

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

POLICY

New NIH institute?

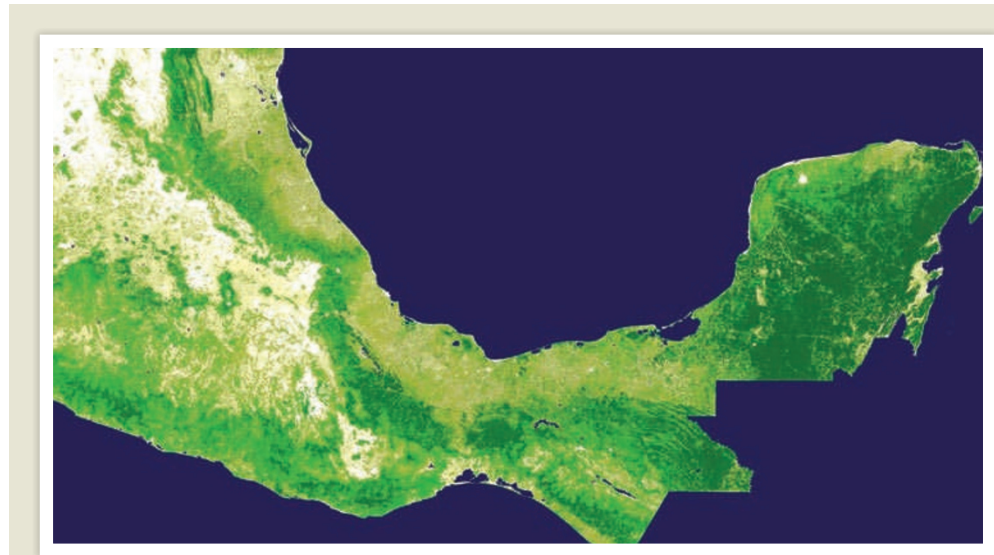
The US National Institutes of Health (NIH) may create a centre devoted to translational medicine, aiming to speed basic biomedical discoveries to therapy. As *Nature* went to press, a board of advisers to NIH director Francis Collins was set to vote on a proposal to create an institute to house the Cures Acceleration Network, a drug-development programme of up to US\$500 million authorized in this year's health-care reform law. It would also be home to the Clinical and Translational Science Awards, worth \$458 million in 2010. See go.nature.com/sg21hh for more.

Food safety

Sweeping food-safety legislation was passed by the US Senate on 30 November, but hit an unexpected roadblock. The bill comes after repeated outbreaks of food-borne illness, and gives the Food and Drug Administration broad new food-policing powers. The agency would also have to identify the most significant contaminants and issue science-based guidance on how to fight them. But because the bill is argued to raise taxes, congressional rules require a revote in the Senate, which Republicans say they will not permit until other political goals are achieved. See go.nature.com/xh4vx0 for more.

Synchrotron cuts

Under pressure from the nations that fund it, the European Synchrotron Radiation Facility (ESRF) in Grenoble, France, has announced that it will cut its budget and scale back plans for an upgrade. On



M. HANSEN & P. POTAPOV/SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIV.

Tracking forests by satellite

Google unveiled its much-anticipated 'Earth Engine' at climate talks in Cancún, Mexico, last week. The online tool provides scientists with more than 25 years of satellite data and should help analysis of land-use trends, in support of efforts to halt carbon dioxide emissions from deforestation. (A forest-cover map of Mexico is

pictured.) The platform was developed to work with satellite software used by researchers such as Greg Asner, an environmental scientist at the Carnegie Institution for Science in Stanford, California, who has developed a way to help tropical countries assess their forests quickly and cheaply. See go.nature.com/w9iqke for more.

30 November, members of the ESRF Council voted for a 6% cut to the facility's €86.8-million (US\$114-million) three-year budget. The savings will be made in part by reducing operating time and downsizing a planned extension of the main experimental hall.

