

South Korea gives funding boost to stem-cell research

The South Korean government will give stem-cell researchers 430 billion won (US\$450 million) over the next decade, in a bid to recover from the scandal involving cloning researcher Woo Suk Hwang.

On 29 May, the Ministry of Science and Technology released a plan compiled by a group of 50 researchers and government officials as part of a strategic effort to make Korea one of the world's leading stem-cell research hubs. It aims to strengthen embryonic stem-cell research and boost adult stem-cell research and infrastructure.

The funding is less than scientists had asked for but still represents an increase on last year's budget. In addition, the government has provided more than 11 billion won for Hwang's group, money that had been approved before the Hwang scandal.

US halts work with South Korean stem-cell line

US officials have halted research involving a human embryonic stem-cell line from a South Korean team, after allegations that

unapproved cell lines had been shipped to researchers.

The cell line was one of those approved by the US government, because it was created before President Bush's 2001 ban on federal research on new stem-cell lines. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has suspended its five-year contract with MizMedi Women's Hospital in Seoul for the line dubbed Miz-hES1.

About three-dozen US researchers at the NIH and universities had received the cell line in question, says John Burklow, an

NIH associate director of communications. His office is investigating a report that other cell lines were substituted in South Korea for some of those shipped as NIH-approved. MizMedi officials did not respond to enquiries.

Health agency puts focus on diseases of the poor

Global health campaigners scored a victory in Geneva on 27 May, as the World Health

Israeli cave reveals eight arthropod species

A unique and isolated ecosystem has been discovered in a subterranean lake in a cave 100 metres below a limestone quarry in central Israel.

Hanan Dimentman, a zoologist at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, collected specimens of eight previously unknown arthropod species, including four kinds of crustacean, a springtail and a scorpion. DNA tests are being done to determine when the animals might have diverged from their marine and freshwater relatives.



The lake was discovered by a geography masters student, Israel Naaman, as he explored the groundwater beneath the quarry.

S. TIRAM

Assembly embraced a measure to tackle medical problems in poor countries.

The resolution directs the World Health Organization (WHO) to set a strategy to spur research on diseases that disproportionately affect the poor. Brazil and Kenya led the push for the measure, which endorses the work of a WHO commission on intellectual property and public health. A report published by the commission in April found that patent laws are one way — but not the only way — to encourage medical research (see *Nature* 441, 135; 2006).

The move is a step in the right direction, advocates say. Over the next year, the WHO's member states will try to work out a strategic plan, with a final report expected by May 2008.

Europe's space lab seeks date with Destiny

At long last, the science lab destined to be Europe's research outpost in space has completed the first leg of its journey into low Earth orbit.

The Columbus science module — a 7-metre-long capsule packed with racks of experiments — arrived at NASA's Kennedy



Hitching a lift: the European space lab Columbus went by plane to NASA's Kennedy Space Center.

Space Center in Florida on 30 May. The module was carried from its storage site in Bremen, Germany, in the belly of an enormous aircraft (pictured).

Columbus is expected to be launched aboard the space shuttle some time in the second half of 2007, after problems with the shuttle program pushed it back from 2005. The module will dock with the International Space Station, where its research facilities in biology, physiology and fluid physics will add to experiments already being done in orbit on the US science module, Destiny.

Transgenic drug gets the go-ahead in Europe

A drug made in the milk of genetically engineered goats may soon be used in a hospital near you.

Overtuning its previous decision not to approve the drug (see *Nature* 440, 13; 2006), the European Medicines Agency has approved ATryn for use in the European Union — the first time it has given the go-ahead for a drug from a transgenic animal source. The change in heart came after another detailed review of the data.

GTC Biotherapeutics, a Massachusetts-based company, engineered goats to express a human protein called antithrombin that stops the formation of blood clots. The protein, marketed as ATryn, will be given to antithrombin-deficient patients when they give birth or undergo surgery, where blood-thinning medicines could lead to runaway bleeding. The drug is also undergoing large-scale human trials in the United States.

Correction

The News story "Old tools shed light on hobbit origins" (*Nature* 441, 559; 2006) said that the hominids *Homo floresiensis* were ancestors of *Homo erectus*; it should have said "descendants".