director of the Geophysical Laboratory of the Carnegie Institution of Washington; Eugene Levy, a physicist and provost of Rice University in Houston, Texas; and the committee's chair, Charles Kennel, director of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in San Diego.

## Indian scientists up in arms over nuclear deal

Eight leading Indian nuclear scientists have protested against a planned nuclear deal with the United States (see *Nature* 436, 446-447; 2005), saying it would compromise research and prevent the development of nuclear weapons. The deal is intended to provide access to cheaper fuel and technical knowhow.

The group, which includes P. K. Iyengar and two other former chairmen of the Indian Atomic Energy Commission, complained in a 15 August memo to Indian parliamentarians. The scientists say that centres such as the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research in Mumbai would become subject to US scrutiny, and call for restrictions proposed under the deal to apply only to facilities using imported nuclear material. They say plans to separate military and civilian nuclear research would also undermine India's weapons programmes.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh later said India would never compromise on its nuclear weapons programme and that the final deal would not allow external supervision of research facilities. He has invited the scientists to a meeting on 26 August to discuss their fears.

## Russian recluse shuns maths' highest honour

A mathematician widely agreed to have derived a proof of the century-old Poincaré conjecture has declined to accept one of the 2006 Fields medals. The medals, awarded every four years to mathematicians no older than 40, are the most prestigious prizes in mathematics.

Grigory Perelman (right) posted three papers online in 2002 and 2003. They sketched out a proof of the conjecture, which concerns the shape of three-dimensional spaces. He used a tool known as Ricci flow to develop ways of studying the deformation of surfaces (see *Nature* 442, 490-491; 2006). Perelman has since retreated from the public eye. He was not present when the 2006 medal winners were announced on 22 August, but prize organizers said he had "declined to accept" the award.

The other Fields medals went to Andrei Okounkov of Princeton University, Terence Tao of the University of California, Los Angeles, and Wendelin Werner of the University of Paris-Sud in Orsay.

