

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).

8th SESAME users meeting attracts 180 delegates in Petra

Some 180 delegates and two Nobel laureates assembled together in the historical city of Petra in Jordan for the 8th SESAME users meeting during 19–21 November 2009. More than 100 delegates came from outside Jordan. All of the member countries were well represented with a major presence of users from Egypt, Turkey, Iran and Israel. The two Nobel laureates were Richard Ernst from ETH Zurich and the 2009 prizewinner Ada Yonath from the Weizmann Institute of Science. Richard Ernst gave a thought-provoking plenary lecture on academic responsibility for shaping a beneficial future while Ada Yonath gave an inspiring lecture covering the journey for final recognition earlier this year. Despite the fact that she had received the prize this year and demand on her time would have been tremendous, she remained at the meeting for the whole of its duration, making herself available to young and experienced delegates alike. The young delegates were already enthused by her presence for the whole meeting but her detailed description of her 25 year-long journey on ribosome against all odds was inspiring. Her enthusiasm for the SESAME project was clear for all to see.

The delegates also learned about the current status of the project, from injector to phase-one beamlines. They learned how the first element in the accelerator complex, the pre-injector microtron, provided the first beam on 14 July 2009. Significant upgrade has been made to the 30 year-old classical microtron given to SESAME by the German BESSY facility. Re-operation has been accomplished through several steps such as testing the different subsystems of the microtron, installing and reconnecting the microtron in its final position in the experimental hall, and replacing the old vacuum and control systems with new ones. In addition, several talks were given by experts from the region and other synchrotron radiation centres, providing a broad coverage of science areas which SESAME would cover *via* its 'day-one' beamlines. Speakers included Zehra Sayers, Zahid Hussain, Uwe Bergmann, Paul Dumas, Samar Hasnain, Jean Susini, Soichi Wakatsuki, Joel Sussman, Graham George, Lisa Miller and Herman Winick. Joan Bordas, Director of ALBA, provided a



Ada Yonath (second from left) with structural biology colleagues, from left, Samar Hasnain, Soichi Wakatsuki and Joel Sussman at the 8th SESAME users meeting.



Hafeez Hoorani (SESAME) and Joan Bordas (ALBA) signing the Memorandum of Understanding. The Technical Director, Amor Nadji, and the President of the SESAME Council, Chris Llewellyn-Smith, look on.

detailed account of the impressive progress that has been made with the construction and installation of the ALBA project. He offered to host scientists and engineers from SESAME during the commissioning of ALBA and its beamlines, which should provide a very useful hands-on experience for the SESAME team. A formal Memorandum of Understanding was signed between ALBA and SESAME for close cooperation. Following the SESAME users meeting, a joint meeting of the beamline advisory committee and the science advisory committee took place where detailed plans for day-one and other phase-one beamlines were approved and then were endorsed by the council at its meeting on 24–25 November 2009.

RIKEN and Liverpool forge closer links for biomolecular structural and functional imaging

Stephen Holloway, Executive Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University of Liverpool, who had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with RIKEN SPring-8 centre earlier in the year [*J. Synchrotron Rad.*



RIKEN (left) and Liverpool (right) scientists with the British Ambassador, David Warren. Hiromichi Kamitsubo, the founding Director of SPring-8, is in the centre, next to David Warren.



Tetsuya Ishikawa (far right) and Tsumoru Shintake (second from left) with Swapan Chattopadaya, Steve Holloway and Samar Hasnain, all from the University of Liverpool, standing in the XFEL tunnel.

(2009), 16, 314–315], took a delegation of senior scientists from the faculties of physical sciences and health and life sciences to RIKEN sites starting from the Harima campus. The week-long visit (9–13 November) comprised symposia at the Harima, Yokohama and Wako campuses as well as a reception and Millennium Science Forum symposium at the British Embassy. More than 100 senior scientists and policy makers from Japan, including RIKEN's executive directors Kenji Takeda and Yoshiharu Doi, attended the symposium and reception at the embassy.

During the visit to the Harima campus, the delegation was able to see the rapid progress being made with the XFEL project. It also learned about the plans for an initiative for a SPring-8 synchrotron source upgrade known as SPring-8 II. This is expected to convert SPring-8 into the 'ultimate' storage ring by the end of 2019. RIKEN and Liverpool announced the intention to start three jointly funded PhD studentships from October 2010, two linked with the health and life sciences faculty and one with the Cockcroft Accelerator Institute, whose Director Swapan Chattopadaya is a professor in the faculty of physical sciences at Liverpool. Stephen Holloway on the occasion said that he "desired a strong relationship between the University of Liverpool and RIKEN as part of university's internationalization strategy".

Japanese synchrotron labs pushed into a budget crisis

RIKEN and KEK, hosts of the two major synchrotron facilities in Japan, SPring-8 at Harima and Photon Factory at Tsukuba, have been put in financial crisis as a result of what appears to be summary judgments by the working groups of the Government Revitalization Unit, created in September and chaired by Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama. The Revitalization Unit was charged with identifying wasteful spending in budget requests (for the financial year which begins in April 2010) prepared under the previous government of the Liberal Democratic Party, which governed Japan for most of the past 50 years. On 11 November, some 400 projects including dozens of prominent science projects were highlighted for scrutiny where additional information was sought. Two days later, on the afternoon of 13 November, intentions to cut/reduce budgets were announced including a potential cut for SPring-8 of 30 to 50%. The recom-



SPring-8 at Harima Campus.

mended cut came with a simple assessment that the merits of budget requests 'were not adequately explained'.

The broader scientific community in Japan has been shocked by the scales of the cuts and speed of the process. A common feeling of lack of objectivity is expressed by most scientists spoken to. The action has attracted robust public statements from senior figures in Japan. In a statement issued as a Call for Opinions on 1 December, Atsuto Suzuki, Director General of KEK, said that 'Science has played a crucial role in our society, contributing to our understanding of the world around us, and supplying knowledge bases to develop innovative technologies. The Japanese science community has made remarkable contributions to this effort. This is clearly seen in the Nobel Prize-winning works by Yukawa and Tomonaga in the past, and by Nambu, Kobayashi, Maskawa and Shimomura in 2008'. Suzuki added that it could take 'years' for the country to recover from the cuts and that 'neglect of the importance of fundamental research could result in a long-term stagnation of our national competitiveness'.

In an unusual move, a group of Nobel Prize laureates, Leo Esaki, Makoto Kobayashi, Ryoji Noyori, Susumu Tonegawa and Fields Medal recipient Shigefumi Mori, held a joint press conference and released a statement denouncing the proposed budget cuts. It is unusual for top scientists to attack central government's policies, and their remarks are being seen as an indication of the strength of their opposition to the government's plan. Noyori, 71, who won the Nobel Prize in 2001 and is President of Riken Physical and Chemical Research Institute, condemned the decision of the new Government's Revitalization panel and said "The panel's approach of judging science purely from the standpoint of cost is completely lacking in discretion".

Anger and anxiety is further fueled by reports attributing remarks to the Prime Minister when Hatoyama, after chairing the 8 October meeting of the Council for Science and Technology Policy, noted that his cabinet is 'extremely rare' because it includes several engineers, such as himself. 'Because we too did research, we know that researchers and academics can get drunk on their own studies', he said.

As we go to press, the level of final cuts are not fully certain. We very much hope that reason will prevail. Whatever the motivation for cuts, action taken in this way will do irreparable damage to Japanese science and technology and also its reputation that it has gained by the hard work of many scientists through the implementation of the most advanced technologies in the field.