

Newsmaker of the Year

Nature is pleased to name Rajendra Pachauri, the Indian engineer and economist, and chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, as our inaugural Newsmaker of the Year.

Science is perhaps less reliant on the concept of ‘personality’ than any other major realm of human endeavour. The scientific facts will remain the same, whoever first discovered them, or described them, or imagined that they might be so.

At the same time, it is because of who scientists are and how they work together, who they like and who they cannot stand, their beliefs about the world, their stamina and their foibles, that research actually gets done. Science, like history, is forged by individuals — even though both are forged on the back of a past whose inhabitants may have faded into anonymity.

It is through people, too, that science shows its public face. When science becomes news, it does so through human agency. That is why at the end of each year, from now on, *Nature* will single out for recognition a person whose role in science has had a particular impact on the wider world stage — a ‘Newsmaker of the Year’.

A newsmaker is not necessarily someone to celebrate. In previous years we might have chosen a figure of obloquy, such as Woo Suk Hwang, the disgraced stem-cell researcher. In future years, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that a cloned human being, a misguided politician or even a bioterrorist could be selected; anyone might have a significant impact in the news and on science itself, and deserve some sort of singular analysis.

But the contribution of this year’s winner to scientific affairs can be celebrated without reservation. Rajendra Pachauri’s great strength is in building and organizing institutions in the fields he understands best — engineering and economics as they apply to issues of development. In that area he has enjoyed a success that reflects his calm, yet fiercely driven personality (see page 1150). Over two decades he has built TERI, the Delhi-based energy and resources institute that he runs, into an organization with offices around the world and several hundred staff. And in the past five years, he has chaired the great collaboration that is the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

The concept of an annual newsmaker does not signify an infatuation with star power, however. Discoveries, rather than personalities,

remain at the core of scientific research. That is why *Nature*’s sister journal *Nature Methods* is introducing a ‘Method of the Year’. The first winner is next-generation ultra-rapid DNA sequencing.

Pachauri’s year has already featured his receipt, on behalf of the IPCC, of a share in the Nobel Peace Prize. It concludes with the moderately successful completion of the UN Convention on Climate Change talks in Bali earlier this month (see, page 1136), when nations made some headway in determining the likely shape of an agreement to succeed the Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012.

Protecting the vulnerable from the threat of climate change is about changing what we all do, and that requires political action as well as changes in personal behaviour. Burying carbon underground and lighting our bedrooms with the power of the atomic nucleus or the tides are things that need to be arranged by governments, both directly — by making the economic costs of carbon emission fall on the processes that emit it — and indirectly, through basic research and spurs to technology development. The Bali meeting provided just a taste of the testing political discourse ahead. Behind that lies the hard reality of the personal costs of mitigating climate change, which will fall alike on those who bear them — whether willingly or unwillingly.

But collective action has a positive and uplifting side, too. The IPCC is a case in point. Its members have sacrificed time that they would rather have spent on new research to do something for the world at large. Their endless meetings and discussions, their intellectual clashes and warm mutual understandings, have produced an unparalleled catalogue of reliable knowledge — and authoritative assessments of remaining ignorance — on a scientific matter of utmost public concern. To produce something that the hundreds of authors can be proud of, and in which the nations of the world have all, to some extent, invested their trust, is no mean thing. The IPCC’s collective efforts span decades. But the person sitting in the chair at its hour of greatest achievement so far is Rajendra Pachauri, and we salute him. ■

A policy of drift

British physics faces an unnecessary squeeze.

In an 11 December announcement of the UK research councils’ budgets for the next three years, the UK government’s innovation secretary, John Denham, called the settlement “good news” for British science. But the numbers were bad news for the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) which, for historical reasons,

funds research in particle physics and astronomy, as well as facilities. The council’s plan for implementing the budget takes from the former to pay for high operating costs on the latter — with potentially painful consequences for physics departments in UK universities.

After the government published its comprehensive spending review in October, it became clear that the STFC would not receive the necessary funds to absorb these running costs. Instead, the council is facing a funding shortfall of about £80 million (US\$160 million) over the next three years. It plans to deal with this by pulling out of the international Gemini telescope project, stopping preparatory work on the proposed International Linear Collider, and slashing