

# SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

## POLICY

### Elections in Canada

Research funding agencies in Canada remain unclear about next year's budget following the toppling of the minority Conservative government. Opposition parties were poised to reject the 2011–12 spending plan, but shortly after it was announced on 22 March, the government was ousted by a vote of no confidence on the grounds of sleaze and financial mismanagement. A federal election will be held on 2 May. See [go.nature.com/wsplng](http://go.nature.com/wsplng) for more on science measures in the original budget.

### UK budget

A £100-million (US\$160-million) investment in research infrastructure and measures to streamline clinical trials were highlights for scientists from the United Kingdom's 2011–12 budget, announced on 23 March. The boost — which includes £70 million to help companies at existing life-science campuses in Cambridge and Norwich — only slightly softened the blow of deep cuts to science facilities announced last year. The government also announced plans to create a single regulatory agency to cut red tape around clinical-trials research, responding to January recommendations by an Academy of Medical Sciences report. See [go.nature.com/ixvuoi](http://go.nature.com/ixvuoi) for more.

### River reserve

Five countries have agreed to create what would be Europe's largest protected river-based ecosystem: a cross-border nature reserve encompassing the Mura, the Drava and the Danube. Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia and Slovenia signed the declaration on 25 March.



AP/PRESS ASSOCIATION IMAGES

## Radioactive water slows nuclear cooling

Hundreds of workers trying to restore cooling systems at Japan's crippled Fukushima nuclear power plant have been hindered by radioactive water in flooded turbine buildings and reportedly leaking from reactor units. On 24 March, three workers were exposed to high localized radiation (around 2–3 sieverts in total) while standing in water in a building near reactor 3 to work on electricity cables.

They were hospitalized (pictured, covered by tarpaulin) but released four days later. As *Nature* went to press, Japan's Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency warned of contaminated water in overflow tunnels from three reactor units, reaching a potentially lethal dose of 1 sievert per hour on its surface. For more on fallout levels around the reactor, see page 555.

Parts of this biodiversity hotspot are already protected in the individual nations, but the group hopes — in two or three years — to have a larger 800,000-hectare area declared a 'biosphere reserve' by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in Paris.

### China rising

China will be publishing more research papers than the United States by 2020 — and that might happen as soon as 2013 if linear projections hold, a report issued by the UK's Royal Society suggested. The report, which looked at

changing patterns of science production around the world, emphasized that the quality of China's research would not match its quantity. See page 559 for more.

### Cloned food

The European Union has been left with no legislation on sales of food and dairy products from cloned animals and their offspring, after last-minute talks in Brussels ended without agreement on 29 March. The European Parliament and the European Council of Ministers had been negotiating for three years on the 'novel foods' legislation,

which also includes the use of nanomaterials in foods. Talks broke down on the feasibility of labelling all food derived from clones' offspring. As a result, 1997 regulations remain in force, and any new proposal for legislating cloned animal products must start from scratch. See [go.nature.com/3izkke](http://go.nature.com/3izkke) for more.

## BUSINESS

### Drug deal dropped

Drug companies Merck & Co., of Whitehouse Station, New Jersey, and Sanofi-aventis, based in Paris, have abandoned plans to form a

joint venture of animal-health units — each generating more than US\$2.5 billion in 2010 sales — that would have created the world's largest animal-health business.

The deal was announced a year ago, but the companies said on 22 March that fair-competition regulations and other aspects of the transaction were too complex to make a merger worthwhile.

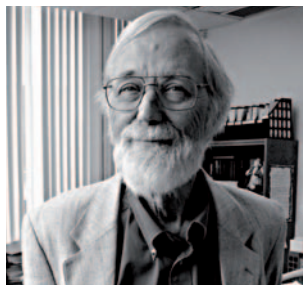
## BP's Russian deal

A collaboration announced in January between BP and Russia's state oil company, Rosneft, to drill for oil in the Russian Arctic now seems doubtful after BP's existing Russian partner, TNK-BP, won a court ruling last week to block the deal. The companies had hoped to swap shares and drill in the Arctic waters of the Kara Sea — a venture criticized by environmentalists concerned about the dangers of drilling in the Arctic.

