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current events

This section carries events of interest to the synchrotron radiation community. Works intended for this section should be sent direct to the Current-Events Editor (s.s.hasnain@liverpool.ac.uk).

SwissFEL project included in strategic plan of ETH

An important decision has been taken towards the realisation of SwissFEL at PSI. The ETH Board discussed at its board meeting on 1–2 March 2010 the proposal presented by PSI and has given its unanimous support by including the project in the strategic planning of the ETH Domain. The SwissFEL project will thus be included in the BFI proposition of the State Secretariat for Education and Research to the Federal Government for the years 2011–2015.

The PSI directorate has placed special consideration to the local public opinion on the project. Therefore, in January 2010, two 'town hall' meetings were organized in the community of Würenlingen, the preferred site for the facility. In these meetings the long-term strategy of PSI, the scientific opportunities of SwissFEL, as well as the impact of the facility on the local and regional level were discussed. A working group including local authorities and associations will give advice on environmental and local issues during the definition and approval phase. The technical development of the project has also reached its first milestone: in the SwissFEL injector test facility the first electron beam from the gun has been extracted and accelerated to an energy of 5 MeV.

UK government and the Wellcome Trust agree to invest GBP 110M for Phase III of Diamond

Business Secretary Lord Mandelson announced that the British government has approved an investment worth GBP 97.4 million for the Phase III development of Diamond at Harwell Science and Innovation Campus in Oxfordshire. This funding boost, together with a GBP 13.8 million contribution from the Wellcome Trust, will add ten more beamlines bringing the total to 32. The government's funding will be made *via* an allocation to the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC). Lord Mandelson on the occasion said "Today we are demonstrating our ambitious vision for UK science. By investing in one of the jewels of the nation's science crown we are building on record levels of investments over the past decade to secure the future of science and help drive innovation. Diamond, the world-best light source, shines a light on how strategic government investment in high-tech, high-skilled facilities can push at the boundaries of science and drive forward the new high-tech, high-skilled industries and jobs of the future." Professor Keith Mason, Chief Executive of STFC, which manages government investment in Diamond, welcomed the announcement and said "This extra money announced by the Department of Business Innovation and Skills will ensure Diamond can branch out into yet more fields of research, allowing Diamond to fully exploit the synchrotron's capabilities for the UK science community and industrial users. STFC will work closely with the Wellcome Trust to ensure maximum scientific and economic value from this investment." Gerd Materlik, who has been leading the Diamond project since its launch, said "We are very grateful for the continued support of the UK Government, the Science and Technology Facilities Council and the Wellcome Trust, which has been key to the successes we have achieved so far. Together with our wide user community from academia and industry, we have delivered on expectations so far. This Phase III capital investment demonstrates our funders' commitment to the UK science base. The team will now focus on delivering the additional experimental facilities by 2017, which will enable us to increase our scientific outputs by 50%."

Diamond in its third year of operation receives funds for Phase III.

The Diamond synchrotron, which resulted from a partnership between the Wellcome Trust and the UK government, currently has 17 operational beamlines and five additional Phase II beamlines are to be added soon. Phase III of the project will provide for a further ten beamlines by 2017, bringing the full complement of beamlines at Diamond to 32. This will allow Diamond to fill important scientific gaps in provision as well as offering new opportunities in emerging areas where the UK can lead from the start.

Inauguration of ALBA: the ALBA Synchrotron, the largest science infrastructure ever built in Spain

ALBA was officially inaugurated on 22 March 2010. The ceremony took place with the presence of the President of the Spanish Government, Mr Rodríguez Zapatero, and the President of the Generalitat de Catalunya, Mr Montilla. The Alba Synchrotron, located in Cerdanyola del Vallès, has been built with an investment of EUR 201 million. The opening ceremony, attended by the Mayor of Barcelona, Jordi Hereu, was presided over by the Prime Minister of

The inauguration ceremony of ALBA.

