

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

EVENTS

Dawn arrival

NASA's Dawn spacecraft slipped into the gravitational pull of Ceres on 6 March, making it the first probe to visit a dwarf planet. At nearly 1,000 kilometres across, Ceres, located in the asteroid belt, is one of the largest unexplored worlds in the Solar System. Dawn will orbit Ceres for the next 15 months, gathering information about the large amounts of water thought to lurk within the asteroid. The craft also visited the asteroid Vesta in 2011–12; its arrival at Ceres also makes Dawn the first probe to have orbited two celestial bodies. See go.nature.com/uw9fb for more.

Animal research

More than 120 research institutes, organizations and societies in Europe called on the European Commission on 4 March to oppose an initiative calling for a complete ban on research using animals. Animal-rights activists submitted a petition to the commission on 3 March signed by more than 1.1 million citizens. As part of a European Citizens' Initiative, the petition opens a procedure for a hearing in the European Parliament, and for reconsideration of legislation. In a joint statement, the bodies supported the current legislation, saying that it guarantees high standards of animal welfare while allowing crucial health research.

Tardy, weak El Niño

A weak El Niño pattern has developed several months later than normal in the equatorial Pacific Ocean, forecasters with the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) announced on 5 March. Marked by warmer



CARL DE SOUZA/AFP/GETTY

Ivory stockpile burns in Kenya

Fifteen tonnes of ivory were burned in Nairobi National Park on 3 March, as Kenya became the latest country to destroy seized stocks to deter elephant poachers. At the burn, President Uhuru Kenyatta said that the country would soon

destroy the rest of its stockpile, too. The country's previous president burned around 5 tonnes of ivory in 2011. China said last month that it would ban all imports of ivory, as poaching continues to kill hundreds of elephants in Africa every week.

than average waters, El Niño conditions can have far-flung consequences, from greater precipitation in the southeastern United States to droughts in southeast Asia. NOAA says that there is a 50–60% chance that El Niño conditions will continue into the Northern Hemisphere summer, but that the system is too weak and too late to have major global impacts. See go.nature.com/qbmdci for more.

as chairman of the French Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission (CEA) in January, was nominated for the ITER post last November (see *Nature* <http://doi.org/2q3>; 2014). He has promised reforms of ITER's complex multinational management, and to address the project's schedule slippages and cost increases. Bigot begins his five-year term immediately.

Cancer chief

The director of the US National Cancer Institute (NCI), Harold Varmus, announced on 4 March that he will step down after five years in the post. Varmus will leave the centre, part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), at the end of the month, and plans to open a lab at the

Weill Cornell Medical College in New York City. He was director of the NIH from 1993 to 1999, and won the 1989 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for his work on the role of retroviruses in cancer. NCI deputy director Douglas Lowy will serve as interim chief until a replacement is appointed. See go.nature.com/sv4ful for more.

BUSINESS

Cancer-drug firm

Pharmaceutical firm AbbVie agreed to pay US\$21 billion to purchase Pharmacyclics, a company that specializes in cancer drugs, in a deal announced on 4 March. Pharmacyclics, based in Sunnyvale, California, makes Imbruvica (ibrutinib), a blood-cancer drug that targets

PEOPLE

ITER head

Bernard Bigot was appointed director-general of ITER, a project to build the world's biggest nuclear-fusion reactor in southern France, at a meeting in Paris on 5 March. Bigot, who retired

JEAN REVILLARD VIA GETTY

a protein called Bruton's tyrosine kinase, and which brought in \$548 million in 2014. AbbVie, of North Chicago, Illinois, plans to close the deal in the middle of 2015.

'Biosimilar' drug

The US Food and Drug Administration awarded its first approval to a 'biosimilar' drug on 6 March. The drug, Zarxio (filgrastim-sndz), is similar to a previously approved protein used to prevent infections following cancer chemotherapy. The Zarxio decision could herald the approval of other biosimilars, and reduce health-care costs. Zarxio, made by the generics arm of the Swiss pharmaceutical firm Novartis, was approved in Europe in 2009, but the United States has struggled to formulate regulations governing biosimilars. See go.nature.com/omxrup for more.