## Skin-cancer drug

An eagerly awaited treatment for late-stage melanoma — the deadliest form of skin cancer — was approved by the US Food and Drug Administration on 25 March. Sales of ipilimumab (Yervoy), made by Bristol-Myers Squibb of New York, could reach more than US\$1 billion a year, analysts predict. See page 561 for more.

## PEOPLE



## Abel award

Mathematician John Milnor, of Stony Brook University in New York, has been awarded this year's Abel Prize in mathematics, worth around US\$1 million and considered as prestigious as the Nobel prizes. A polymath whose work spans topological conundrums, group theory and dynamical systems, Milnor has already won just about every other prize available in his field, including the Fields Medal (1962) and the Wolf prize (1989). See [go.nature.com/frdfhh](http://go.nature.com/frdfhh) for more.

## RESEARCH

## Arctic sea ice

Sea-ice cover in the Arctic seems to have peaked this year at the lowest maximum since satellite measurements began in 1979. The US National Snow and Ice Data Center in Boulder, Colorado, declared on 23 March that, with sea ice

retreating, the extent reached on 7 March was probably the winter's peak. On that day, around 14.64 million square kilometres of sea in the Arctic were at least 15% ice-covered, under a measurement system used by the data centre. This ties with 2006 for the lowest maximum recorded by satellite, and is 1.2 million square kilometres below the average extent for the 1979–2000 period.

## Tiger census

Heartening news for endangered big cats: India's tiger population has risen by around 16% in the past four years, according to a 2010 census whose results were reported at a conference in New Delhi on 28 March. The government-funded Project Tiger programme estimated the tiger population last year at 1,706 ( $\pm 9\%$ ). Even excluding 70 tigers seen in areas that had not been surveyed before, this is an improvement on the same programme's estimate of 1,411 tigers ( $\pm 17\%$ ) in 2006. Around half of the world's tigers are thought to live in India.

## Nuclear opinion

Protests against the use of nuclear power continued last week. Tens of thousands marched in Germany, and hundreds joined an anti-nuclear rally in Tokyo. In the

## COMING UP

### 2–6 APRIL

The American Association for Cancer Research meets in Orlando, Florida. Topics include how best to analyse a flood of newly sequenced cancer genomes.

[go.nature.com/yiytk](http://go.nature.com/yiytk)

### 3–8 APRIL

The European Geosciences Union holds its annual general assembly in Vienna, with discussions on Japan's earthquake and tsunami.

[go.nature.com/huj6ko](http://go.nature.com/huj6ko)

United States, public support for the increased use of nuclear power has dropped to 39%, with 52% of people opposed to it, reported the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press in Washington DC on 21 March. In comparison, the centre's October 2010 poll found 47% were for nuclear power, and 47% were against. But opinions can swing sharply: the centre said that support for more offshore oil and gas drilling, which dipped after the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, has now rebounded to near its pre-spill level.

## Stardust's end

NASA has bade farewell to its comet-chasing Stardust spacecraft. The probe was launched in 1999, and in 2004 collected a canister of dust from comet Wild 2, together with interstellar dust, returning it to Earth two years later. With fuel to spare, Stardust was then sent to take images of the previously examined comet Tempel 1, which it flew past in February this year. On 24 March, Stardust burned up its final fuel and was left to orbit the Sun.

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## TREND WATCH

If the Fukushima crisis causes expansion of the nuclear power industry outside Japan to slow, the effects will be felt most keenly in China, India and South Korea where, before the disaster, speedy and extensive construction had been planned. Conversely, in the United Kingdom and the United States, which have some of the oldest reactors still in operation, any intended 'renaissance' amounts to little more than replacing those plants that have already seen more than 40 years of service.

## THE WORLD'S NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS

The world's newest reactors are mainly being built in Asia.

