

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

POLICY

Flu work freed

Two studies that created ferret-transmissible strains of the highly pathogenic avian H5N1 influenza A virus should be published in full, a meeting of 22 experts convened by the World Health Organization in Geneva, Switzerland, concluded on 17 February. Last December, the US government and the US National Science Advisory Board for Biosecurity had asked that the research be censored. See pages 439 and 447 for more.

Climate politics

A high-profile water and climate scientist acknowledged on 20 February that he had dishonestly acquired internal budget documents from the Heartland Institute, a libertarian think tank in Chicago, Illinois, that aims to combat climate science. Peter Gleick, president of the Pacific Institute in Oakland, California, released the documents to environmental website DeSmogBlog. Heartland has not disputed the authenticity of most of the papers, but says that a strategy memo — which Gleick says he received anonymously — is fake. See go.nature.com/v1zrbu and page 440 for more.

Animal testing

Tens of millions of animals have been saved from use in chemical safety tests, after Europe's chemical regulator gave the go-ahead to a streamlined method for checking substances' effects on animals' reproductive systems. Toxicologists have been concerned that up to 54 million animals could be required for extra tests mandated by the European Union's sweeping 2007 chemicals legislation — with most of the



S. MARAI/AFP/GETTY

The struggle against soot

An international coalition has launched a modest fund to curb emissions of methane, black carbon (soot) and other short-lived climate-affecting pollutants (see *Nature* **481**, 245–246; 2012). The United States, Canada, Sweden, Mexico, Bangladesh and Ghana founded the programme, which was unveiled in Washington DC on 16

February. With initial funding of US\$15 million, it will aim to support projects such as cleaning up inefficient biomass stoves, brick kilns (pictured, in Kabul), diesel vehicles and coke ovens; and reducing gas leakage from rice paddies, landfills, wastewater systems and oil and gas extraction. See go.nature.com/nu3ak5 for more.

increase down to reproductive-toxicity tests that have to be done in two generations of animals. But on 15 February, the European Chemical Agency, based in Helsinki, approved a test that uses only one generation. See go.nature.com/optzux for more.

AIDS budget cut

Health advocates said last week that they were dismayed by planned cuts to the US administration's global AIDS programme. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, health-policy analysts headquartered in Menlo Park, California, President Barack Obama's 2013 budget request would cut 13% (US\$543 million) from the US

state department's support for HIV work, although it would add 27% (\$350 million) to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. See go.nature.com/rcdhhv for more.

Iran concern

Iran has responded to tightened trade sanctions by claiming that it has made technical advances in its nuclear programme, including building a new generation of centrifuges to enable faster enrichment of uranium. Diplomats from the United States and Europe dismissed the pronouncements on 15 February as political bluster. As *Nature* went to press, inspectors from the

International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna were visiting Tehran to discuss Iran's nuclear programme for the second time in three weeks.

Drug trials rap

On 14 February, three senior Democrats in the US House of Representatives questioned the National Institutes of Health and the Food and Drug Administration over their apparent failure to enforce the public reporting of clinical-trial results. Under a 2007 act, sponsors must report the results of trials of already-approved drugs and devices on clinicaltrials.gov within a year of completion — or be fined. A study (A. P. Prayle *et al.* *Br. Med. J.* **344**, d7373; 2012)

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published in January found that results of only 22% of 738 trials completed in 2009 were reported in time.

RESEARCH

Fracking risks

There is little or no evidence that fracking — pumping high-pressure fluids into shale to force out natural gas — has contaminated groundwater, according to a university-funded report (see go.nature.com/sopiwm) from researchers assembled by the Energy Institute at the University of Texas at Austin. The report, released on 16 February at the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Vancouver, Canada, found that harm ascribed to the controversial technique could usually be traced to above-ground chemical spills or problems common to all oil and gas drilling operations, such as casing failures.

Dioxin health risk

The US Environmental Protection Agency has released a long-delayed assessment of the health risks of dioxins — work that has taken more than two decades to produce. In line with its 2010 draft report, the agency recommends a safe consumption limit for the chemicals that is well below that proposed by the World Health Organization. But it

also says that current exposure to dioxins “does not pose a significant health risk”. See go.nature.com/dh3ary for more.