GM beet ban

A federal judge, who in August barred US farmers from planting genetically modified (GM) sugar beets, is blocking any attempt to get round the ban. The ruling meant that GM beets — which provide about half of the US sugar supply — could not be grown until the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) completes environmental-impact statements. The USDA let

biotech 'stecklings' be planted, which are designed to produce GM seeds, not sugar beet directly. Yet last week, the judge ordered them to be destroyed too. Monsanto, based in St Louis, Missouri, which markets the GM beets, says it will appeal the ruling.

Seals threatened

Two Alaskan seal species may become the first animals since the polar bear in 2008 to be listed as 'threatened' under the US Endangered Species Act because of climate change. On 3 December, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration proposed adding Arctic ringed seals (*Pusa hispida*) and Pacific bearded seals (*Erignathus barbatus*) to the threatened list, citing diminished sea ice

in their native habitats. The final decision will be made after a period of 60 days to allow public comment; if listing is approved, the agency will need to make a recovery plan to increase seal populations.

Climate meeting

In the first major development at the United Nations climate talks in Cancún, Mexico, Japan announced that it will not support an extension beyond 2012 of the Kyoto Protocol, the only international agreement with legally binding targets to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions. No solution was forthcoming at the beginning of this week. Meanwhile, Brazil announced at the talks that deforestation in the Amazon was at a historic

low this year, putting the country on target to reduce deforestation by 80% by 2020 (from a 1996–2005 baseline).

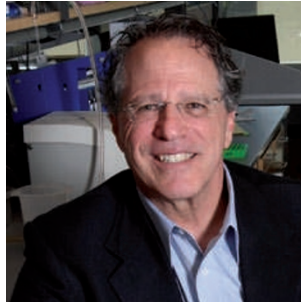
PEOPLE

Misconduct finding

In a fraud inquiry overshadowed by an anonymous Internet campaign, two former postdoctoral students at the Research Center Borstel in Germany have been found guilty of scientific misconduct by an external investigating committee. Throughout the inquiry, which began in July, anonymous e-mails sent to science journalists had implicated the former head of the Borstel laboratory, immunologist Silvia Bulfone-Paus, and her husband, dermatologist Ralf Paus, who now hold joint positions at the University of Manchester, UK, and at the University of Lübeck in Germany. Bulfone-Paus bears “substantial responsibility” for the postdocs’ scientific misconduct, the committee charged. See go.nature.com/ik1pgp for more.

Klein stays on

The head of a US\$3-billion stem-cell agency has reversed his decision to quit, after state officials realized that the leading candidate to replace him was ineligible. Bob Klein



(pictured), chairman of the California Institute of Regenerative Medicine in San Francisco (see *Nature* 468, 620–623; 2010), was set to be succeeded by Canadian biologist Alan Bernstein — until it emerged last week that US citizenship was a requirement for the job. Klein has decided to stay on for up to a year; the agency’s board is expected to confirm this when it votes on nominees for the post on 15 December. See go.nature.com/onn3nt for more.

BUSINESS

Pharma chiefs

After four years as chief executive of New York-based drug company Pfizer, Jeffrey Kindler announced his retirement on 6 December. He is to be replaced by Ian Read, the firm’s global head of pharmaceuticals. The move was a surprise. Pharmaceutical company Merck & Co. of Whitehouse

Station, New Jersey, made a more expected announcement on 30 November, choosing its president, Kenneth Frazier — a lawyer — to replace current chief executive Richard Clark from 1 January.

Red wine drug

Drug company GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) has halted all development of a proprietary formulation of resveratrol — a chemical found in red wine and touted as an anti-ageing treatment. The formulation, dubbed SRT501, was being tested by GSK and its subsidiary, Sirtris in Cambridge, Massachusetts, against several conditions, including multiple myeloma. But GSK, of London, has scuttled development of SRT501, it confirmed to the patient website Myeloma Beacon last week. Instead, the company is focusing on other chemicals thought to activate the same biological pathway as resveratrol. See go.nature.com/osc3vz for more.

