

# SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

## POLICY

### No nuclear in Italy

The Italian government has had to kill plans to reintroduce nuclear power, after a referendum on 12 and 13 June voted overwhelmingly to keep the nation nuclear-free. All nuclear power stations in the country have been closed since 1990, as a result of a referendum held after the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. Italy is already noted for its high dependence on imported electricity, which amounted to 14% of electricity demand in 2009, according to Italian utility company Terna.

### Arctic agreement

A barrier to exploration for oil and gas in Arctic waters was removed on 7 June when Norway and Russia ratified a deal on how to share the Barents Sea region, which is potentially rich in fossil fuel. In September 2010, after a four-decade dispute about the dividing line, the two nations' foreign ministers signed a treaty in Murmansk that split the Barents Sea equally. The treaty will be implemented from 7 July.

## RESEARCH

### Bean sprouts: guilty

The source of the *Escherichia coli* outbreak that has swept across Europe over the past month has been identified: bean sprouts. The Robert Koch Institute, the German federal agency for disease surveillance in Berlin, confirmed the culprit on 10 June. By 13 June, 36 people around the world had died and 3,324 had been infected. See Editorial, page 251.

### Tevatron clash

Two research groups at the Tevatron, the particle collider at Fermilab in Batavia, Illinois,



WHO

## Vaccine provides hope for meningitis

A cheap vaccine that was rolled out in three African countries in December has scored an early success. Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have all reported the lowest number of meningitis A cases ever recorded in an epidemic season, six months after 20 million people received the MenAfriVac vaccine (pictured; see *Nature* 468, 143; 2010). No one immunized

is known to have contracted the bacterial disease, which periodically kills thousands during intense epidemics. The Meningitis Vaccine Project — led by the World Health Organization and PATH, a non-profit body based in Seattle, Washington — plans further immunizations, starting with Cameroon, Chad and Nigeria later this year.

disagree about whether they have spotted new particles. In the past couple of months, researchers on the Collider Detector at Fermilab experiment reported evidence of particles not predicted under the standard model of particle physics. But on 10 June, researchers on the independent D0 experiment said that their data do not confirm the signal. The two teams rarely disagree. See [go.nature.com/t46nns](http://go.nature.com/t46nns) for more.

### China's Moon probe

China's lunar orbiter Change-2 has left the Moon and is heading out into the Solar System, state news media reported on 9 June. The unmanned probe had been taking high-resolution images

of the Moon's surface as part of China's preparation for a future lunar rover. Change-2 is now headed for L2, a point beyond the Moon's orbit where the gravitational pull of the Sun and Earth are equal. Its arrival there in September will mark the farthest that China has ever sent a satellite.

### Frog fungus

Chytridiomycosis, a virulent fungal disease of amphibians, now affects the entire mountainous neotropics of Central America. On 13 June, scientists at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama announced that they had found infected frogs at a site bordering the Darien National Park, previously the only area to

escape the infection. The area is considered the "best shot" for biologists hoping to collect frog species to preserve in captivity, said Brian Gratwicke, a biologist at the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute in Washington DC. "We would like to save all of the species in the Darien, but there isn't time to do that now," he said. See [go.nature.com/pve1su](http://go.nature.com/pve1su) for more.

### Age of Aquarius

After two failed launches for NASA's Earth observation projects, the space agency has a success: Aquarius, its satellite to measure the saltiness of the oceans, reached orbit on 10 June. The probe will pick up weak microwave radiation emitted naturally by the

SOURCE: FAO  
ocean. This radiation varies according to the electrical conductivity of the water, which in turn is tied to its salinity. Because salinity is linked to evaporation and water density, the data could help scientists to confirm theories about the global water cycle and its response to climate change. See [go.nature.com/jfwfhf](http://go.nature.com/jfwfhf) for more.