Spain, Jose Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, and the President of the Generalitat (regional government) of Catalonia, José Montilla. The Alba Synchrotron is the biggest scientific installation in Spain. Both the Spanish Prime Minister and the President of the Generalitat championed this new technological centre as a boost to the new economic model based on innovation and research. President Montilla said that ''soon the industrial fabric of the country will have a key ally in the synchrotron to provide the competitive edge necessary to ensure the viability of our economic model.'' ''This centre is the culmination of considerable work and effort, and a start along the path to a new economic model,'' added Prime Minister Zapatero. At the inauguration, the President of the Catalonia Government highlighted that the facility is a demonstration of the fact that Spain is turning the page of the history book, moving on from a chapter in which the country turned its back on science and guaranteeing its position in the scientific first division of European countries. Barcelona's Mayor also stated that the Alba Synchrotron would help to 'position the Barcelona metropolitan area at the centre of the new economy.' Hereu called for 'the maximum return' from this state-of-the-art centre, to enable 'the whole business sector to make use of it' and encourage 'science and enterprising businesses to locate here, one of the great symbols of this new era'.

The opening of ALBA represents a decisive step forward for the Spanish Map of Singular Scientific and Technological Infrastructures (ICTS) and Spain's international presence by positioning it (already the world's ninth most scientifically productive country) as an outstanding country in terms of large-scale research infrastructures. ALBA is managed by CELLS, the Consortium for the Construction, Equipping and Operation of the Synchrotron Radiation Laboratory, which was jointly set up by the Ministry of Science and Innovation and the Regional Government of Catalonia in equal parts. The total budget for the construction phase, from the end of 2003 to 2009, amounted to EUR 201 million and was jointly financed by the two authorities. The laboratory is scheduled to open for experiments with seven beamlines by the end of 2010.

Australian Synchrotron continues work-to-rule operation

The Australian Synchrotron has been setting records in mismanagement of a synchrotron radiation facility; *e.g.* sacking of the founding director, Robert Lamb, last October with no prior indication, followed by a large number of resignations from the members of the international science advisory committee, staff going on strike and continued work-to-rule at the facility; thus, while electrons are circulating 24 h, the scientific staff leave the site once the working day is over, something completely unknown among the synchrotron radiation community.

The rift has attracted widespread media attention including *Science* but we have been reluctant to cover this sorry state of affairs in this column. We have been an enthusiastic supporter of the Australian Synchrotron project since the early stages of its construction when the current Premier, John Brumby, championed the synchrotron as innovation minister and without whose direct engagement we believe that the Australian Synchrotron project may have remained under discussion for some more years.

When the Australian Synchrotron opened in mid-2007, it was celebrated worldwide among the synchrotron community. So soon after the opening, which happened in the same year as the UK's third-generation synchrotron radiation source Diamond and France's source SOLEIL, it is sad to see the facility in such turmoil. The author visited Melbourne for the first time in February when he was looking forward to seeing the buzz typical of any new facility of this kind. Disappointment, disillusion and frustration were widespread.

Robert Lamb (second from left) on the occasion of the recently held 9th BSR and MASR conferences with senior international colleagues including Sine Larsen (fifth from right), Soichi Wakatsuki (fourth from right) and Samar Hasnain (far left).

New resignations and ongoing industrial strife are continuing to attract poor publicity nationally and internationally. The Victorian TV carried an in-depth interview with various parties including Premier John Brumby (http://www.abc.net.au/news/video/2010/03/05/2838155.htm). Frank Larkins, former chair of the scientific advisory committee, who resigned after Robert Lamb's dismissal, was also interviewed. Larkins, who is an advisor to the State Government of Victoria on the synchrotron, said ''Our international members basically gave the message that their time was precious and they did not see that there was merit in continuing, and I lament that very much, because we will not be a world class facility unless we have world class people and world class support.'' He added ''The advice which has been fed in over two years to the board about planning for the future, new beamlines, new money for operating, creating an environment to retrain and attract more good people, that advice has not been acted upon.'' He said ''Since the end of November from the point of view of the Australian Synchrotron science community things have deteriorated further and we are certainly now not meeting world's best practice.''

The Victorian Premier John Brumby is keeping a distance from this unhappy phase of the facility. He said ''Obviously the synchrotron is very dear to my heart, but the operational matters, the administrative matters, the management decisions, they are honestly matters for the board; they are not for me to get involved in.'' We urge him and others to resolve this even if it means taking difficult decisions such as starting with a completely new management and its remit. To ignore and wish that the problem will go away is not going to be wise and is certain to put the Australian synchrotron community at a disadvantage in this very highly competitive and rapidly progressing field.