

# NEWS BRIEFING

## ● POLICY

**Ecology network:** A planned \$434-million US environmental monitoring network was last week approved by the National Science Board, the oversight body of the National Science Foundation (NSF). The National Ecological Observatory Network aims to collect data on climate, ecology and biodiversity in 20 different ecosystems across the United States. The NSF has requested \$20 million to begin construction in 2011; the entire network of distributed observatories would take five years to complete.

**US emissions decline:** Carbon emissions by the United States fell 7% in 2009, the US Energy Information Administration said in a report released on 5 May. The fall, a record since energy data collection began in 1949, was partly due to the recession, with gross domestic product falling 2.4%, and a particular decline in the energy-intensive industrial sector. But the agency, based in Washington DC, noted that the carbon intensity (emissions per unit of energy consumed) of the US energy supply also fell more than 2%, mainly because natural gas is replacing increasingly expensive coal.

**China energy rise:** China faces an uphill struggle to meet its self-imposed target of reducing its energy intensity (energy consumption per unit of gross domestic product) by 20% from 2005 levels by the end of this year. Although energy intensity had improved by more than 14% between the start of 2006 and the end of 2009, the first quarter of this year has seen the figure fall back by 3.2%, according to a statement from Premier Wen Jiabao published by the country's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology on 6 May.

**Biodiversity failures:** Reiterating earlier findings, the third edition of *Global*



## BID TO STEM LOUISIANA OIL SLICK FAILS

Last week's attempt to contain oil leaking into the Gulf of Mexico with a giant dome failed after it became clogged with methane hydrates and had to be moved aside. BP had hoped that the dome could be used to collect oil flowing from a ruptured pipeline after the explosion and sinking of the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig.

Dispersant chemicals are being deployed (pictured) in an attempt to manage the oil, but it has been coming ashore on the wildlife-rich Chandeleur Islands off the Louisiana coast. In the wake of the explosion, US interior secretary Ken Salazar declared that no new offshore drilling permits would be issued at least until a federal investigation into the accident is delivered at the end of May.

*Biodiversity Outlook* — a United Nations (UN) report — declared that none of the 2002 targets to reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010 has been achieved globally. “Humanity has fabricated the illusion that somehow we can get by without biodiversity,” wrote Achim Steiner, the executive director of the UN Environment Programme. The report was released on 10 May at the opening of a two-week UN-led biodiversity meeting in Nairobi.

## ● PEOPLE

**Australian academy:** Cancer researcher Suzanne Cory has been elected as president of the Australian Academy of Science, it was announced on 7 May. Cory — who takes over from geophysicist Kurt Lambeck — is the academy's first elected female president since its founding

in 1954, although geologist Dorothy Hill led the organization for a short time in 1970.

**Political influence:** The US biomedical community will lose a powerful supporter with the departure of David Obey (Democrat, Wisconsin) from the House of Representatives after more than four decades of service. On 5 May, Obey announced that he would not seek re-election in November. He has long championed federal research funding, and last year helped to steer more than US\$10 billion in stimulus money to the National Institutes of Health.

## ● RESEARCH

**Biosecurity costs:** Stringent US biosecurity regulations have increased the cost of experiments that use dangerous pathogens. But the red tape introduced

## SOUND BITES

**“It was a mistake. We ought to have been far more careful.”**

Deepak Pental, the vice-chancellor of the University of Delhi, apologizes for a radioactive accident in which his institution sold off a  $\gamma$ -ray source for scrap metal. One worker has died and six have been ill since early April (see [go.nature.com/KxRujd](http://go.nature.com/KxRujd) for more).

by two acts passed after the 2001 anthrax and terrorist attacks — the 2002 Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response Act, and the 2001 USA PATRIOT Act — have not dissuaded scientists from performing research in these fields, contrary to some microbiologists' warnings. The conclusions come from a study published on 10 May (M. B. Dias *et al. Proc. Natl Acad. Sci. USA* doi:10.1073/pnas.0915002107). See [go.nature.com/m5QO3J](http://go.nature.com/m5QO3J) for more.

**Nuclear restart:** Monju, Japan's prototype fast-breeder nuclear reactor (pictured), restarted operation on 6 May. Located on the coast at Tsuruga, the reactor was shut down more than 14 years ago following a coolant leak and a fire. Fast-breeder reactors, designed to produce more plutonium than they consume, are a key part of resource-poor Japan's nuclear ambitions (see *Nature* 464, 661; 2010). Monju will undergo a three-month test period, running at 1% of its

## NUMBER CRUNCH

# 14

**Members of the UK House of Commons science and technology committee, before last week's elections.**

# 5

**Number of committee members re-elected to parliament. See Editorial, page 135.**

coherent X-ray light for imaging single biomolecules and making movies of molecular events. The upgrade, capped at \$380 million, would by 2017 widen the spectrum of available X-ray light, and increase the number of beams, allowing more experiment stations to work simultaneously.

