

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

POLICY

Iran nuclear deal

On 2 April, Iran reached a preliminary agreement with the United States and other nations aiming to cut off its means of producing nuclear weapons. Among other changes, Iran would be required to slash the number of centrifuges it maintains for enriching uranium and to neutralize most of its stores of enriched uranium in exchange for relief from long-standing economic sanctions against the country. Negotiators aim to finalize the agreement over the next three months.

Academic freedom

Activists in Hong Kong are speaking out about perceived interference by the Chinese government in local academic institutions. More than 500 people signed a petition that ran on 30 March in the Chinese-language newspaper *Ming Pao*. Signatories expressed growing concerns about political influence on the appointments of university administrators and on choices of teaching materials. Activists have accused the Chinese government of cracking down on educational institutions following student-led pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong that lasted for 79 days in 2014.

Whales win in court

A US court ruled on 31 March that marine-wildlife officials violated environmental law by authorizing US Navy exercises that could harm marine mammals off the coasts of southern California and Hawaii. The decision states that the National Marine Fisheries Service — the branch of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) that approved the activities — was wrong in

concluding that there would be a negligible impact on whales and other animals. NOAA said in a statement that it was reviewing the judge's decision and evaluating possible next steps.

Plant patent flap

Agricultural-industry bodies have condemned a decision by the European Patent Office (EPO) to potentially allow patents on plant products such as fruits and seeds even if the plants had been created by conventional, non-patentable breeding techniques. The European Seed Association in Brussels said on 31 March that the move could restrict access to many plant products and

might discourage innovation in plant breeding. The decision, made on 25 March by the EPO's Enlarged Board of Appeal, cannot be appealed.

Climate clampdown

On 31 March, the United States formalized a pledge to reduce its greenhouse-gas emissions to 26–28% below 2005 levels by 2025. Russia has committed to cut greenhouse gases to 25–30% below 1990 levels by 2030. Several other nations and the European Union filed their climate plans earlier this year to prepare for negotiations at the UN global-warming summit in Paris this December. See go.nature.com/L1iixk for more.

FUNDING

Megascopes money

Canada will contribute about Can\$240 million (US\$193 million) towards construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope over the next decade, Prime Minister Stephen Harper said on 6 April. The announcement ends months of speculation about Canada's future role in the megatelescope, to be built on Mauna Kea in Hawaii at an expected cost of more than US\$1 billion. Roughly Can\$150 million of Canada's money will go towards building the enclosure to house the giant telescope. Project officials had expected



MAX WHITTAKER/GETTY

Water cutbacks for California

As California's drought drags on, Governor Jerry Brown has ordered the state's first ever mandatory water restrictions. The plan, announced on 1 April, calls for measures to cut the state's non-agricultural water usage by one-quarter compared with 2013. Many of California's ski resorts have closed early this year because of low snow levels (pictured). On 1 April, for the first time in

75 years, surveyors had no snow to measure at an annual assessment at Phillips Station, a 2,073-metre-high site near Echo Summit, California. The water department measured only 3.6 centimetres of water content in the snowpack statewide — 5% of the historical average for 1 April. The snowpack provides about 30% of the state's fresh water. See go.nature.com/gcgumk for more.

Canada to announce its commitment last year (see *Nature* **519**, 270–271; 2015).

EVENTS

LHC restarts

The Large Hadron Collider (LHC) kicked off its second run on 5 April, after a two-year hiatus for an upgrade. The world's most powerful particle collider will now run at a higher energy and produce more proton collisions. A short circuit late last month in a safety system had delayed the start-up, but it was resolved on 30 March by engineers at CERN, Europe's particle-physics laboratory near Geneva, Switzerland. See go.nature.com/gexdrq for more.

STD lawsuit

Johns Hopkins University, the Rockefeller Foundation and the pharmaceutical company Bristol-Myers Squibb were sued on 1 April for their alleged contributions to unethical experiments that exposed Guatemalans to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in the 1940s and 1950s (see *Nature* **482**, 148–152; 2012). The suit, which seeks more than US\$1 billion in damages, was brought by 774 plaintiffs. A class-action lawsuit was filed against US officials in 2011 but was dismissed on the grounds of governmental immunity.

**Killer-whale baby**

Whale watchers caught the first glimpse of a few-day-old calf in a pod of endangered killer whales (*Orcinus orca*) near Active Pass, British Columbia on 30 March. Baby J52 (pictured) is the fourth whale born to the local population in the past four months, say scientists at the Center for Whale Research in Friday Harbor, Washington, which verified the sighting. The centre helps the US government to monitor 'southern resident' killer whales in the North Pacific Ocean. The population consists of three pods and an estimated 81 individuals.

Global positioning

China has taken its first step towards expanding its regional satellite-navigation system into one with global coverage, similar to the US Global Positioning System

and Russia's GLONASS.

On 30 March, China launched a new-generation satellite from the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in the Sichuan province. The satellite, launched on a Long-March-3C carrier rocket, forms part of the BeiDou Navigation Satellite System.

BUSINESS

Gene kits hit UK

DNA-testing kits, banned in the United States, can now be bought in UK stores. On 30 March, personal-genetics firm 23andMe in Mountain View, California, announced that its product is available in more than 600 locations of the UK shop Superdrug. 23andMe was ordered to stop marketing the service in the United States in November 2013, when the US Food and Drug Administration determined

COMING UP

12–17 APRIL

Vienna hosts the general assembly of the European Geosciences Union, which look at topics such as the environmental impacts of geoengineering, the results from the Rosetta probe and changes to the Greenland ice sheet. go.nature.com/9manc8

13–16 APRIL

Topics such as ride-sharing technologies, small-satellite design and solar electric propulsion of spacecraft will be discussed at the 31st Space Symposium in Colorado Springs. go.nature.com/tsn9ex

15–19 APRIL

Prehistoric dogs and three-dimensional modelling and printing are among the items on the agenda at the 80th annual meeting of the Society for American Archaeology in San Francisco, California. go.nature.com/guxdpf

that there was insufficient information about its safety and effectiveness (see *Nature* <http://doi.org/qdm>; 2013).

No to deforestation

Global food-supplier Archer Daniels Midland confirmed on 30 March that it will stop buying soya beans and palm oil from producers involved in deforestation. The company, headquartered in Chicago, Illinois, will work with outside organizations to monitor compliance at farms from which it gets these products. The announcement follows similar pledges by major suppliers such as ConAgra Foods in Omaha, Nebraska.

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TREND WATCH

In one of the largest studies of massive open online courses (MOOCs), researchers at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Cambridge report the steadily rising popularity of the non-profit learning platform launched jointly by the universities in 2012 (see go.nature.com/dk2ntt). Between July 2012 and September 2014, the authors clocked 1,300 people starting MOOCs every day, with each participant taking 1.7 courses, on average.

POPULAR PROGRAMMES

Open online courses are taking off at Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

