

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

PEOPLE

IPCC head resigns

Rajendra Pachauri resigned as head of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on 24 February, amid allegations of sexual harassment. The accusations were made by a colleague at The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), the non-profit organization that Pachauri directs in New Delhi, India. The IPCC said that panel vice-president Ismail El Gizouli would step in as acting chair for its session in Nairobi this week. Pachauri became chair of the IPCC in 2002, and was scheduled to complete his second term in office in October. See go.nature.com/1ssogm for more.

US data chief

The White House appointed its first-ever chief data scientist on 18 February. DJ Patil, a former mathematician who helped to coin the term 'data science' and who has worked at companies including Skype, PayPal and eBay, will be in charge of US government policies around open data, based at the Office of Science and Technology Policy. He will also work on the US Precision Medicine Initiative, announced in January, which seeks to link genomic data to health records in order to find patient-customized treatments.

Financial conflict

The Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics in Cambridge, Massachusetts, has launched an investigation into solar physicist and climate-change sceptic Willie Soon, after documents detailing research contracts with the energy industry and a conservative foundation were released in response to a US Freedom of Information



KATE HOLT/EVINE

Nations asked to tackle tropical diseases

Neglected tropical diseases affect more than 1.5 billion people worldwide, yet many diseases, such as river blindness may be prevented simply by taking a pill. In a report released on 19 February, the World Health Organization

estimated that it will cost US\$34 billion over 16 years to meet its targets to reduce the burden of the 17 neglected tropical diseases, which include leishmaniasis and leprosy. It has called on affected countries to boost their spending.

Act by Greenpeace. Officials at the Climate Investigations Center in Alexandria, Virginia, which revealed the documents on 21 February, allege that Soon failed to report these financial relationships on numerous peer-reviewed papers. See go.nature.com/tvgedg for more.

X-ray pioneer dies

Ernest Sternglass, a pioneer of safer X-ray imaging, died on 12 February, aged 91. Born in Berlin in 1923, Sternglass fled Germany to the United States in 1938. While at the firm Westinghouse, he worked on electron-amplification effects that were later harnessed in

the low-light television camera that allowed viewers to watch the live Moon landing in 1969. In the 1980s, while at the University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Sternglass and colleagues developed digital X-ray imaging. He also applied his studies on the dangers of X-ray exposure to the health effects of atomic-bomb testing, about which he publicly campaigned.

POLICY

Future of graphene

Europe's €1-billion (US\$1.3-billion) initiative to commercialize graphene, which has 142 industrial and academic partners in

23 countries, is on course and "providing excellent value for money", its organizers said on 24 February. In mid-January, an independent assessment of milestones reached by the Graphene Flagship project, produced for the European Commission, gave positive scores all round, a spokesperson for the project said. That assessment has not yet been published, but a 200-page road map setting out research areas for graphene and other two-dimensional crystals was published this week, covering 11 themes from energy storage to biomedical devices (A. C. Ferrari *et al.* *Nanoscale* <http://doi.org/2df>; 2015).

ISC PHOTOGRAPHY CLUB

POLICY

Dietary advice

The US Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee released its scientific assessment of nutritional guidance on 19 February. The report calls for the eradication of limits on dietary cholesterol, sets an upper limit for added sugar consumption, and recommends a diet containing more vegetables and less meat than are consumed by many people — both to improve health and to reduce environmental impact. The scientific assessment is available for public comment until 8 April. The final publication, due out in the autumn, will be used to guide health recommendations as well as public programmes such as school lunches and food assistance.

EVENTS

Indian PhDs protest

Thousands of Indian PhD students are protesting (pictured) about delays in a hike in research-fellowship wages pledged by the Indian government last October, after protests in July. Last week, half a dozen students went on hunger strike. While some funding agencies have implemented the rise, others have delayed its introduction, prompting a letter from students to Prime



Minister Narendra Modi in January. See go.nature.com/adq5pw for more.

New killer virus

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced the discovery of a new deadly virus on 19 February. Dubbed Bourbon virus after the county in Kansas where it was found, it is thought to have killed a man, aged over 50, who was bitten by ticks shortly before falling ill. Bourbon virus is part of a family known as thogotoviruses, which are carried by ticks and insects and are known to have infected only eight people previously.

Anti-HIV-jab trial

Trials to test whether injectable antiretroviral drugs could prevent HIV infection for months at a time were launched

by the US National Institutes of Health on 19 February. The trials, to be carried out in Africa, South America and the United States, will compare the effectiveness of the injections against placebo and oral forms of the medications. Currently, one pill (Truvada) is approved for HIV prevention in the United States, but it must be taken daily; injectable drugs might offer long-lasting protection.

Fast Ebola test

The first rapid diagnostic test for Ebola — which gives a result in 15 minutes — was approved by the World Health Organization in Geneva, Switzerland, on 20 February. The inexpensive test, developed by Corgenix of Broomfield, Colorado, and Robert Garry, a virologist at Tulane University in

New Orleans, Louisiana, detects viral protein and does not require electricity or refrigeration, making it suitable for use in remote settings. Currently, blood samples from suspected cases in West Africa must be transported to labs for genetic testing, which incurs delays. Faster diagnosis is considered key to combating the epidemic. See go.nature.com/e5bml6 for more.

FUNDING

Costly drugs

The National Health Service (NHS) in England is doing more harm than good by paying for expensive new drugs, says a team of UK health economists. The researchers suggest that the threshold used by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence to assess the cost effectiveness of new drugs should be drastically lowered (K. Claxton *et al. Health Technol. Assess.* **19**, 14; 2015). The NHS will currently fund treatments that cost up to £30,000 (US\$46 000) for every extra year of good-quality life they provide. If this figure was dropped to £13,000, benefits would spread to more people, say the authors.

Plutonium shortage

It is likely to take longer than anticipated to bolster NASA's dwindling stocks of plutonium-238, which is used to power deep-space missions. The US Department of Energy (DOE) has been ramping up production of the radioactive isotope, aiming to provide NASA with more than 1 kilogram per year by 2021 (see *Nature* **515**, 484–486; 2014). But limited funding means that it will take an unspecified time longer. DOE space-power director Alice Caponiti told a NASA advisory panel on 20 February. With limited supplies, NASA has had to ration the fuel.

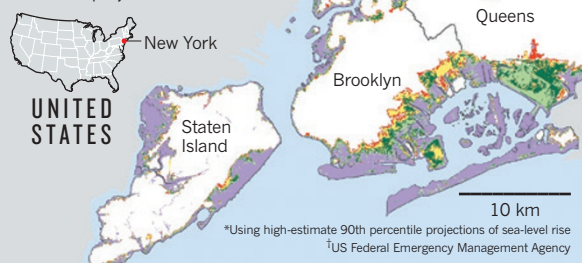
TREND WATCH

Global warming is likely to increase sea levels around New York City by 56–127 centimetres by 2100, and in the worst case by 183 cm, warns an assessment released by the New York City Panel on Climate Change on 17 February. The study says that the city's sea levels have risen by around 3 cm per decade — nearly twice the global average — since 1900. The coastal area affected by floods could double by 2100, with the boroughs of Queens and Brooklyn having the largest amount of land area at risk.

FUTURE FLOOD ZONES

Sea-level rise in the coming century is projected to put the people, economy and infrastructure of New York City at great risk.

- Predicted sea-level rise*:**
- 2020s: 25 cm
 - 2050s: 76 cm
 - 2080s: 147 cm
 - 2100s: 191 cm
- December 2013 FEMA† projections



SOURCE: NPOC

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