

German science receives promised boost in funds

The new German government is on course to keep its pre-election pledge to bolster public investment in research.

Chancellor Angela Merkel announced on 10 January that an additional €6 billion (US\$7 billion) will be injected into basic and applied research over the next four years. As long as private industry also pitches in, the extra money would boost Germany's research spending to 3% of its gross domestic product by the end of 2009.

How exactly the money will be spent, and which fields of science may benefit, will be agreed by research minister Annette Schavan and other government departments, probably by the end of February. The cash is also likely to allow Schavan to run a planned €1.9-billion competition for elite universities without cutting funds elsewhere.

DNA tests confirm guilt of executed prisoner

Roger Keith Coleman was guilty after all. New DNA tests prove that in 1981 Coleman raped and murdered his sister-in-law in Grundy, Virginia, a crime for which he was executed in 1992.

Many opponents of the death penalty had hoped the tests would prove that Coleman was innocent. This would have made him the first person in the United States to be cleared by DNA evidence after their execution (see *Nature* 439, 126–127; 2006).

Outgoing Virginia governor Mark Warner had requested the tests be done on old DNA samples taken from the scene of the crime. Researchers from Canada's Centre of Forensic Sciences in Toronto reported the results on 11 January.

"We are very disappointed," says Kate Germond of Centurion Ministries, a non-profit organization based in New Jersey. An exoneration would have boosted the anti-death-penalty cause. "It would have been tremendous," she says.



Groups opposed to the death penalty were dealt a blow by DNA tests on an executed prisoner.

Researchers reach out for a little bit of stardust

Some 180 scientists across the world are gearing up to receive tiny amounts of the cometary particles collected by NASA's Stardust mission.

The spacecraft (shown here during re-entry) parachuted safely onto the Utah desert on 15 January, carrying thousands of dust particles collected from the tail of Comet Wild 2. Stardust gathered the particles on an aerogel paddle about the size of a tennis racquet. The dust was destined for NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston before being shared out among researchers.

Scientists hope that the samples will give them clues about the chemical make-up of the primordial rubble that spawned the planets.



Stardust's close encounter with the comet, in January 2004, has already revealed that Wild 2 has a surprisingly rigid core and a surface that is pock-marked by craters.

Google Scholar search engine goes multilingual

Chinese- and Portuguese-speaking scientists can now search the scientific literature in their own languages using the free search engine Google Scholar. Additional languages, including French, Spanish and German, will be added later.

Abstract and indexing databases such as PubMed, Scopus and Thomson Scientific's Web of Science already include English abstracts of foreign-language journals, where such information is available. But Google Scholar allows full-text searching of some articles in their original language, ranking papers by the number and quality of citations.

Anurag Acharya, the engineer who built Google Scholar, says that Chinese and Portuguese are the first languages to be added because there were local journal databases to collaborate with in these countries, including Wanfang Data and VIP Information in China, and SciELO and Bireme in Brazil.

when they are tested in humans.

Andrew von Eschenbach, the acting FDA commissioner, reassured watchdog groups that the new guidelines would not place patients at risk. "Rapid does not mean reckless," he said.

Private donation set to keep collider running

The Relativistic Heavy Ion Collider, the largest US nuclear-physics experiment, has received a \$13-million private donation that will allow it to keep operating this spring.

The collider, which smashes atomic nuclei together to recreate conditions in the early Universe, was facing a budget shortfall in 2006, according to Praveen Chaudhari, director of the Brookhaven National Laboratory in New York, where the collider is based. The Department of Energy had given the lab enough money to run the accelerator for only five weeks — just long enough to warm it up and cool it down again. Under those circumstances, Chaudhari says, "we were not going to make a run" this year.

The donation comes from James Simons, mathematician and head of investment management company Renaissance Technologies, based in Setauket, New York. The directors of Brookhaven Science Associates, which runs the lab, and of which Simons is a member, are also involved in the donation.

"It seemed a terrible shame that so valuable a piece of scientific equipment and so valuable a team of scientists be left for a year to lie fallow," Simons says.

US drug agency gives green light to early clinical trials

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued new guidelines on 12 January to pave the way for more drugs to make the leap from lab bench to patient.

The regulations allow scientists to make small batches of trial drugs in their labs instead of ordering them from factories. Researchers can then test smaller doses in fewer patients than those used in early clinical trials. They will use imaging studies to gauge whether the drug reaches its intended target before embarking on a full-blown clinical trial. The agency has been working to distinguish promising drugs earlier in the development process, as nine out of ten experimental drugs fail

Correction
The 5 January News Feature 'Awash with fossils' (see *Nature* 439, 14–16; 2006) misidentified palaeoanthropologist Berhane Asfaw as director of Ethiopia's National Museum. He is a former director of the museum; the current director is Mamiit Yilma.