

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

POLICY

Leap-second vote

A decision about whether to ditch the leap second — a move that would pull reference time out of sync with the rising and setting of the Sun — has been deferred until 2015. Delegates to the World Radiocommunication Assembly of the International Telecommunication Union in Geneva, Switzerland, were supposed to vote on the issue last week, but couldn't reach a consensus. See go.nature.com/tucxg for more.

Untreatable TB?

India's government has dismissed reports that a form of incurable tuberculosis has arrived in the country. Last year, researchers at the Hinduja National Hospital in Mumbai reported 12 cases of totally drug-resistant tuberculosis (Z. F. Udwadia *et al. Clin. Infect. Dis.* <http://doi.org/hpd;2011>). This would have made India the third country, after Italy and Iran, in which an untreatable form of the disease had emerged. But in a 17 January statement, the health ministry said doctors had found that seven of the patients were responding to treatment, and that the disease was in fact extensively-drug-resistant tuberculosis. See go.nature.com/hygn2o for more.

West Bank rebuke

The European Commission and London's venerable Natural History Museum are facing criticism for working with a company that has facilities inside Israeli settlements in the West Bank occupied territories — settlements that international law has determined are illegal. The company, Israeli cosmetics firm Ahava Dead Sea Laboratories, is part of



A. HARRER/BLOOMBERG/GETTY

Tar sands pipeline pulled

US President Barack Obama has blamed politics for his rejection of an application to build a 2,700-kilometre-long pipeline to carry oil from tar sands in Alberta, Canada, to the coast of Texas. Congress had forced a deadline of 21 February for the decision, which did not

leave time for the state department to assess the project, Obama said on 18 January. The decision pleased environmental campaigners, but TransCanada, the Canadian company hoping to build the Keystone XL pipeline, said that it would reapply.

a €5.19-million (US\$6.7-million) research project on the toxicity of nanoparticles. On 17 January, 21 academics and public figures wrote to the British newspaper *The Independent* decrying the museum's involvement with the firm. See go.nature.com/vxuwwm for more.

NIH salary cut

The maximum salary that institutions can pay to a biomedical researcher out of a grant from the US National Institutes of Health has been cut by 10% to \$179,700. The agency told grant recipients about the tightened salary cap (which applies to grants won after 22 December) on 20 January. Academic medical centres will have to dig into other budgets if they wish to keep wages high. The cut

could have been worse — last October, Congress was considering legislating a 17% cut. See go.nature.com/jdk9gh for more.

Genome reshuffle

Genome scientists and genetics societies have expressed support for a planned reorganization of the US National Human Genome Research Institute. At a public teleconference on 18 January, biologists welcomed the changes, which create new divisions to help the institute shift the focus of its research from understanding the structure and biology of genomes, to translating this information into better medical care. (Priorities were laid out in a planning paper last year; see E. D. Green *et al. Nature* **470**, 204–213; 2011.) Another

public meeting will be held on 13 February. See go.nature.com/s6sgw8 for more.

BUSINESS

Stem-cell promise

Two clinical trials testing retinal cells derived from human embryonic stem cells have reported positive preliminary results. Advanced Cell Technology, a biotechnology firm in Marlborough, Massachusetts, says that the cells seem to be safe 4 months after being injected into the eyes of two patients with differing forms of blindness (S. D. Schwartz *et al. Lancet* [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(12\)60028-2](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(12)60028-2); 2012). The trials — which are testing safety, not efficacy — will eventually enrol a dozen

patients each, with final results expected in 2013. See go.nature.com/g3mjg7 for more.

EVENTS

Nuclear looting

Radioactive material was stolen last week from a nuclear power plant being built in Egypt, highlighting the dangers of nuclear looting during social upheaval. The International Atomic Energy Agency said that low-level radioactive sources were taken from a lab at the El Dabaa nuclear plant on Egypt's Mediterranean coast. This is not the first example of such theft: for instance, looters stole caesium and cobalt radioactive sources from a nuclear centre in Baghdad in 2003, after the US-led invasion of Iraq. See go.nature.com/u6g8se for more.

