ON THE RECORD

"The crocodile is showing no signs of life. We are not specialists and, to be honest, we don't know whether it's dead or alive."

Rudimentary herpetology proves to be a bit too much for Nikolai Ranga, the Ukrainian emergency official charged with looking after Godzilla, recently recaptured after six months on the run from a travelling zoo.

ZOO NEWS

F. SAVIGNY/NATUREPL.COM

Royal tigers
Rather like Europe's royal families, tigers at a breeding centre in China are having their family tree drawn up to ensure their bloodline remains pure. Keepers are DNA-testing the centre's 800 tigers to guard against 'intermarriage' that could dilute the tigers' precious gene pool.

SCORECARD

▲ **Battling obesity**
US health officials say obesity levels may be hitting a plateau — although they're still running at one in three for both sexes.

▼ **Battling incompetence**
Rhode Island Hospital has been fined $50,000 after the third instance this year of brain surgeons operating on the wrong side of a patient's head.

NUMBER CRUNCH

50 is the number of endangered humpback whales scheduled to be caught by Japanese researchers this year — a quota that has angered conservationists.

11,000 is the number of potential names suggested for the migrating whales being tracked as part of Greenpeace International's campaign to save them. Supporters can vote online for their favourites.

75% is the proportion of voters who chose 'Mister Splashy Pants' as their preferred name.

Sources: Reuters, Xinhua.net, AP, Greenpeace International

SIDELINES

Saudi–Italian biomedical institute gets go-ahead

Saudi Arabia has come a step closer to attaining a world-class level of research with the first signed agreement between the kingdom and a Western biomedical institute.

On 26 November, two oncology institutes in Milan, Italy, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with representatives of the Saudi Arabia General Investment Authority (SAGIA). The institutes will help to train Saudi Arabian students, advise Saudi authorities on the creation of a hospital and cancer research centre and collaborate in research projects.

Saudi Arabia, which has not invested much in basic science in the past, is now actively trying to buy its way into the world of cutting-edge research. Earlier this year, it founded the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) with a US$10-billion endowment (see *Nature* **447,** 758–759). It also has plans to create from scratch four new 'economic cities'. The planned research hospital will be part of the King Abdullah Economic City being developed on a 168 square-kilometre site close to the Red Sea near the cities of Jiddah, Mecca and Medina.

The SAGIA wants to model its research activities on Milan's IFOM-IEO campus, which was created in April when the FIRC Institute of Molecular Oncology (IFOM) and the European Institute of Oncology (IEO) moved to one site. The campus is the core of a consortium there that includes university institutes and biotech firms, and incorporates research training, technology development and technology transfer. Marco Foiani, a scientific director at the IFOM, says that SAGIA got things moving very quickly after first making contact with their campus in spring this year. Italian scientists visited Saudi Arabia in summer and will start teaching at universities there next year. "We will take the opportunity to scout for talent for our PhD programmes in molecular medicine, nanomedicine and bioethics," Foiani says.

"Many more women are working in Saudi Arabian hospitals and research centres."

The two sides have agreed that Saudi students should be recruited for the IFOM-IEO's highly competitive, international PhD programmes from next October. Saudi Arabia has little experience in biomedicine, but senior scientists at the Milan campus insist that they will not lower standards to favour one nation. "It's a difficult part of the story — but we are committed to finding a way to implement it,"

Asia plans first cancer network

Cancer researchers from around Asia met in Nanjing, China, last month to hammer out plans for a regional network to coordinate epidemiology data and prevention.

The network would gather data from cancer registries in countries from the Philippines to Turkey — an area that has two-thirds of the world's population and more than half of its 7.6 million cancer deaths each year, according to the World Health Organization. Most of these nations have registries, but the data are not always accurate or standardized, says Kazuo Tajima, director of the Aichi Cancer Centre Research Institute in Nagoya, Japan, who is one of the meeting's organizers. "There is currently no way to compare notes," he says.

The Asian Cancer Registry and Information Network, as it is being mooted, would establish the region's first hub — probably in Japan — to hold standardized data, which could then be used for epidemiological research, cancer risk assessment and prevention planning. It would offer some of the less-developed countries in the region a chance to catch up with modern diagnostic techniques and offer comparisons that might help figure out why, for example, incidence of liver cancer is so high in Mongolia.

The network would also offer an opportunity to tease out the role of Asian genes in the

Cancer education can break down cultural barriers.

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