

# SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

## POLICY

### Turkish decree

The Turkish government unexpectedly shook up national research politics on 27 August with a decree that gives it the power to nominate the president and vice-presidents of the previously autonomous Turkish Academy of Sciences. The government will also appoint four members of the academy's 14-strong, decision-making council. The decree requires the academy to establish and finance a series of new basic-research institutes, and enables the government to nominate top personnel in TÜBİTAK, the Turkish research-funding agency.

### Dollar disclosure

On 23 August, the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) unveiled its new policy for disclosing financial conflicts of interest. In the interests of transparency and public trust, the guidelines impose stricter reporting requirements on both federally funded researchers and their institutions. But the NIH confirmed that it is backing down from an earlier proposal to require disclosure of conflicts of interest on a public website, and is instead allowing institutions to make the information available on request. See [go.nature.com/oc4n3](http://go.nature.com/oc4n3) for more.

### Greek reform

On 24 August, Greece's parliament passed sweeping reforms to higher education that aim to modernize universities and make it easier for Greek scientists working abroad to return (see *Nature* 475, 13–14; 2011). The parliament also agreed to abolish a university asylum law intended to stop police intervening in academic affairs. The law prevents police from entering university



J. S. APPELWHITE/AP

## Virginia quake deals seismic surprise

A magnitude 5.8 earthquake in rural Virginia on 23 August caused disruption across broad swathes of the eastern United States, where it was the most significant tremor in a century. Major earthquakes are rare in the region because its crust is old and mostly stable, but when quakes do occur, the strong crustal rock transmits seismic waves with relatively little loss of energy,

so they can cover vast distances. Shaking was felt along the eastern seaboard, from Florida to Nova Scotia in Canada; and the quake caused an automatic shutdown at the nearby North Anna nuclear power plant in Mineral, Virginia. There was some damage to buildings in urban centres, including Washington DC (its cathedral is pictured). See [go.nature.com/sgugvi](http://go.nature.com/sgugvi) for more.

campuses, but has long been exploited by criminals. It was introduced in 1974 after the fall of the Greek military dictatorship, which had brutally suppressed a student uprising in Athens in 1973.

### US energy audit

An audit report from the US Department of Energy's inspector-general has criticized the branch of the department that specializes in funding high-risk, high-pay-off research. The 22 August report says that the Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy (ARPA-E) lacked policies to ensure oversight and monitoring of awards worth US\$368.6 million, many

of them made from funds received through the 2009 stimulus bill. ARPA-E says it is remedying the situation. But the report may fuel political concern: it comes just three months after the House of Representatives recommended cutting the agency's \$180-million budget by 45% for 2012. See [go.nature.com/qkojko](http://go.nature.com/qkojko) for more.

### Arctic push

Denmark last week announced a ten-year strategy for its priorities in the Arctic, declaring that, together with Greenland and the Faroe Islands, it would welcome industrial development in the region, but also respect the

Arctic's fragile environment. Denmark will need to both cooperate and compete with its Scandinavian rivals in Arctic development, as well as with Russia, Canada and the United States.

### Ocean drilling

Just two months after the 26-nation Integrated Ocean Drilling Programme (IODP) released a new decadal science plan, the United States has said it cannot afford to take part in the research consortium after 2013. The decision was announced last month by the US National Science Foundation in a letter to the IODP community, and reported in *Science* last

week. Yet it was not entirely unexpected — worries had been building since the spring, when it emerged that rising fuel costs were limiting the activities of the US drilling ship *JOIDES Resolution* (see *Nature* **473**, 137; 2011). IODP partners are now discussing whether a less-costly cooperation might allow US scientists to take part in international ocean-drilling projects after 2013.

NASA/NOAA GOES PROJECT

## RESEARCH

**Exploding star**

The closest type Ia supernova in nearly 40 years has been spotted in the spiral galaxy M101 by astronomers at the Palomar Observatory in California. As the brightest and most energetic kind of stellar explosion, it can be used to measure the accelerating expansion of the Universe. Astronomers are now scrambling to study the event as it brightens over the coming weeks. See [go.nature.com/oraf5x](http://go.nature.com/oraf5x) for more.

**Ethics report**

US Public Health Service researchers knew that they were acting unethically when they exposed hundreds of Guatemalans to sexually transmitted diseases in the 1940s without the subjects' consent, according to the Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues.

The commission will now assess whether current research rules protect trial participants from similar abuses, and report its conclusions in December.