Nuclear agreement

As part of a series of commercial deals with France announced on 6 December, India agreed that French energy company Areva would construct two nuclear reactors in the state of Maharashtra by 2018; a deal valued at US\$9.3 million. India plans to build about 20 more

COMING UP

11–15 DECEMBER
The chemical and physical signals that influence pluripotency in stem cells are among many topics discussed at the American Society for Cell Biology’s 50th annual meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

www.ascb.org/meetings

13–17 DECEMBER
The American Geophysical Union meets in San Francisco, California; one session discusses the role of scientists and engineers in rebuilding Haiti after January’s earthquake.

go.nature.com/utb4cs

nuclear reactors to generate 60 gigawatts of electricity (10% of total demand) by 2035. Areva hopes to build a total of six, and Russia’s state-owned nuclear company has preliminary agreements to supply at least a dozen.

RESEARCH

Orion from a plane

Nearly a decade overdue, the Stratospheric Observatory for Infrared Astronomy (SOFIA) has published its first images of the sky, focusing on the Orion star-formation complex. The 2.5-metre, mid-infrared telescope is mounted on the back of a Boeing 747 that flies in the stratosphere — above much of the atmospheric water vapour that absorbs infrared light. After test flights, the instrument completed its first flight to collect astronomical data on 1 December. NASA and the German Aerospace Center, who together fund SOFIA, plan two more science flights before Christmas.

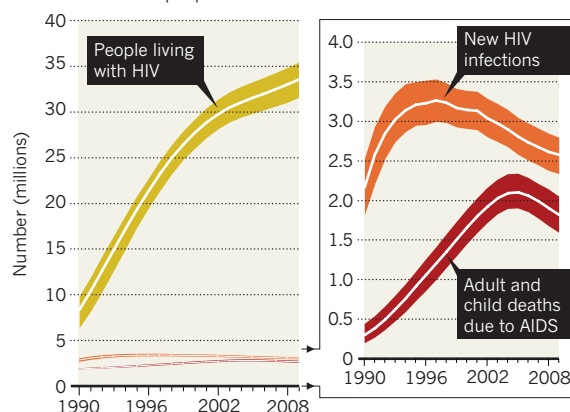
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TREND WATCH

Growth of the global AIDS epidemic seems to have stabilized, said the UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) on 23 November (see chart). Numbers of new HIV infections have dropped, thanks in part to increased condom use and availability. But there are still two new infections for every person starting treatment, said UNAIDS, and funds for prevention are inadequate and poorly allocated. US\$15.9 billion was available for AIDS response in 2009, \$10 billion short of 2010 needs, and international funding is declining.

PROGRESS ON HIV

Fewer people are being infected with HIV and dying from AIDS — but 33.3 million people still live with the virus.



S. ZAKLIN/GETTY IMAGES

Ivins committed suicide in 2008. After seeing a draft copy, the FBI said hundreds more pages of previously undisclosed documents should be considered by the investigation, which will now continue until February 2011.

Cancún climate deal

United Nations climate talks in Cancún, Mexico, ended with an agreement by developed and developing countries to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions — largely approving commitments made in last year's Copenhagen Accord. See page 875 for more.

PEOPLE



S. J. FERRELL/CONGRESSIONAL QUARTERLY/GETTY IMAGES

Committee chairs

Ralph Hall (Republican, Texas) was on 8 December confirmed as the new chairman of the US House Committee on Science and Technology. Hall (pictured) has made it clear that he will take a hard line against attempts to regulate greenhouse gases. Fred Upton (Republican, Michigan)

— who has frequently supported environmental legislation — will chair the House Committee on Energy and Commerce.

NASA chief scientist

Waleed Abdalati will be NASA's chief scientist from 3 January, the agency's administrator Charles Bolden announced on 13 December. A researcher on polar ice who worked at NASA for a decade until 2008, Abdalati is currently director of the Earth Science and Observation Center at the University of Colorado at Boulder. He is NASA's first chief scientist since James Garvin, who served in the post during 2004–05.

