

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

POLICY

Smallpox stocks

The World Health Organization (WHO) has failed to decide when to destroy the world's last two remaining stocks of the virus that causes smallpox. A meeting of the WHO's decision-making body, the World Health Assembly, this week was supposed to produce a deadline, but the organization ended up deferring judgement until the 67th assembly meeting, in 2014. A US resolution calling for the stocks to be maintained for at least another five years ran into opposition led by Iran. See go.nature.com/7gmck for more.

Three Gorges Dam

In an unusually frank assessment of problems caused by the controversial Three Gorges Dam in central China, the State Council, China's cabinet, has pledged to curb environmental deterioration in the area, and to tackle the pollution of water supplies downstream in the Yangtze River. Other problems that the council plans to address include the dam's potential to cause seismic disasters, and its effects on biological diversity. The 18 May statement came during a severe drought in provinces along the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze that has devastated farmland and left millions of people short of drinking water. See go.nature.com/auffmx for more.

Carbon targets

On 17 May, Britain extended existing pledges to limit greenhouse-gas emissions beyond 2020. It plans to cut emissions to 50% below 1990 levels between 2023 and 2027. The establishment of such targets is required under 2008



J. STANMEYER/VI/CORBIS

Deforestation surges in the Amazon

Brazil's environment minister Izabella Teixeira has vowed to crack down harder on loggers clearing trees in the Amazon rainforest, after a sudden rise in deforestation. On 18 May, Brazil's National Institute for Space Research (INPE) released satellite data recording that 593 square kilometres of forest had been cleared in March and April, a 473% increase over the

103.5 square kilometres cut down in the same period last year. Much of the clearing occurred in the state of Mato Grosso (pictured, in 2008), where soya-bean farming is common. At a crisis meeting, Teixeira said it was too early to tell whether the surge related to anticipated changes in legislation governing forest preservation, as environmentalists claim.

legislation that mandates setting 'carbon budgets' for consecutive five-year periods to 2050 — by which time levels should have been cut by 80%. And in Australia, an independent climate advisory body established by the government in February has published its first report. The 23 May study from the Climate Commission, *The Critical Decade*, urges immediate action to cut carbon emissions.

HIV scandal

The last plaintiff suing Japan's government and five biomedical companies over HIV infection caused

by tainted blood products settled last week for ¥28 million (US\$340,000) in damages. Since 1989, nearly 1,400 patients — mostly haemophiliacs — have sued after being infected in the 1980s by blood coagulants that were not treated to kill viruses. In 1996, Naoto Kan, then health minister and now prime minister of Japan, admitted partial government responsibility in the scandal (see *Nature* 379, 663; 1996). The court cases may now be closed, but the patients are stuck with the virus. The health ministry says that it will continue to support their treatment.

BUSINESS

Hepatitis approvals

As expected, the US Food and Drug Administration has approved what is only the second drug to directly target the hepatitis C virus. Telaprevir (Incivek), marketed by Vertex Pharmaceuticals in Cambridge, Massachusetts, was given the green light on 23 May — 10 days after the agency approved boceprevir (Victrelis) made by Merck of Whitehouse Station, New Jersey.

TEPCO's losses

The operators of Japan's stricken Fukushima nuclear power plant announced a net

J. GUSTAFSSON/AP

loss of ¥1.25 trillion (US\$15.3 billion) for the year ending 31 March, because of expenses set aside to deal with nuclear clean-up. The president of the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO), Masataka Shimizu, resigned after the figures were released on 20 May. He has been replaced by managing director Toshio Nishizawa. The company's share price has dropped by more than 80% since the earthquake and tsunami on 11 March.

Takeda drug deal

Japanese drug giant Takeda will buy Swiss drug maker Nycomed for €9.6 billion (US\$13.6 billion), the firms announced on 19 May. Takeda's chief executive Yasuchika Hasegawa said Nycomed, based in Zurich, would give the Osaka-based company a better presence in Europe and emerging markets. Its last major deal was an \$8.8-billion acquisition of biotech firm Millennium Pharmaceuticals, based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 2008.

EVENTS

Iceland's volcano

A year after the eruption of Eyjafjallajökull sent ash plumes across Europe, closing down airspace, another ice-covered volcano began



erupting on 21 May (pictured). Grímsvötn spewed a plume of material some 20 kilometres into the sky, making the event far more powerful than the eruption of Eyjafjallajökull (which reached about 8 kilometres), but — thanks largely to prevailing winds — it is expected that there won't be such a large impact on European flights. Grímsvötn is Iceland's most active volcano, last erupting in 2004.

RESEARCH

Einstein telescope

A network of European researchers released designs on 19 May for an ultra-sensitive gravitational-wave observatory. The 'Einstein telescope', to be constructed around 2025, would be ten times more sensitive than even second-generation detectors expected to come online

around 2015, such as the US Advanced LIGO experiment in Hanford, Washington State, and Livingston, Louisiana. It could also study in detail the interiors of sources producing gravitational waves. So far, no detectors have directly spotted gravitational waves — ripples in space-time thought to be produced by dramatic events such as the merger of black holes or neutron stars. See go.nature.com/apeqr5 for more.

Genome grants

The US National Institutes of Health's ENCODE (Encyclopedia of DNA Elements) programme, which aims to catalogue all the functional elements of the human genome, has been granted a US\$123-million expansion. On 16 May, an advisory council to the National Human Genome Research Institute, which runs the programme, approved the money to allow the agency to develop calls for research proposals. Elise Feingold, director of ENCODE, told the council that completing the picture of RNA function was of particular interest.

PEOPLE

Nobel campaign

A group of 18 Nobel laureates have put their weight behind a campaign for sustainable

COMING UP

25–27 MAY

A host of eminent researchers speak at a free-to-attend conference on 'Transforming the future of energy', hosted by the US Department of Energy in Washington DC. go.nature.com/zjrmew

29 MAY–2 JUNE

A world congress devoted to understanding the biological pathology behind psychiatric disorders is held in Prague. go.nature.com/uxjkz1

development. Concluding the third Nobel Laureate Symposium on Global Sustainability on 16–19 May in Stockholm, the laureates signed a memorandum stating that economic and social development should go hand in hand with environmental protection. The document also calls for a major research initiative to better understand global sustainability. It was handed to the United Nations, which is preparing for a key conference on sustainable development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012. See go.nature.com/9cmhbw for more.

Royal Society intake

Among 44 fellows elected to the Royal Society in London on 20 May were Nobel-prizewinning graphene researcher Kostya Novoselov of the University of Manchester; Mark Walport, head of the Wellcome Trust; and Bob Watson, a former chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. See go.nature.com/bmautt for more.

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TREND WATCH

The price of uranium oxide — the raw material for uranium fuel — climbed steadily last year after an earlier price collapse. But since the disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in Japan, the spot price has dropped by about 16%, reflecting uncertainty about prospects for nuclear energy. Ux Consulting, headquartered in Roswell, Georgia, has taken 10% off its projection of cumulative demand for uranium oxide to 2030, which now stands at around 2.3 billion kilograms.

URANIUM STUTTERS AFTER FUKUSHIMA

The price of uranium oxide (U₃O₈) has plunged on fears of a slowdown in nuclear power programmes.