## EVENTS

**Storm damage**

The hurricane season has definitely arrived. Torrential rain, flash floods and  $140\text{ km h}^{-1}$  winds left a trail of destruction along the east coast of the United States this week. Irene (pictured) may have been downgraded from hurricane status to a category 1 storm by the time it made landfall in North Carolina, but it still left millions without power and caused more than 40 deaths as it moved northwards. Irene was the ninth named storm of the season; forecasters predict up to 19 this year.

**Space failure**

The next manned mission to the International Space Station will be delayed by a month,

to October, following the loss of a Russian cargo capsule carrying fresh supplies into orbit. The launch vehicle, a Soyuz-U rocket, was lost after its third stage failed around 5 minutes after lift-off from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. The failure raises questions about quality control in the Russian space programme: in August, a Russian telecommunications satellite aboard a Proton rocket was delivered to the wrong orbit. See [go.nature.com/lfp5zl](http://go.nature.com/lfp5zl) for more.

## PEOPLE

**Research head**

Donald Dingwell is the new secretary-general of the European Research Council (ERC), Europe's competitive funding agency. The geoscientist, currently at Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich, Germany, will act as a liaison between the ERC and the European Commission. He fills a year-long vacancy left after the departure of the previous incumbent, Andreu Mas-Colell.

**Iran assassin**

The alleged assassin of an Iranian particle physicist killed by a bomb explosion last year pleaded guilty in a Tehran court on 24 August. Majid Jamali Fashi confessed

## COMING UP

**2–3 SEPTEMBER**

Nature.com and Digital Science hold their fourth annual Science Online London conference to explore how the web is changing science. [www.scienceonlinelondon.org](http://www.scienceonlinelondon.org)

**8 SEPTEMBER**

NASA's two GRAIL spacecraft launch for the Moon, where they will fly in tandem to map its gravitational field. See page 16. [go.nature.com/msewft](http://go.nature.com/msewft)

to setting up the bomb that on 12 January 2010 killed Masoud Alimohammadi on his way to work at the University of Tehran (see *Nature* **463**, 279; 2010). Prosecutors said that Israel's intelligence agency Mossad was ultimately behind the murder — but observers worry that the confession was a show trial. Another Iranian physicist was killed last November, and an Iranian electrical engineering student was murdered in July. See [go.nature.com/tukvtk](http://go.nature.com/tukvtk) for more.

**Researcher returns**

Wildlife biologist Charles Monnett of the US Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement (BOEMRE) went back to work on 26 August after a six-week suspension triggered by an investigation by the US Department of the Interior's inspector-general. BOEMRE says that Monnett, who in 2006 first observed polar bears that had apparently drowned while searching for sea ice, remains under investigation. He will now do environmental-assessment research rather than return to his former role managing research contracts. See [go.nature.com/ebvtvb](http://go.nature.com/ebvtvb) for more.

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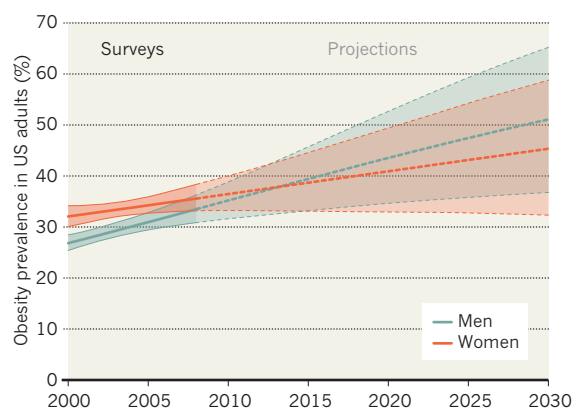
For daily news updates see: [www.nature.com/news](http://www.nature.com/news)

## TREND WATCH

Surveys in the United Kingdom and the United States suggest that the rate of increase in obesity is slowing. Even so, the prevalence of obesity in US adults is set to grow from around 32% in 2007–08 to 50% in 2030 for men, and from 35% to 45% for women. The projections were published on 27 August (Y. C. Wang *et al.* *Lancet* **378**, 815–825; 2011). The study also estimates that by 2030, the annual cost of treating obesity-related diseases in the United States will have risen by US\$48 billion–66 billion.

**THE OBESITY TIDE**

Projections suggest that more than 50% of US male adults are likely to be obese by 2030.



SOURCE: LANCET