

# SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

## SPACE

### European missions

The European Space Agency approved an ambitious gravitational-wave observatory on 20 June. The Laser Interferometer Space Antenna (LISA) will be a trio of probes connected by laser beams. It will search for ripples in space-time of longer wavelengths than those that can be detected on Earth. LISA will have to pass a detailed design and feasibility study before final approval, and would launch around 2034 (see page 583). The agency also gave final approval to the Planetary Transits and Oscillations of stars (PLATO) mission that will seek out exoplanets and is scheduled to fly in 2026.

## RESEARCH

### Coral conclusions

The global coral bleaching event that began in 2015 is beginning to subside, the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced on 19 June. Corals bleach when ocean temperatures rise above a crucial threshold, causing the corals to expel algae that live within them. Satellite data on ocean temperatures suggest that reefs in the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian oceans are getting a break from the abnormally high temperatures they have experienced since 2015. This event is the third global bleaching episode on record. However, a report from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) released on 23 June warned that all of the coral reefs that it lists as World Heritage sites will be destroyed by 2100 unless carbon dioxide emissions are radically cut. The analysis is the agency's first assessment of how climate change is affecting its



MOHAMMED HUWAIS/AFP/GETTY

## Race to contain Yemen cholera outbreak

The World Health Organization and the United Nations children's charity UNICEF launched a desperate appeal on 24 June, asking for help to stop a large cholera outbreak in Yemen. An estimated 200,000 people have contracted the disease and 1,300 have died; 5,000 new cases are emerging each day. Two

years of war in Yemen have destroyed health, water and sanitation systems, cutting off access to clean water for millions of people. Attacks targeting medical facilities are also hindering efforts to control the epidemic, according to the international humanitarian organization Médecins Sans Frontières.

29 'globally significant' reefs, including the Great Barrier Reef in Australia.

## POLICY

### Quake collaborators

The geological research agencies of China, Japan and South Korea agreed on 20 June to collaborate on earthquake-risk research. Their initiative will study active fault systems in the region, including the Yangsan fault in South Korea, the Tan-Lu fault in northeastern China and a central fault on Japan's main island of Honshu. The joint effort is the first of its kind between the three nations. Seismologists suggest that an increase in seismic activity on

the Korean Peninsula over the past year could be related to recent earthquakes in Japan, and are concerned that South Korea's infrastructure is not prepared for a major quake.

### Pharma club

China has been approved to join the organization that sets global guidelines for the pharmaceutical industry, the International Council for Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Pharmaceuticals for Human Use (ICH) in Geneva, Switzerland. The approval is a vote of confidence for China's drug agency, which has been rewriting its own regulations to make drug approval stricter and more

efficient. The number of Chinese applications waiting to be processed has dropped from 22,000 in 2015 to 6,000 today. ICH members shape its recommendations for how to maintain quality in drug production and prove that new drugs are safe and effective. Questions about the quality of Chinese drugs and clinical data have plagued the country; in 2008, for example, a contaminated batch of the blood-thinner heparin produced in China caused a spate of deaths.

### EPA drops advisers

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has declined to renew the appointments of 38 members

of its Board of Scientific Counselors. The agency, which decided not to reappoint nine other members of the board in May, has also cancelled five planned meetings of board subcommittees in the coming months. The EPA announced the decisions in an e-mail to members of the board on 19 June. Agency chief Scott Pruitt has the power to choose new members for the board, which advises the EPA's Office of Research and Development.

## PUBLISHING

## Paper pirates

Science publisher Elsevier won a lawsuit on 21 June against websites that provide illicit access to millions of research papers and books. A New York district court awarded Elsevier US\$15 million in damages for copyright infringement by Sci-Hub, the Library of Genesis project and related sites. However, observers question whether Elsevier will ever recover the damages, because the sites' founders are based outside the United States. See [go.nature.com/2tfxrkx](http://go.nature.com/2tfxrkx) for more.

## CONSERVATION

## Bears laid bare

The grizzly bears of Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming will lose their protection under the



US Endangered Species Act (ESA), the Department of the Interior said on 22 June. The bears (*Ursus arctos horribilis*, pictured) were listed as threatened in 1975, after their population dwindled to just 136; today there are more than 700 bears in Yellowstone. Grizzlies outside the park are considered a separate population and are still protected under the ESA. The interior department will soon publish its delisting decision, which will take effect 30 days afterwards. The government last tried to remove protections from the bears in 2007, prompting a successful legal challenge by conservation groups.

## Dead zone

The Gulf of Mexico's 'dead zone' — an area of ocean with little to no oxygen — will cover about 2,120 square kilometres this summer, scientists with the US Geological Survey and the National Oceanic and

Atmospheric Administration said on 20 June. Animals that cannot escape these deadly waters usually suffocate. In the Gulf of Mexico, the zones are triggered when rivers sweep nutrients into the ocean, sparking blooms of algae that eventually die and sink to the sea floor. There, they decompose, sucking oxygen out of the water. If predictions hold, this year's dead zone will be the third largest on record.

## PEOPLE

## South Korea adviser

Mun Mi-ock, a physicist-turned-lawmaker, was appointed by South Korea's President Moon Jae-in to be his chief science adviser on 20 June. Mun held a research professorship at Yonsei University in Seoul and has worked in science policy since 2003, including at the Center for Women in Science, Engineering, and Technology in Seoul. She joined South

Korea's parliament last year as a member of Moon's liberal party and helped to craft its research policies, including promises to double basic-science funding and to give better support to young researchers.

## EDUCATION

## Teaching ranking

In the United Kingdom's first national assessment of teaching quality in universities, some of the country's most prestigious institutions received the lowest possible grade. The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), which published its results on 22 June, assessed 295 universities on factors such as student satisfaction and graduate employability, rating them gold, silver or bronze. The universities of Oxford and Cambridge were among the 59 institutions that received gold awards, as were a number of specialist arts institutions. However, some leading research universities, including the London School of Economics and Political Science and the University of Liverpool, gained only a bronze rating. The government plans to use the TEF award to decide which English universities can increase tuition fees in line with inflation.

## Evolution dropped

The concept of evolution will be dropped from Turkey's high-school curriculum from September. Biology teaching will be reduced from three to two hours per week, whereas instruction in religion and ethics will increase from one to two hours. In a video posted on the education ministry's website on 21 June, education board chairman Alpaslan Durmuş said that evolution was a controversial concept that would be too complicated for students. Turkey's Science Academy criticized the proposal to remove evolution when the draft school agenda was made known in January.

## TREND WATCH

An analysis of parental-leave policies at 66 US institutions finds that a postdoc's ability to take time off after the birth or adoption of a baby varies depending on the funder. More than half of institutions did not offer paid maternity leave to directly employed postdocs, and those paid by an external funder had the option at just one-quarter of institutions. Paternity leave for postdocs was even less common. The analysis is from the Center for WorkLife Law and the US National Postdoctoral Association.

## POSTDOCS AND PARENTAL LEAVE

A survey of 66 US institutions found that many don't offer postdocs paid parental leave.

