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WASHINGTON, Nov. 26

Mars Express records 5,000 orbits

DARMSTADT, Germany, Nov. 26 The European Space Agency said its Mars Express spacecraft has completed 5,000 orbits of the Mars since arriving there Dec. 25, 2003.

The orbiter has revolutionized knowledge of Mars, probing every facet of the planet in unprecedented detail, the ESA said. Some of the most visually astonishing results have been returned by the craft's High-Resolution Stereo Camera, which has produced 3D color images of Mars' surface, the ESA said.

Other instruments have been examining different aspects of the planet's environment.

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With the mission already extended until at least 2009 and the possibility of further extensions into the next decade, Mars Express controllers at the ESA's Space Operations Center in Darmstadt, Germany, are fine-tuning the spacecraft's orbit.

Stem cells grow new immune systems in mice

STANFORD, Calif., Nov. 26 U.S. scientists have found a way of transplanting blood-forming stem cells into the bone marrow of mice, effectively replacing their immune systems.

The Stanford University School of Medicine researchers said their achievement represents a small but significant step toward the goal of transplanting adult stem cells to create a new immune system for people with autoimmune or genetic blood diseases.

Many aspects of the new technique would need to be adapted before it can be tested in humans, said Dr. Irving Weissman, one of the investigators and director of the Stanford Institute for Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine.

The study appears in the journal Science.

Nanoparticles deliver drugs to tumors

CAMBRIDGE, Mass., Nov. 26 U.S. scientists have created remotely controlled nanoparticles that, when pulsed with an electromagnetic field, release drugs to attack tumors.

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology researchers said their achievement could lead to the improved diagnosis and targeted treatment of cancer.

In earlier work the team -- led by Dr. Sangeeta Bhatia, an associate Harvard-MIT professor -- developed injectable multi-functional nanoparticles designed to flow through the bloodstream, home to tumors and clump together. Clumped particles help clinicians visualize tumors through magnetic resonance imaging.

With the ability to see the clumped particles, Bhatia's co-author, Geoff von Maltzahn, discovered the nanoparticles are superparamagnetic -- a property that causes them to emit heat when they are exposed to a magnetic field. Tethered to the particles are active molecules, such as therapeutic drugs.

Exposing the particles to a low-frequency electromagnetic field causes the particles to radiate heat that, in turn, melts the DNA "tethers" and releases the drugs.

The research was supported by grants from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the National Cancer Institute, and a fellowship from the University of California Biotechnology Research and Educational Program.

New device measures ionizing radiation

GRANADA, Spain, Nov. 26 Spanish scientists have created a portable device that can measure ionizing radiation, thereby making quality control of radiotherapy treatments possible.

The University of Granada scientists said the low-cost, tiny detectors not only can quickly measure radiation in different body areas, but also create a historical record of the information.

The scientists noted ionizing radiations play a vital role in the treatment and diagnosis of malignant neoplastic illnesses, as well as in the diagnosis of other pathologies.

But "the potential harm ionizing radiations can cause means that, in order to obtain clinical benefits and

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reduce the onset of unwanted adverse effects as much as possible, they must be used under strict quality control," said Manuel Vilches Pancheco of the Hospital Virgen de las Nieves.

The new device doesn't require electricity or a reading supply unit and is constructed of low-cost and reusable electronic devices.

The University of Granada has patented the device.

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