

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

EVENTS

Science unmuzzled

Canadian scientists have been thrilled by their new Liberal government's first week in office. On 5 November, the government reinstated the mandatory long-form population census, which scientists and policymakers rely on for social data. And on 6 November, the new Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Navdeep Bains, 'unmuzzled' government scientists, declaring that they no longer need to seek permission from communications officers to speak with the media or public. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was sworn in on 4 November and announced Kirsty Duncan in the new post of science minister (see page 146 for more).

Ebola-free nations

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the end of the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone on 7 November. On that date, the country met the WHO's criteria of 42 days — twice the maximum incubation period for the virus — since the last case was cured. Liberia was declared Ebola-free on 3 September, leaving Guinea as the only remaining country in the region with continuing infections. One new case of Ebola was recorded in Guinea in the week up to 1 November, and three infections were reported in the previous week. The WHO warns that there is a risk of further cases to come.

Amazonian park

Peruvian President Ollanta Humala announced the creation of the Sierra del Divisor National Park on 8 November, a move long sought by scientists and conservationists. Encompassing 1.3 million hectares, the park protects



LOS ALAMOS NATL LAB./SPL

Manhattan Project gets national park

The US Department of Energy and the National Park Service established a national park on 10 November to preserve historic sites from the 1940s Manhattan Project to develop atomic bombs. The park covers three sites — Oak Ridge in Tennessee; Hanford in Washington; and Los Alamos in New Mexico. Each site worked on different aspects of nuclear-weapons design and

uranium and plutonium production. Preserved facilities include Oak Ridge's X-10 graphite reactor, which converted uranium-238 to plutonium-239; Hanford's B reactor, the first to produce large amounts of plutonium; and the V-Site buildings in Los Alamos, where components for the first nuclear bombs were assembled (pictured: the Trinity bomb).

crucial Amazonian biodiversity, including endangered plant and animal species, and is also home to uncontacted indigenous groups. The philanthropic Andes Amazon Fund in Washington DC called the decision "one of the most significant rainforest conservation accomplishments in recent years". Sierra del Divisor faces mining, logging and other threats that officials must continue to fend off.

BUSINESS

Drug-cost probe

The US Senate is investigating drug costs and price hikes resulting from mergers

and acquisitions. On 4 November, two senators requested documents from four pharmaceutical companies relating to their communication with regulators and details on drugs that they acquired from other companies. Central to the investigation is Turing Pharmaceuticals in New York City, which caused outcry in September when it acquired the antiparasitic drug pyrimethamine (Daraprim) and increased its price by more than 5,000%. Turing's chief executive, Martin Shkreli, said this week that the firm will most likely drop the price by about 10% before the end of the year.

Oil giant quizzed

New York state attorney-general Eric Schneiderman has launched an investigation into whether ExxonMobil deliberately misled investors about the risks of global warming. Schneiderman issued a subpoena on 4 November for records related to the oil company's statements about climate change. Environmentalists have accused ExxonMobil, headquartered in Irving, Texas, of intentionally lying about the science underlying global warming and of funding climate-change sceptics to prevent the regulation of greenhouse gases. Company officials deny

the claims, saying that the firm supports the implementation of a carbon tax.

VW emission woes

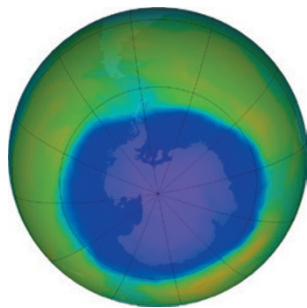
After an internal investigation, Volkswagen (VW) reported on 3 November that 800,000 of its cars show “irregularities” in fuel-consumption rates and carbon dioxide emissions, which may be different from those officially stated. The report comes on top of the company’s manipulation of nitrogen oxide tests in a scandal involving 11 million VW cars worldwide.

Environmental groups claim that real-world CO₂ emissions from cars in the European Union are up to 40% higher than the official values that manufacturers report based on idealized laboratory tests.

POLICY

HFC curbs

Governments agreed on 6 November to use the Montreal Protocol ozone treaty to regulate the climate impact of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), commonly used as refrigerants. HFCs were developed to replace chemicals that deplete the ozone layer (pictured is the ozone hole over the Antarctic in October this year), but they are powerful greenhouse gases. At a meeting in Dubai, 197 parties to the treaty agreed to manage HFCs under the



protocol, but negotiators delayed debate about the details of any regulations until 2016.

PEOPLE

Obokata PhD blow

Waseda University in Tokyo has revoked the doctorate of Haruko Obokata, formerly of the RIKEN Center for Developmental Biology in Kobe, Japan. Obokata was lead author on two papers published in *Nature* in January 2014 that reported the creation of pluripotent stem cells by subjecting body cells to acid; the method was called stimulus-triggered acquisition of pluripotency (STAP). Problems in the papers led to their retraction in July 2014. In October that year, after finding plagiarized passages and images in her 2011 PhD dissertation, the university gave Obokata a year to make corrections. But in its 2 November statement, the university committee judged her drafts inadequate.

Euro advisers

The seven researchers who will form a panel to provide the European Commission with independent scientific advice were named on 10 November. They include Rolf Dieter-Heuer, the outgoing head of CERN, Europe’s particle-physics laboratory near Geneva, Switzerland, and Julia Slingo, chief scientist at Britain’s Met Office in Exeter. The panel’s announcement marks the formal launch of the commission’s revamped system for obtaining scientific advice. Under that system, the panel will feed in advice to the commission by seeking input from national academies and the wider scientific community. See go.nature.com/7gj4pu for more.

Prize scoop

On 10 November, *Nature* reporter Alexandra Witze took home the gold prize for magazine journalism at the 2015 AAAS Kavli Science Journalism Awards. The awards, which cover magazine, newspaper and television journalism, are funded by the Kavli Foundation and administered by the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The judges singled out Witze’s features for praise, including ‘The quake hunters’ (*Nature* 523, 142–144; 2015) and

COMING UP

16–20 NOVEMBER

Physicists meet in Paris to celebrate 100 years of general-relativity theory. go.nature.com/phmn3r

18–22 NOVEMBER

AORTIC 2015, the 10th International Conference on Cancer in Africa, is held in Marrakesh, Morocco. aorticconference.org/

‘The Pluto siblings’ (*Nature* 518, 470–472; 2015).

FUNDING

Indian alliance

India’s ministry of human-resource development launched a research alliance between 16 Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore, on 5 November. The Impacting Research Innovation and Technology (IMPRINT) programme is the country’s first pan-IIT and IISc initiative. Its ten topics range from water resources and river systems to nanotechnology. The initiative has an initial budget of 10 billion rupees (US\$150 million).

Google heart boost

On 8 November, Google’s life-sciences branch and the American Heart Association announced that each would contribute US\$25 million to a \$50-million project to make breakthroughs in understanding, treating and preventing coronary heart disease, which causes one in every three US deaths. The money will all go to one interdisciplinary team, led by a single investigator and advised by an as-yet unchosen panel. Applications will open in January.

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TREND WATCH

The latest *UNESCO Science Report* highlights the striking progress made by sub-Saharan Africa in science, technology and innovation. Publications by nearly all 15 countries in the Southern Africa Development Community rose from 2005 to 2014. Article output almost tripled in Malawi and Mozambique, and more than doubled in South Africa and Tanzania. The 10 November report points to Malawi’s huge effort to attract foreign investment and increase science spending to offset its lack of natural resources.

THE RISE OF SOUTHERN AFRICAN SCIENCE

Since 2005, the number of publications from southern African nations has risen dramatically, almost tripling in Mozambique and Malawi.

