

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

POLICY

GM alfalfa ruling

A long-running battle over genetically modified (GM) alfalfa has ended with the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) deciding that farmers can plant the crop without restriction. Just a month ago, the USDA put forth a draft plan that would have limited where the herbicide-resistant crop could be planted, addressing organic farmers' concerns about contamination of their fields. But the plan came under fire from politicians and lobbyists, and on 27 January, the USDA reversed its stance.

Polio pledges

Billionaire Bill Gates has called for a final push to eradicate polio. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation will add US\$102 million to its annual \$200-million pledge for the cause, Gates announced on 28 January. The United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom also made funding commitments last week. The World Health Organization's Global Polio

SOUND BITE

“It’s like a math teacher not believing in algebra.”

William Wallace, Washington DC representative of the National Association of Biology Teachers in McLean, Virginia, responds to a study suggesting that most biology teachers in publicly funded high schools are uncomfortable with teaching evolution. See go.nature.com/yfgex8 for more.



AMR NABIL/AP

Cairo museum survives Egyptian looters

Amid the public unrest in Egypt last week, Cairo's world-famous Museum of Egyptian Antiquities seems to have been spared serious damage. Looters tried to steal two mummy skulls and damaged some 100 items at the museum on 28 January. But other citizens stepped in to guard the museum, which holds precious antiquities including Tutankhamun's

death mask, before the army secured the building the next day (pictured). Zahi Hawass, head of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities in Cairo, says that the damaged items can be restored, adding that the looters mainly stole jewellery from the gift shop. Archaeological sites outside the city may not have been so lucky, reports suggested as *Nature* went to press.

Eradication Initiative, which vaccinates children against the virus, needs \$720 million to fill a funding gap in 2011–12. Polio remains endemic in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Nigeria.

US budget tension

In his annual State of the Union address on 25 January, US President Barack Obama stressed the need to invest in research — particularly in biomedical science and clean-energy technology — but he also proposed a freeze on annual domestic spending for the next five years. Obama's 2012 budget request is expected in mid-February. Congress has yet to vote on the budget for 2011, which is expected to include tough austerity measures.

Weak innovation

Member states in the European Union are losing their lead in innovation over Brazil and China, and are not catching up with the United States and Japan, according to the European Commission's annual *Innovation Union Scoreboard*, released on 1 February. The report, based mainly on data from 2008 and 2009, says that Europe's patent revenues and business research spending are particularly poor compared with those of Japan.

China's wind win

China has now installed more wind-power capacity than has been deployed by the United States. The American Wind Energy Association, in a 24 January report, said that its wind industry installed

5.1 gigawatts of capacity last year — half the 2009 total — to reach a total capacity of 40.2 gigawatts. Data released on 12 January by the Chinese Renewable Energy Industries Association show that China installed 16 gigawatts in 2010 to reach 41.8 gigawatts.

RESEARCH

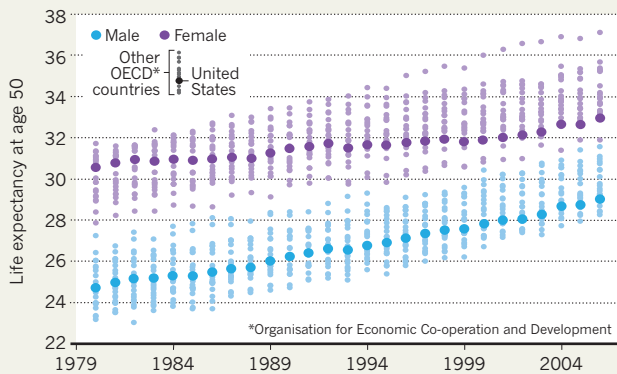
Vostok drilling

Russian researchers drilling down to the sub-glacial Lake Vostok, 3,750 metres under Antarctica's ice sheet, told *Nature* that they hope to reach within 20 metres of the lake's surface by 6 February — the last day of Antarctic summer operations. But they do not expect to penetrate the pristine lake this season. Operations will resume in December.

SOURCE: NRC

THE RACE TO LONGER LIVING

Improvements in life expectancy in the United States are lagging behind those in other wealthy countries.



Smoking gun

Life expectancy in the United States is lower than in many other wealthy countries (see chart), despite the country's huge health-care spending. The popularity of smoking in past decades and today's rising obesity rates are partly to blame, a report from the US National Research Council concluded last week.