PEOPLE

European funder

Teresa Riera Madurell (**pictured**), a Spanish politician and former computer scientist, will be the rapporteur for Europe's enormous 2014–20 research funding programme (Horizon 2020), *Nature* has learned. As rapporteur, Riera will shepherd committee reports on the programme through the European Parliament, and will influence decisions about its funds and structure. Under



proposals currently being considered, the programme would distribute around €80 billion (US\$104 billion) for research.

Brazilian minister

Brazil's new science minister is Marco Antonio Raupp, formerly head of the Brazilian space agency. From 24 January, he replaces Aloizio Mercadante, who moves to the education ministry in a cabinet reshuffle. The announcement was made on 18 January.

Crafoord winners

Astrophysicist Reinhard Genzel, at the Max Planck Institute for Extraterrestrial Physics in Garching, Germany, and astronomer Andrea Ghez, at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), have won the 2012 Crafoord Prize in Astronomy for their work showing that there is probably a black hole at the centre of the Milky Way. The prize, worth 4 million Swedish kronor (US\$590,000), rotates through

several disciplines. This year, a separate mathematics prize was given to mathematicians Terence Tao at UCLA and Jean Bourgain at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, for their work in areas including harmonic analysis, partial differential equations and ergodic theory of dynamical systems.

Early-career grants

The Howard Hughes Medical Institute in Chevy Chase, Maryland, will dole out a total of more than US\$20 million to 28 international scientists who are beginning their independent careers. The medical-research giant announced on 24 January that the investigators come from 12 countries, with China, Portugal and Spain leading the way. Each person, selected from the 760 applicants, will receive \$650,000 over 5 years.

RESEARCH

A chip off Mars

A meteorite that fell to Earth last July in Morocco has proven to be a rare chunk of Mars. Only a handful of Martian meteorites are known, and only five (including the new find) were seen falling to Earth — an important factor because it tells scientists how much time the meteorites have had to pick up contamination on the ground. The last witnessed

COMING UP

26 JANUARY

To inform its priorities in tackling climate change, the UK government publishes a study that weighs up climate risks according to their financial, social and environmental cost.

fall was in 1962. About a dozen pieces of meteorite were recovered from Morocco in December, and were certified on 17 January as coming from Mars. See go.nature.com/9scfwq for more.

Bat scourge

Between 5.7 million and 6.7 million bats have been killed by white-nose syndrome in North America since 2006, biologists agreed on 17 January, after a meeting of the Northeast Bat Working Group in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. A 2009 estimate had put the death toll at 1 million. The deadly disease, caused by a fungus, was first documented in February 2006 in a cave in New York, and has spread to at least 16 other US states and 4 Canadian provinces. Mortality rates in surveyed bat colonies range from 70% to more than 90%.

Altering embryos

Researchers at Newcastle University, UK, have received £5.8 million (US\$9 million) from the university and the Wellcome Trust in London to assess the safety of techniques that transfer genetic material between human eggs to produce embryos free of inherited mitochondrial diseases. The award was announced on 19 January. On the same day, British regulators launched a public consultation on the procedures, a step towards legalizing their clinical use. See page 419 for more.

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TREND WATCH

Biodiesel firm Renewable Energy, based in Ames, Iowa, made the first US initial public offering (IPO) of 2012, raising US\$72 million on 19 January. Companies hope to improve on 2011, which saw only 21 clean-energy IPOs globally, say analysts Bloomberg New Energy Finance. The sector's three largest IPOs last year were Chinese firms: Sinovel Wind Group (\$1.4 billion); wind-energy firm Huaneng Renewables (\$850 million); and photovoltaic maker Beijing Jingyuntong Technology (\$394 million).

THE IPO ROLLERCOASTER

Initial public offerings (IPOs) in clean energy stuttered in 2011 after a recovery in 2010.

