

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

BUSINESS

Myriad problems

Diagnostics firm Myriad Genetics, in Salt Lake City, Utah, is facing a legal challenge from people who say that the company refused to give them access to their own genomic data, thereby violating a US government rule on medical records. Myriad has now agreed to release the data, but the individuals filed the complaint to the US government on 19 May, in part to set the precedent that companies must legally provide the full results of genetic tests — not release them on a voluntary basis. The skirmish is the latest in a long-running war between Myriad and data-sharing advocates. See page 449 for more.

Bid for Monsanto

Chemical company Bayer has offered US\$62 billion to acquire the controversial agriculture giant Monsanto, of St Louis, Missouri. Bayer, headquartered in Leverkusen, Germany, announced the bid on 19 May and revealed the offer amount on 23 May in response to investor concern. If successful, the acquisition would create the largest agrochemical company in the

NUMBER CRUNCH

37%

The proportion of North America's 1,154 native bird species put on a 'watch list' in the first comprehensive assessment by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative on 18 May. The 432 species are most at risk of extinction and need urgent conservation action.

Source: www.stateofthebirds.org



JEAN-SEBASTIEN EVYARD/AFP/GETTY

Fine over goat-cruelty allegations

The antibody producer Santa Cruz Biotechnology has been fined a record US\$3.5 million by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) for alleged animal welfare violations. The fine is part of a 19 May settlement, after three USDA inspections said that the firm had kept goats and rabbits used for antibody production in cruel conditions.

The company, headquartered in Dallas, Texas, will also lose its licence to produce animals and research products. A January USDA inspection found no animals on the premises, suggesting that the firm had already stopped producing animals; thousands of goats and rabbits had disappeared. See go.nature.com/4wpcfm for more.

world. The development is the latest of several such attempted moves in the industry. In December 2015, US chemical giants Dow Chemical and DuPont announced that they would merge, and in February, the state-owned China National Chemical Corporation offered \$43 billion for the Swiss chemical and seed company Syngenta.

FUNDING

Postdoc pay

Minimum postdoctoral salaries in the United States are expected to rise as a result of a law change, finalized on 18 May by the US Department of Labor. The rule will make overtime pay mandatory for

many postdocs who are paid less than US\$47,476 per year. Overtime, which is paid at 1.5 times the normal hourly wage, kicks in once workers exceed 40 hours on the job in one week. But instead, funders and universities are likely to raise wage packets to meet that threshold. The average salary for a US postdoc is around \$45,000, with many earning substantially less. See pages 438 and 450 for more.

Pandemic funds

The World Bank Group has unveiled a new aid mechanism for developing countries that are dealing with infectious-disease outbreaks. The Pandemic Emergency Financing Facility, launched

on 21 May, and expected to be operational later this year, will provide up to US\$500 million to poor countries in the event of such outbreaks. The scheme was prompted by the delayed response to the Ebola outbreak in 2014, when the World Health Organization was unable to rally timely aid to fight the epidemic in West Africa. The aid packages will be funded through bond sales, insurance mechanisms and cash.

PEOPLE

Tech-prize first

Frances Arnold, a biochemical engineer at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, scooped the

Millennium Technology Prize for her work on directed evolution on 24 May. She is the first woman to win the €1-million (US\$1.1-million) prize, which is awarded every 2 years by the Technology Academy Finland. Arnold pioneered a technique for generating random DNA mutations to produce new proteins, which can then be tested and used in fields ranging from pharmaceuticals to renewable energy.

EVENTS

Australian quake

A magnitude-6.1 earthquake shook the Australian outback on 21 May, one of the largest in the country since seismic measurements started there in the early 1900s. It was a relatively rare instance of seismic activity in the middle of an otherwise stable plate of Earth's crust. It was also the biggest quake in Australia since a magnitude-6.2 tremor occurred off the western coast in 1997. There was no damage from the latest quake, which struck a sparsely populated region of the Northern Territory about 125 kilometres west of Uluru (Ayers Rock).