LHC extension

The Large Hadron Collider (LHC) will run until the end of 2012. The particle accelerator at CERN, Europe's high-energy physics laboratory near Geneva, Switzerland, had been due to stop in 2011 for a year-long shutdown to upgrade its collision energy to 14 teraelectronvolts (TeV). But after a meeting in

Chamonix, France, last week, scientists decided to give themselves an extra year to collide particles — currently at 7 TeV but potentially reaching 8 TeV — with the hope of collecting enough data to spot the Higgs boson. See go.nature.com/wd9fug for more.

Dengue control

Six thousand mosquitoes genetically engineered to be sterile were released in Pahang state, Malaysia, on 21 December. But the field trial, which aims to control dengue fever by suppressing mosquito populations, was announced only on 26 January, by Malaysia's Institute for Medical Research in Kuala Lumpur. Scientists and advocacy groups were surprised, as they believed the trial had been postponed.

It follows larger trials on the Caribbean island of Grand Cayman in 2009 and 2010, all run by Oxitec, a company based in Oxford, UK.

Intel research

Intel is investing US\$100 million in US universities over five years, by opening six to eight science and technology centres on university campuses throughout 2011. Announcing the investment on 26 January, the company said that its first centre will be at Stanford University in California, researching visual computing.

Solar sailing

Two trials of solar sails, which use the pressure of photons from the Sun to propel spacecraft, are going well. On 26 January, Japan's Aerospace Exploration Agency said that its Ikaros space capsule, which has a 200-square-metre solar sail, had completed six months of space flight and would have its mission extended to March 2012. Six days earlier, NASA deployed a 10-square-metre solar sail, NanoSail-D, in low-Earth orbit.

BUSINESS

Pharma pruning

In the latest round of drug-industry cutbacks, Abbott Laboratories, headquartered in Abbott Park, Illinois, will

COMING UP

4 FEBRUARY

The European Council discusses energy policy and European innovation, at a summit meeting in Brussels. go.nature.com/olubai

10-11 FEBRUARY

The future of the delayed LISA Pathfinder mission (see *Nature* 469, 280; 2011) will be assessed by the European Space Agency's Science Programme Committee.

cut 1,900 jobs, of which the firm said "a small number" were in research and development. Elan, based in Dublin, will cut 130 jobs — about 10% of its workforce. Around half of these are scientists, and most are based at the biotech firm's research and development facility in South San Francisco.

Biotech buy

Biotechnology giant Amgen will pay US\$425 million to acquire a cancer-vaccine company. Amgen, based in Thousand Oaks, California, could also spend up to \$575 million in milestone payments for BioVex Group. The biotech, based in Woburn, Massachusetts, develops tumour-killing viruses that also provoke immune responses against the cancer.

Drug deal near

Drug-maker Sanofi-aventis of Paris was reported to be nearing a deal to buy Genzyme of Cambridge, Massachusetts, as *Nature* went to press. Sanofi is said to have boosted its rejected US\$18.5-billion bid. Last month, Sanofi suffered a setback when late-stage clinical trials showed that its anticancer drug iniparib failed to slow advanced breast cancer.

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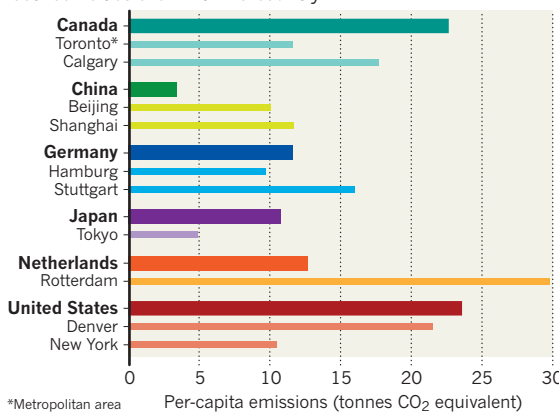
SOURCE: ENVIRONMENT AND URBANIZATION

TREND WATCH

Although cities generate most of the world's greenhouse-gas emissions, their per-capita emissions vary widely (see chart). New York, for example, has half the per-capita emissions of Denver, thanks to its denser population and lower reliance on cars, notes a study published last month (D. Hoornweg *et al. Environ. Urban.* doi:10.1177/0956247810392270; 2011). Rotterdam's per-capita emissions are particularly high because its port attracts industry and fuelling of ships.

CITIES' CARBON EMISSIONS

Average per-capita greenhouse-gas emissions vary widely between cities even within a country.



*Metropolitan area