TECHNOLOGY

Solar plane

Swiss pilots launched an attempt on 9 March to fly around the world in a plane powered only by solar energy. Bertrand Piccard and André Borschberg began their trip in the experimental plane Solar Impulse 2 (pictured) in Abu Dhabi. The plane, which has a wingspan wider than



that of a jumbo jet but is the weight of a small car, uses more than 17,000 solar cells and rechargeable lithium-ion batteries to fly for several days and nights in a row. The five-month trip will include passing over both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

FUNDING

Australian crisis

Much of Australia's shared national research infrastructure is under threat of closure because of uncertainty over whether it will receive the Aus\$150 million (US\$116 million) allocated by the government last year. Organizations representing Australian scientists wrote an open letter to Australia's Prime Minister Tony Abbott on 4 March warning of the crisis. Twenty-seven facilities under the National Collaborative

Research Infrastructure Strategy, employing some 1,700 research staff, will close if funding does not come through. The cash is tied to controversial legislation on higher-education reform that has not yet passed through parliament. See go.nature.com/3q8eiq for more.

RESEARCH

Brain project

The European Commission has recommended changes to the governance of Europe's €1-billion (US\$1.1-billion) Human Brain Project, which brings together neuroscience and computing. A summary report published by the commission on 6 March states that the decision-making processes need to be made "simple, fair and transparent". Similar recommendations were made on 9 March by an independent mediation committee that was analysing

COMING UP

14–18 MARCH

The decadal UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction will take place in Sendai, Japan. It aims to help countries prepare for disasters. go.nature.com/opisic

15 MARCH

NASA's Super Pressure Balloon is scheduled to launch after this date from Wanaka, New Zealand. The research balloon aims to break the previous record of 54 days in flight, and will also test technology developed by NASA over 15 years.

17–21 MARCH

The UN World Conference on Tobacco or Health takes place in Abu Dhabi. The event, which occurs every three years, will focus on the link between tobacco use and non-communicable diseases that kill 38 million people each year. go.nature.com/smiiek

deep rifts in the project. See go.nature.com/knoaqg for more.

EU funding scrutiny

Bulgaria has agreed to have its deficient research system scrutinized by a group of international science-policy experts on behalf of the European Commission. The review, scheduled to begin in April, will be the first carried out under the auspices of the commission's Policy Support Facility, a €20-million (US\$22-million) programme launched on 3 March with the goal of strengthening science and innovation capacities in the European Union.

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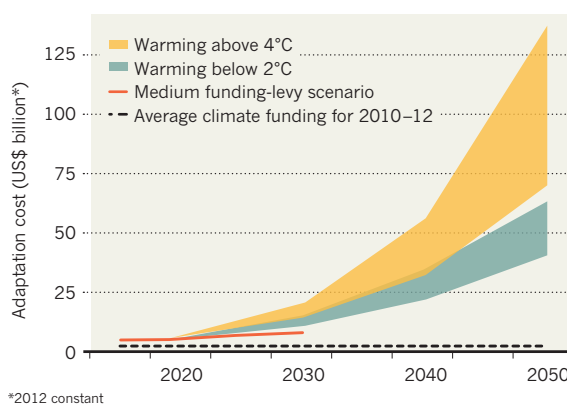
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TREND WATCH

The costs to Africa of adapting to climate change could rise to between US\$50 billion and \$100 billion per year by 2050, depending on global efforts to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions, the United Nations Environment Programme reported on 4 March. It estimates that current annual financial aid is just \$1 billion to \$2 billion. Levies on sectors such as tourism and banking could raise \$4.8 billion per year, but even if current policies keep warming to below 2°C, costs could still outpace revenue as early as 2020.

CLIMATE-CHANGE COSTS

Adapting to the effects of climate change will cost Africa dearly, even if the world acts on warming.



SOURCE: UNEP