

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

POLICY

Biodiversity cash

Wealthy nations have agreed to double their support to developing countries for protecting biodiversity, to reach about US\$10 billion annually by 2015. The pledge was made at the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity in Hyderabad, India, which ended on 20 October. The host country said that it would contribute \$50 million over two years for conservation.

Egg freezing is safe

Egg freezing is no longer an 'experimental' procedure, says the American Society for Reproductive Medicine in Birmingham, Alabama, which issued new guidelines for the controversial practice on 22 October. That change in policy is expected to accelerate the growth of clinics that offer to freeze the eggs of women who face fertility-damaging treatment or who wish to delay having a baby. See go.nature.com/ugsflc for more.

Biofuels rethink

The European Commission launched an overhaul of its biofuels policies on 17 October, after criticism that the rules have contributed to rising food prices and concerns that biofuels may produce greater greenhouse-gas emissions than fossil fuels (see *Nature* <http://doi.org/bmssn7>; 2011). The proposals retain a target that 10% of transport fuels should come from renewable sources by 2020 — but set a 5% cap on food-based biofuels. See go.nature.com/xhgytb for more.

Forest-code veto

President Dilma Rousseff once more exercised her veto before finally signing off the long-delayed revision of

Brazil's forest code into law on 17 October. She rejected nine provisions that, among other things, would have removed forest protection along rivers and slopes, and would have allowed lawbreakers to receive a blanket amnesty. The country's National Congress initially passed a bill to roll back forest protection in April, and Rousseff then used her veto powers to alter that version and send it back to lawmakers.

Badger cull stalled

The British government on 23 October delayed a controversial cull of badgers (*Meles meles*) that has provoked years of heated debate among researchers, farmers and politicians. The cull was scheduled to start imminently as part of efforts

to control bovine tuberculosis, which badgers can transmit to cattle (see *Nature* 490, 317–318; 2012) — but it will now take place no sooner than next summer. See go.nature.com/aizbax for more.

India GM concerns

Prospects for growing genetically modified (GM) food crops in India receded further when a panel of scientists called for a moratorium on all field trials in a report issued on 17 October. The five-member panel had been appointed by India's Supreme Court in May in response to a petition from anti-GM protesters. Its conclusions echo an August parliamentary report, but go further, calling for a re-examination of biosafety

data on GM crops already approved for field trials. See go.nature.com/kovfrc for more.

BUSINESS

Stem-cell bid

Tom Okarma and Michael West, former chief executives of biotechnology firm Geron, sent the company's shareholders a letter bidding for its stem-cell assets on 18 October. Geron, based in Menlo Park, California, spent more than a decade developing a spinal-cord-injury treatment derived from human embryonic stem cells and performed early clinical testing in 2010. But John Scarlett, the company's current chief executive, shut down the programme last November, saying that Geron's cancer



F. MONTEFORTE/AFP/GETTY

Manslaughter verdict rocks seismology

After a 13-month trial, six scientists and former government official Bernardo De Bernardinis (**pictured**) have been found guilty of manslaughter because of the way that they assessed and communicated risk before the earthquake that hit the Italian city of L'Aquila in April 2009, killing 309 people. The seven men were each sentenced to six

years in prison, and must pay compensation to the victims' families, although the defendants will appeal the verdict. At the 22 October hearing, a prosecutor said that the men's reassurances led to the wrong messages being given to the public, which added to the death count. See page 446 and go.nature.com/5orvaa for more.

WALDRAPPTeam

therapeutics are a better investment. See go.nature.com/tihbe6 for more.

Diet-pill concern

Europe's drug regulators have recommended against approving a diet pill recently cleared for sale in the United States. The European Medicines Agency's Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use said that it was concerned about cardiovascular and nervous-system side effects for the obesity drug made by Vivus of Mountain View, California. Vivus says that it will appeal the 18 October opinion.

Battery bankruptcy

A123 Systems, a leading US manufacturer of lithium-ion batteries for electric vehicles, filed for bankruptcy on 16 October. The firm, based in Waltham, Massachusetts, had been backed by a US\$249-million grant from the US Department of Energy. Founded in 2001, it was a spin-off from work at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge. See go.nature.com/mkqsbc for more.

PEOPLE

EU health fracas

Europe's health commissioner, John Dalli, has left his role amid fallout from a corruption

investigation. The European Commission said on 16 October that Dalli resigned after the European Union (EU) anti-fraud office, OLAF, looked into legislation on tobacco regulation. According to the commission, a tobacco company complained that a third party had suggested using contacts with Dalli to influence the proposed legislation. Dalli denies the allegations. See go.nature.com/zqplrx for more.

RESEARCH

Vostok lifeless?

No native microbes were found by an early analysis of the ice on the drill used by a Russian team to penetrate Lake Vostok, a body of water buried deep under Antarctica's ice, in February. The top layer of the lake seems to be lifeless, according to "very preliminary results" presented by Sergey Bulat of the Petersburg Nuclear Physics Institute in Gatchina, Russia, at the 12th European Workshop on Astrobiology in Stockholm on 16 October. See go.nature.com/cpe12m for more.

Iconic ibis shot

A bird that had been hand-reared by researchers as part of a project to save a rare species of ibis was killed by poachers in Italy on 13 October. Goja (pictured), a northern bald



ibis (*Geronticus eremita*), had been trained to migrate from a breeding area in Germany to wintering grounds in Italy and was the first bird in the project to fly back unaided to Germany in summer 2011. The bird has been extinct in the wild in Europe for nearly 400 years. See go.nature.com/4buekb for more.

UK animal research

A poll released on 19 October by Ipsos Mori suggests that 63% of people in the United Kingdom support animal experimentation where there is no alternative — a drop from 73% in 2010. Only 43% think that UK rules on animal experimentation are well enforced, down from 56% two years ago. In response, medical charities, drug firms and 15 universities issued a declaration affirming that their research involves animals only where other avenues are not possible, and said that they would develop transparency principles to win over the

public to the need for animal research. See go.nature.com/lspaam for more.

Chimp haven

The US National Institutes of Health (NIH) said on 17 October that it will send 20 chimpanzees to permanent retirement in a federally funded sanctuary by August 2013 — double the number it announced last month. The animals are among 110 NIH-owned chimpanzees that the agency is removing from the New Iberia Research Center in Lafayette, Louisiana. Officials at the 80-hectare Chimp Haven sanctuary in Keithville, Louisiana, say that they would like to accommodate all the animals, but need an extra US\$2.55 million to build the necessary structures.

EVENTS

Phones and tumours

Italy's highest civil court has stated that mobile phones can cause brain tumours — to the dismay of medical experts who say no study has proven a clear causal link between health risks and mobile-phone use. In a 12 October decision made public last week, the court ruled in favour of a commerce manager who claimed his tumour was a consequence of the heavy phone usage demanded by his job. See go.nature.com/bg6zly for more.

SOURCE: WHO

TREND WATCH

New cases of tuberculosis (TB) fell by 2.2% between 2010 and 2011, the World Health Organization said in its annual report on the disease. But some 3.7% of new TB cases are now multi-drug resistant. In some countries in eastern Europe and central Asia, multi-drug resistance occurs in more than 20% of cases (see chart). Because of incorrect diagnoses and a shortage of data in some places, even this is probably an underestimate. See go.nature.com/pytbbu for more.

DRUG-RESISTANT TB SPREADS IN EASTERN EUROPE

In seven former Soviet countries, a fifth or more of new tuberculosis cases are now multi-drug resistant.

