

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

EVENTS

Bomb test detected

The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban-Treaty Organization (CTBTO) in Vienna said on 23 April that it had detected radioactive gases in the atmosphere at levels indicating that North Korea did test an atomic bomb, as it claimed it had on 12 February. Nuclear monitoring stations in Takasaki, Japan, and in Ussuriysk, Russia, picked up traces of radioactive xenon isotopes — ¹³¹m and ¹³³ — which signal a nuclear fission event around the time of the alleged explosion. But the CTBTO says that it is still eliminating other possible explanations, such as releases from a nuclear reactor or other nuclear activity.

POLICY

Helium sales

US legislators voted on 26 April to continue selling federal helium gas reserves. The move follows warnings of a looming shortage in the supply of the gas that researchers and electronics manufacturers use for cooling. The United States was due to stop trading helium reserves in October, once it had paid off debts of \$1.3 billion with revenues from the gases' sale. However, the House of Representatives agreed to extend helium sales until all but 85 million cubic metres of the stockpile remain. The Senate is expected to consider a similar proposal on 7 May.

Open discourse

Libel laws that make it harder to suppress free speech in England and Wales came into effect on 25 April, after the Queen gave the Defamation Bill her seal of approval. Scientists have long argued that the previous English libel law threatened open scientific discourse because it favoured



NIKO BORNEWMANN, ALFRED-WEGENER-INSTITUT

Arctic research lab opens for business

A German–Russian expedition team settled into a shiny new research base (pictured) in the Siberian Arctic on 23 April. The Samoylov station, located on a small island in the Lena Delta close to the Laptev Sea, replaces a 15-year-old small wooden station

situated nearby. The 14-strong team will study processes affecting the formation and decay of permafrost in the Lena Delta during its four-week stay. Equipped with state-of-the-art lab appliances, the station will enable researchers to conduct fieldwork all year round.

those claiming they had been defamed, and that the costs of such cases could force people to keep quiet in the face of legal threats. See go.nature.com/12bxfm for more.

HCFC deal

China will receive up to US\$385 million over the next 17 years from the Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol to stop industrial production of hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs). The ozone-depleting chemicals, which are also powerful greenhouse gases, are used in applications such as refrigeration. The deal, announced on 22 April, makes China party to an existing 2007 global agreement to accelerate the phase out of HCFCs. See go.nature.com/5rzlbnk for more.

Pesticide ban

In an effort to protect bees, the European Commission has announced that a two-year ban on the use of three common pesticides on crops will begin on 1 December. The Commission took the decision on 29 April, after a vote by European member states failed to either support or reject the proposed restrictions on the use of neonicotinoids. Scientists argue over whether neonicotinoids damage bee populations. See *Nature* 496, 408 (2013) and go.nature.com/apvdlf for more.

FACILITIES

Primate pull-out

Harvard Medical School announced on 23 April that it will close its 47-year-old New

England Primate Research Center in Southborough, Massachusetts. The centre, which houses 1,860 non-human primates — mostly macaques — will close by 2015 owing to a cash shortage. The animals will be transferred to other primate research centres or be maintained on site, say medical-school officials. Inspections by the US Department of Agriculture found that the centre had violated the Animal Welfare Act several times, with four primate deaths occurring between June 2010 and February 2012. See go.nature.com/zsavjr for more.

Satellite launch

China has launched the first in its series of next-generation civilian Earth-observing

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satellites. The Gaofen-1 satellite lifted off on 26 April from the Jiuquan launch facility in the Chinese Gobi desert. Its data will be used to aid distribution of disaster relief and for environmental monitoring, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported. China is planning to launch a further six satellites in the series.

Farewell Herschel

Europe's Herschel mission has come to an end. The €1.1-billion (US\$1.4-billion) infrared space telescope exhausted its stores of liquid-helium coolant on 29 April, at which point its scientific instruments stopped working, said the European Space Agency. Astronomers have hailed the legacy of the observatory, which over three years has helped them to revise theories about the birth and death of stars (see *Nature* 495, 151–152; 2013).

RESEARCH

Freshwater lifeline

Ontario's government threw a lifeline to Canada's Experimental Lakes Area (ELA) on 24 April. Funding shortages led the Canadian government to close the freshwater research facility (pictured) in March. Ontario's premier, Kathleen Wynne, says that the province will provide funds to support the facility



and will work towards a deal to transfer research operations to the International Institute for Sustainable Development, a think tank based in Winnipeg, Manitoba. See go.nature.com/q39xpw for more.

Hepatitis drug

A new hepatitis-C drug, sofosbuvir, has been found to be highly effective in clinical trials. Developed by Gilead of Foster City, California, the drug is one of several in development that could replace existing hepatitis-C treatments, which can cause harsh side effects. See go.nature.com/fpasug and page 18 for more.

GM salmon

Genetically modified (GM) salmon have moved one step closer to US grocery stores. On 26 April, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) closed a public consultation on its finding that the engineered

fish pose no significant environmental concern. The FDA must now evaluate the comments before finalizing its decision. See page 17 for more.

PEOPLE

Research politics

Physicist Maria Chiara Carrozza was appointed as research minister in Italy's new government on 27 April. Carrozza is a biorobotics specialist and was rector of an elite university in Pisa, the Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies, until she was elected to parliament in February for the centre-left Democratic Party. Carrozza says that she will boost Italy's notoriously low spending on science, increase the number of research and academic positions and reduce the bureaucratic red tape that encumbers research.

Lab-death trial

Patrick Harran, a chemist at the University of California, Los Angeles, will stand trial for the death of research assistant Sheharbano Sangji, who died more than four years ago in a laboratory accident. Harran will be tried on three counts of violating health and safety standards, a Los Angeles judge ordered on 26 April. A trial date has not yet been set; Harran could face 4.5 years in prison. The case is touted as

COMING UP

5–8 MAY

The third World Conference on Research Integrity meets in Montreal, Canada. go.nature.com/enai63

6–8 MAY

Darmstadt, Germany, hosts the first international meeting on research into 'ocean colour' science: how satellite observations of the ocean can infer photosynthesis and other activity from colour. go.nature.com/ubntid

the first time that a scientist has gone to trial over an accident in a US academic lab. See go.nature.com/738hpf for more.

Wellcome head

Jeremy Farrar, an expert in infectious diseases, is the next director of the Wellcome Trust, the London-based biomedical research charity announced on 24 April. Farrar will take up the post in October succeeding Mark Walport, who left in March after a decade in the job to become the UK government's chief scientific adviser. See page 19 for more.

Jailed physicist

Omid Kokabee, a former physics graduate student who has been imprisoned in Iran since early 2011, has written a public letter stating that he was jailed for refusing to cooperate with Iranian military projects. The letter, dated March 2013, was revealed by *Nature* last week. In a separate private letter, Kokabee, who had been studying laser physics at the University of Texas at Austin, claims that his expertise was sought for nuclear applications. See go.nature.com/4mught for more.

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TREND WATCH

The office that oversees misconduct investigations involving US-government-funded biomedical researchers has seen the number of allegations it has received since 2001 rise by 216%. Officials at the Office of Research Integrity in Rockville, Maryland, said in April that the office is likely to receive more than 500 queries in 2013. But because the number of staff who process allegations has remained flat, at 8–10 people, the office cannot take on any more cases than usual.

MISCONDUCT OFFICE OVERLOADED

The US Office of Research Integrity saw a jump in queries last year — although limited staff numbers restrict its capacity to open new cases.