**Nucleotide database:** A one-stop-shop for DNA and RNA sequence data, the European Nucleotide Archive, was officially launched on 10 May. It provides access to three existing public databases through one web interface ([ebi.ac.uk/ena](http://ebi.ac.uk/ena)). The backbone of the archive, hosted by the European Molecular Biology Laboratory's (EMBL's) European Bioinformatics Institute in Cambridge, UK, is the EMBL-Bank. It also holds raw sequence data from the European Trace Archive and the newer Sequence Read Archive, created in 2008 to house data from next-generation sequencing machines.

## ● BUSINESS

**Pharmaceutical riches:** The husband-and-wife owners of a pharmaceutical company shot to the top of China's rich list on 6 May, after their firm made its initial public offering on the Shenzhen Stock Exchange. Shenzhen Hepalink Pharmaceutical Company's share price rose by 18% on its first day of trading, putting the company's value at about 70 billion renminbi (US\$10 billion). Co-founders Li Li and Tan Li own a 72% stake in the firm, which says it is the world's largest supplier of the blood thinner heparin.

280,000 kilowatt capacity, and reach full capacity in 2012. The country hopes to commercialize fast-breeder reactors by 2050.

**Laser upgrade:** The world's biggest free-electron laser is going to get bigger. The SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory in Menlo Park, California, announced on 5 May that it had received initial approval from the US Department of Energy for an upgrade to the Linac Coherent Light Source (LCLS). The \$420-million LCLS, which began operation in April 2009, produces short pulses of

## THE WEEK AHEAD

**14 MAY**  
**The InterAcademy Council, which is reviewing the procedures of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, hears its first presentations, in Amsterdam. They are open to the public.**

▶ [go.nature.com/d9wy6A](http://go.nature.com/d9wy6A)

**16-20 MAY**  
**Giant earthquakes and their tsunamis are the subject of a one-off conference in Viña del Mar, Chile, convened by the American Geophysical Union on the 50th anniversary of the giant 1960 Chile earthquake (see *Nature* 465, 24-25; 2010).**

▶ [go.nature.com/ZhmWap](http://go.nature.com/ZhmWap)

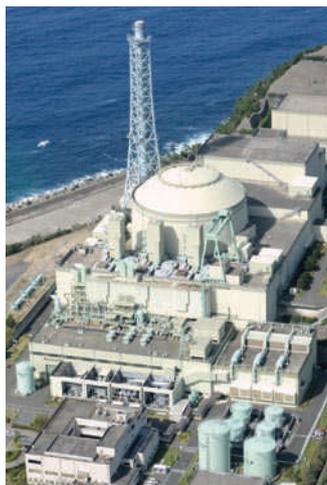
**18 MAY**  
**Japan's Venus Climate Orbiter 'Akatsuki' — its first probe to the planet — is scheduled to launch from the Tanegashima Space Center.**

▶ [go.nature.com/zpRZYp](http://go.nature.com/zpRZYp)

**17-21 MAY**  
**The World Health Organization holds its 63rd annual assembly in Geneva, Switzerland; pandemic flu vaccines and a global strategy to reduce harmful use of alcohol are on the agenda.**

▶ [go.nature.com/u7EdT2](http://go.nature.com/u7EdT2)

AP/PA IMAGES



## BUSINESS WATCH

First-quarter earnings by large pharmaceutical companies exceeded analysts' expectations. But many companies have lowered their predictions for the rest of the year to incorporate the effects of US health-care reform. In the long term, the reform should provide drug manufacturers with more customers, but its measures this year include higher price rebates for patients in the government's Medicaid insurance plan. Overall, pharmaceutical stocks dipped below the Dow Jones Industrial Average in mid-February as the US health-care legislation took shape, and have remained there since (see chart).

AstraZeneca, based in London, reported a 28% increase in earnings per share; revenue from sales

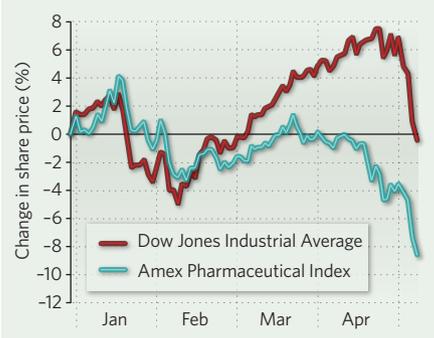
in China alone soared 36%. Meanwhile, sales at New York-based Bristol-Myers Squibb rose 11% relative to the first quarter of 2009. The company expects changes in US health laws to reduce 2010 earnings per share by 12 cents.

Sales by Swiss company Roche beat forecasts, helped by its cancer drug Avastin, and sales at London-based GlaxoSmithKline rose 9%, largely due to its pandemic flu vaccine.

Two companies — Merck, in New Jersey, and Pfizer, headquartered in New York — reported lower profits than the same period last year, although better than expected. Both firms are dealing with the costs of large acquisitions.

### PHARMACEUTICAL DOWNER

Despite promising first-quarter results, pharmaceutical stocks have underperformed the average since US health-care reform took shape.



SOURCE: NYSE