## Bias in science

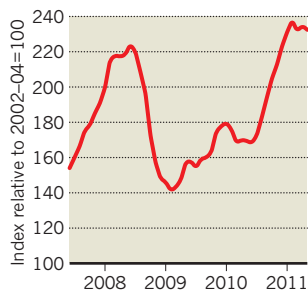
The eminent evolutionary biologist and science historian Stephen Jay Gould may have fudged his numbers, when criticizing skull measurements by nineteenth-century American physician Samuel Morton as a classic example of bias influencing scientific results. Gould — who died in 2002 — made the charges in 1978 (S. J. Gould *Science* **200**, 503–509; 1978). But, in a 7 June paper, a group of anthropologists argues that most of Gould's criticisms are “poorly supported or falsified” (J. E. Lewis *et al.* *PLoS Biol.* **9**, e1001071; 2011). See [go.nature.com/r1szy4](http://go.nature.com/r1szy4) for more.

## BUSINESS

### High food prices

World food prices are likely to remain “high and volatile”, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization. The agency warned in a 7 June update that its food

## FOOD PRICE INDEX



price index for May was only slightly down from a record level in February (see **chart**). Unfavourable weather, rising oil prices, political unrest and the nuclear disaster in Japan have all helped to unsettle the food market. The higher prices have boosted planting, but this year's harvests — particularly for crops with depleted stocks, such as maize (corn) — will be crucial, the agency said.

## Chinese windfalls

Huaneng Renewables, the wind-energy subsidiary of China's largest power producer, started trading last week after raising HK\$6.23 billion (US\$800 million) in an initial public offering (IPO) in Hong Kong. The firm had shelved its IPO in December because of a lack of interest. Its re-entry into the market follows January's 9.5 billion renminbi (US\$1.4 billion) IPO of Sinovel, China's largest, and the world's second-largest, maker of wind turbines.

## FUNDING

### Physics in Jordan

A US\$110-million synchrotron seems to be on track for construction in Amman, Jordan — surviving a global recession, political upheaval and the assassinations of two members of the project's Iranian delegation. The Synchrotron-light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East (SESAME) project has received commitments from Israel, Iran, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority to provide funding as long as two further nations commit funds — as Egypt and Turkey are expected to do. Chris Llewellyn Smith, a physicist at the University of Oxford, UK, and president of the SESAME council, says that he is “confident” that the project will deliver its first three beamlines by 2015.

### California cash

The W. M. Keck Foundation in Los Angeles, California, has announced the single largest science donation in its 57-year history: a US\$150-million gift to the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, for scientific research at its medical school and two affiliated hospitals. The foundation also gave \$110 million to the university's medical school in 1999. For

## COMING UP

### 17 JUNE

The European Commission reveals the results of a vote on the new name of Europe's post-2013 research funding system. [go.nature.com/oxsurs](http://go.nature.com/oxsurs)

### 20–25 JUNE

In Lima, Peru, scientists preparing the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's fifth report meet to discuss geoengineering, and the ethics and economics of estimating the ‘cost’ of climate change. [go.nature.com/jfc8le](http://go.nature.com/jfc8le)

### 20–24 JUNE

The International Atomic Energy Agency holds a meeting on nuclear safety in Vienna, Austria, to identify lessons from the Fukushima disaster. [go.nature.com/jwjewx](http://go.nature.com/jwjewx)

the university, the donation on 13 June follows shortly after a record gift of \$200 million for science research, in March (see *Nature* **471**, 271; 2011).

## Vaccine cash bounty

The GAVI Alliance, a global health partnership that focuses on getting vaccines into low-income countries, has been promised US\$600 million more funding than it expected at a meeting in London on 13 June. The alliance, based in Geneva, Switzerland, needed \$3.7 billion to enable a planned \$6.8-billion expansion of vaccination programmes in 2011–15, yet donors committed \$4.3 billion. The pledges include an extra \$1.3 billion from Britain and \$1 billion from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. See [go.nature.com/qlldf4](http://go.nature.com/qlldf4) for more.

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## TREND WATCH

China accounted for just over one-fifth of the world's energy consumption in 2010, and 48.2% of global coal consumption, according to statistics released by oil company BP on 8 June (see **chart**). Oil is still the world's leading fuel (33.6%), although its market share has dropped about 5% over the past decade, whereas renewables make up just 1.3%. Overall, however, every fuel is being used more than ever before, as energy use has rebounded from a recession-induced drop in 2009.

## WORLD ENERGY USE 2010

World energy consumption rose by 5.6% from 2009; fossil fuels' contribution remained almost static, at 87% of the total.