EVENTS

Greek robbery

Greece's economic suffering has been compounded by desecration of its archaeological heritage, with the robbery of 77 artefacts from the Museum of the History of the Olympic Games in Olympia on 17 February. Culture minister Pavlos Geroulanos offered to resign after the theft, which ministry officials said included a 3,300-year-old gold ring and a 2,400-year-old oil jar.

BUSINESS

Nanopore sequencer

Oxford Nanopore Technologies, a UK firm that promises its technology could theoretically sequence a human genome in 15 minutes, impressed scientists with the first public presentation of its data on 17 February, at the Advances in Genome Biology and Technology meeting in Marco Island, Florida. The technology identifies bases in real time by measuring electrical conductivity as a DNA strand is fed through a biological nanopore. The company expects to start selling its machine in the second half



of this year, and plans to sell a miniaturized, disposable sequencer (pictured) for less than US\$900. See go.nature.com/evpc1e for more.

PEOPLE

Nobel laureate dies

Virologist Renato Dulbecco, who shared the 1975 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, died on 19 February, aged 97. Dulbecco won the Nobel for work in the 1950s and '60s showing that some viruses insert their genes into the genomes of the cells they infect, and that these changes can trigger cancer. Born in Italy, Dulbecco also worked in the United States and Britain. From 1988 to 1992 he was president of the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in San Diego, California.

MIT head resigns

The first female president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Cambridge has announced that she will resign the post, after seven years in charge. Susan Hockfield, a

COMING UP

26–29 FEBRUARY

In Washington DC, scientists and policy-makers discuss research and political efforts on biodefence and bioterrorism, including work that created mutant influenza. go.nature.com/xnstjz

27 FEB–2 MARCH

Graphene, solar-energy technology and nanoscience remain hot topics at this year's American Physical Society meeting in Boston, Massachusetts. go.nature.com/6m7ekb

neuroscientist, has headed MIT since 2004; she previously spent two decades at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, including time as provost. On 16 February she said that she would step down when a successor was appointed, to pave the way for a new fund-raising effort.

Italy research head

Italy's multidisciplinary National Research Council (CNR), which runs more than 100 institutes and research centres, finally has a new president. It should now be able to implement a 2009 law intended to make the country's research system more transparent and meritocratic (see *Nature* **476**, 386; 2011). The reform has dragged on because outgoing CNR president Francesco Profumo, appointed last August, declined to resign the post after becoming national research minister last November. On 18 February, after Profumo was finally pressed into resignation, Luigi Nicolais, a chemical engineer who is also a member of parliament, was appointed as president of the CNR.

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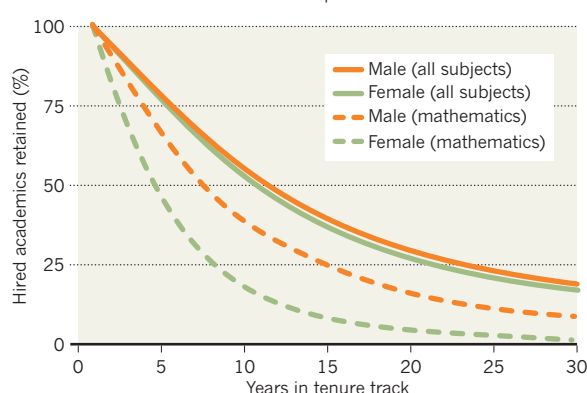
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TREND WATCH

A study of the careers of nearly 3,000 tenure-track science and engineering assistant professors in 14 US universities suggests that men and women are retained and promoted at about the same rate, spending a median time of 10.9 years at their first university. But in mathematics, women leave significantly sooner than men (see chart). A problem lies in hiring: only 27% of incoming academics are women, the authors point out. See go.nature.com/nn23z1 for more.

RETAINING SCIENCE TALENT

Men and women hired by US science and engineering faculties are retained at about the same rate — except in mathematics.



SOURCE: D. KAMINSKI/AAAS