India space shuttle

India successfully launched a test version of its first reusable space shuttle (pictured) from Sriharikota, southern India,



on 23 May. The Reusable Launch Vehicle–Technology Demonstrator (RLV–TD) ascended to 65 kilometres before descending and re-entering the atmosphere at five times the speed of sound. It glided down to a defined landing spot over the Bay of Bengal, some 450 kilometres from Sriharikota. The reusable technology aims to reduce the cost of launching spacecraft to US\$2,000 per kilogram, about one-tenth of the current cost.

Environmental toll

Nearly one-quarter of deaths globally are the result of environmental effects, according to a report by the United Nations Environmental Programme on 23 May. It found that 12.6 million deaths in 2012 were attributable to a deteriorating environment, equivalent to 23% of total mortality. The biggest killer was air pollution, with poor-quality air contributing to about 7 million deaths each

year. Other environmental health risks included a lack of access to clean water and sanitation, exposure to chemicals, and natural disasters related to weather. Climate change was noted as an amplifier of negative health effects owing to its impact on land, water, biodiversity and weather.

French drug trials

France will tighten approval procedures for 'first-in-human' clinical trials, its health minister, Marisol Touraine, announced on 23 May. The announcement followed the release of a final report by the general inspectorate for social affairs on the death of a drug-trial participant in Rennes in January. The report reiterated its interim findings from February that although the trial protocol respected current regulations, there were major shortcomings surrounding the handling of

COMING UP

31 MAY – 2 JUNE

Representatives from science, business and government will gather in Berlin for the Group on Earth Observation's workshop for European projects.

go.nature.com/jrjwsx

4–7 JUNE

The biennial World Congress of Cardiology and Cardiovascular Health takes place in Mexico City. Research will cover everything from the effects of migration to obesity and health coverage.

go.nature.com/cev6tz

the fatal event by Biotrial, the trial contractor. Biotrial said that it "strongly contests" the findings, and claimed it had not been given a fair hearing.

RESEARCH

NFL rapped

Officials in the US National Football League (NFL) tried to influence how a donation to support sport-related health research was spent, according to a Congressional report released on 23 May. In 2012, the NFL gave an unconditional gift of US\$30 million to the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) to fund research, with a special focus on traumatic brain injuries. But an investigation by led by congressman Frank Pallone (Democrat, New Jersey) of the House of Representatives Energy and Commerce Committee says that the NFL pressured the NIH not to support a brain-trauma centre at Boston University in Massachusetts; after the NIH had awarded a \$16-million grant for the centre, the NFL reneged on this funding.

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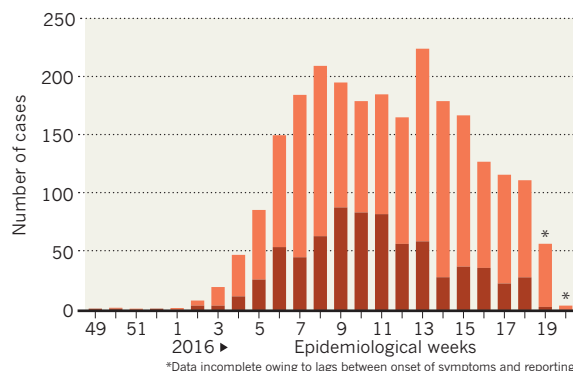
TREND WATCH

The World Health Organization announced on 19 May that the ongoing outbreaks of yellow fever in Africa constitute a serious public-health threat but not yet a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. The outbreak began last December in Luanda, Angola, but a delay in detection has enabled it to spread. As of 19 May, Angola had reported 2,420 suspected cases (736 lab confirmed) and 298 deaths. Travellers have taken the virus to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, China and Kenya.

YELLOW-FEVER OUTBREAK

The number of people contracting yellow fever in urban Angola seems to be on the wane.

■ Suspected ■ Confirmed



*Data incomplete owing to lags between onset of symptoms and reporting.