Nobel chemist dies

John Fenn (pictured), who shared the 2002 Nobel Prize in Chemistry, died on 10 December aged 93. In the late 1980s, he developed electrospray ionization, a way to gently separate clumped proteins into a fine spray of individual molecules. This method, when combined with mass spectrometry, gave scientists a tool to quickly identify proteins via their mass and helped to launch the field of proteomics. In 2005, Fenn lost a legal battle over the patent rights to Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, where he developed the technique.



He had moved to Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond in 1994.

BUSINESS

Biotech bid

On 8 December, US pharmaceutical giant Johnson & Johnson issued a long-awaited public offer to buy Crucell, a biotechnology firm headquartered in Leiden, the Netherlands. Johnson & Johnson, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, offered to pay €1.75 billion (US\$2.3 billion) for Crucell, which specializes in vaccines and antibody therapies. Crucell's board of directors unanimously supports the deal, and shareholders will vote on the matter on 8 February.

Cheap sequencing

Research-services giant Life Technologies of Carlsbad, California, announced on 14 December that it is now selling benchtop DNA sequencers to labs for less than US\$50,000. The

sequencers, the first of a new wave of affordable machines to reach the market, were developed by start-up firm Ion Torrent in Guilford, Connecticut, which was bought by Life Technologies in August. Current sequencing technologies label nucleotides with dyes, but the new machine uses semiconducting chips to detect hydrogen ions released as nucleotides are added to a DNA strand. Life Technologies also announced three out of seven \$1-million prizes that it will award for solving key challenges in low-cost DNA sequencing. See go.nature.com/mbhs6a for more.

TB diagnosis

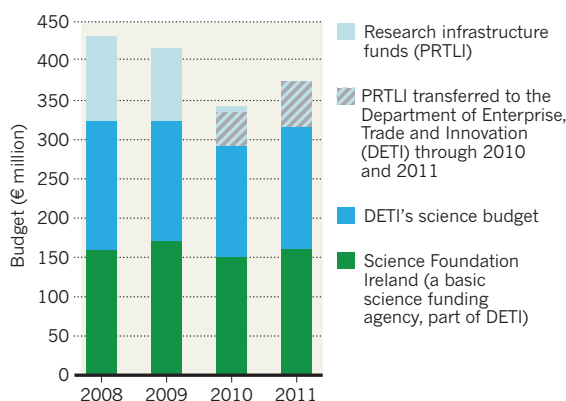
The World Health Organization (WHO) said on 8 December that a test that can rapidly diagnose tuberculosis (TB) was a 'major milestone' for disease control. The DNA-based 'Xpert MTB/RIF' test, developed by the non-profit Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics in Geneva, Switzerland, and the company Cepheid, based in Sunnyvale, California, can detect TB in around 100 minutes. Traditional tests, based on sputum-smear microscopy, can take up to three months to yield results, the WHO said. The new test is costlier, so will need donor funding, although Cepheid will cut prices by 75% for poorer nations.

TREND WATCH

After last year's drop in research-grant funding, the Irish government kept a promise to spare researchers further pain in its austerity budget for 2011–14, announced on 7 December. Total funding for basic science has flatlined, not including inflation, since 2008. But the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation announced a 12.5% increase in its science and technology budget compared with 2010. The basic-science funding body Science Foundation Ireland saw a 7% increase in its share.

IRELAND'S SCIENCE BUDGET

Despite cutting €6 billion (US\$8.1 billion) from its budget, Ireland maintained its science funding.



CORRECTION

The story 'Synchrotron cuts' (Nature **468**, 736; 2010) incorrectly gave the three-year budget of the European Synchrotron Radiation Facility as €86.8 million. That number is the facility's annual budget. The brief also said that cuts to "operating time" would be made. To clarify, two existing beam lines will be closed, but the accelerator will continue to run on its normal schedule.

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