



SPACESHIP TWO UNVEILED
Clever spacecraft design allows for training and 'safer' return to Earth.
www.nature.com/news

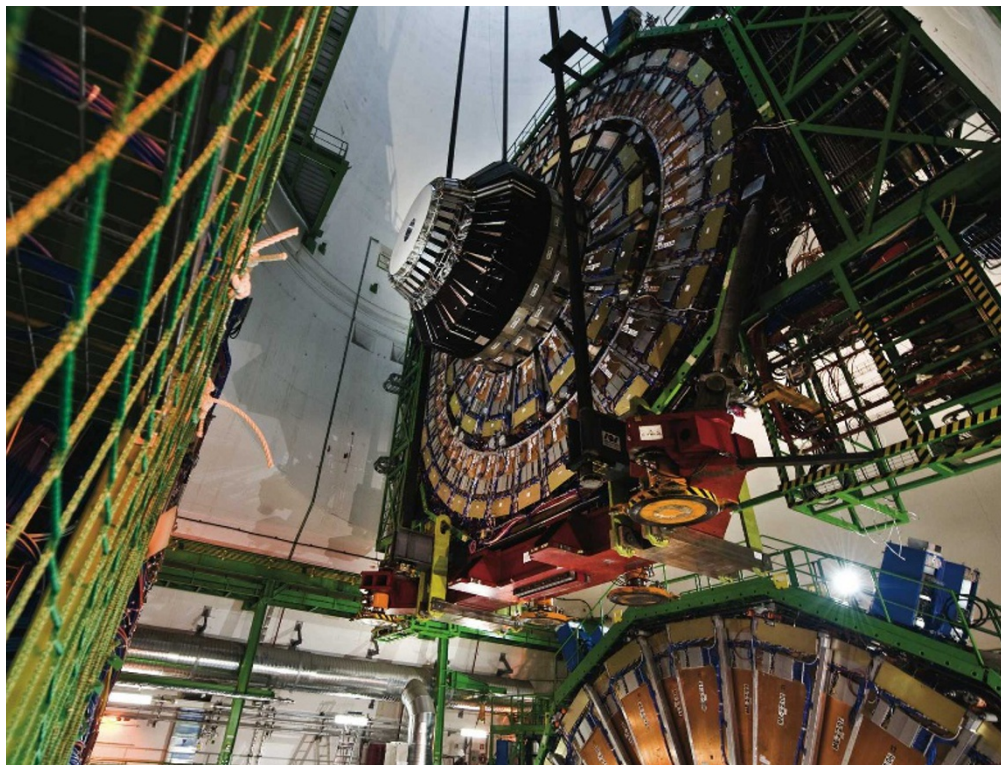
VIRGIN GALACTIC
CERN

SNAPSHOT Search for Higgs primed to start

The final element of the Compact Muon Solenoid (CMS) detector is gently lowered into place at CERN, Europe's particle-physics laboratory near Geneva in Switzerland. The detector will look for physics beyond the 'standard model' in the high-energy collisions of protons at the Large Hadron Collider, CERN's next-generation particle accelerator.

On 22 January, the last piece of the 1,430-tonne detector was installed in a chamber 100 metres below the surface. There, researchers will join it with 14 other segments to complete the instrument. The CMS will help to lead the search for the Higgs particle, which is believed to endow all other particles with mass. If all goes to plan, it could take its first data later this year.

Geoff Brumfiel



Funding freeze shakes Russia's prodigals

Hundreds of young Russian researchers are in a financial limbo after an acclaimed funding programme run by the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS) stopped without warning a few weeks ago.

Georgii Bazykin is one researcher hit by the freezing of the programme, which allows young Russian researchers to set up independent groups in their homeland. With a PhD from Princeton University under his belt, the young geneticist returned to Moscow last

summer with a generous three-year grant from the Scientific Programmes of the Presidium of the RAS. Six months later, with his funding stopped, he is in such a tight spot that he is considering returning to the United States.

The funding programme was set up in 2002 and covers 16 scientific disciplines. No explanation has been given for why the money has dried up, and it is unclear whether the programme will continue.

"We're in a very awkward situation," says Georgii Georgiev, who chairs the council of the programme in molecular and cell biology. "The programme has not been formally terminated, but the academy Presidium keeps postponing its renewal from one week to the next. People are getting very nervous here."

The RAS Presidium is presently preoccupied with redrafting the statutes of the

academy and with preparing for presidential elections in May, programme officials have been told. Georgiev, who is still optimistic that the grants will continue, was told by RAS officials that a decision is due on 12 February. However, there are rumours that the RAS is considering disrupting the programme throughout most of the year, possibly terminating all ongoing projects and launching a new competition.

The programme is unique in Russia's research system in that grant winners are selected through open competition on the basis of scientific performance. The grants — up to US\$180,000 per group per year — are also extremely generous by Russian standards. The programme in molecular and cell biology has been particularly successful, attracting several talented researchers back to Russia.

"I don't see how I could sustain my work and my family in Moscow without the grant," says Bazykin, whose regular salary from the Kharkevich Institute, one of more than 400 institutes run by the RAS, is just \$200 per month. "I'm very concerned," he says. "If the programme were to be cut, the chances are that I will leave."

Quirin Schiermeier

B. KAVASHKIN/ITAR-TASS



The Russian Academy of Sciences may have cut its repatriation programme.