

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

EVENTS

Mars probe crash

Russia's Phobos-Grunt spacecraft, which failed to make it out of Earth orbit in its attempt to reach a moon of Mars last year, splashed down in the southern Pacific Ocean on 15 January. As *Nature* went to press, exact details of the probe's crash and location were unclear, but it is expected to have scattered fragments over thousands of square kilometres. On-board tanks containing unused, toxic fuel probably broke up well before the probe re-entered Earth's stratosphere. See go.nature.com/qdv3to for more.

POLICY

NOAA to move?

US President Barack Obama has proposed moving the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) from the Department of Commerce to the Department of the Interior, as part of a broader agency reorganization that is intended to save taxpayers about US\$3 billion over 10 years. Obama made the proposal on 13 January; what the move would mean for NOAA is unclear. See go.nature.com/efbprv for more.

Stem-cell lawsuit

Two scientists seeking to block US government funding for research using human embryonic stem (ES) cells filed their arguments to a US appeals court on 12 January. James Sherley and Theresa Deisher, who work on adult stem cells, are appealing a July 2011 decision in which a federal judge ruled against their case. The appeal is set to be heard on 23 April. On 12 January, the US National Institutes of Health made four more human ES-cell lines eligible for use



MEGHAD MADADI, FARS NEWS AGENCY/AP

Iranian chemical engineer assassinated

A chemical engineer who worked at Iran's Natanz uranium-enrichment facility was killed on 11 January in Tehran — the latest victim of a string of assassinations and attacks apparently aimed at Iran's nuclear programme. Mostafa

Ahmadi Roshan Behdast, 32, was assassinated by a magnetic bomb that had been attached to his car (pictured). He was identified in the Iranian press as a deputy director of marketing at the Natanz facility. See page 249 for more.

in federally funded research, bringing the approved total to 146. See go.nature.com/wtsnxn for more.

US reactor safety

The United States may follow France in recommending that nuclear power plants install back-up equipment for containing a serious accident, in the wake of the meltdowns at Japan's Fukushima plant. On 11 January, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) said that it considered a plan put forward by the Nuclear Energy Institute, a body based in Washington DC that represents the nuclear industry, to be "a reasonable starting point". The plan involves placing portable pumps, generators and other equipment around reactors for use in emergencies. The NRC is expected to announce new safety measures before the

11 March anniversary of the Fukushima accident. See go.nature.com/saeouu for more.

Emissions data

The US Environmental Protection Agency has released a public database of greenhouse-gas emissions from the nation's largest power plants and industrial facilities. The agency requires more than 6,200 facilities to report annual emissions, and their 2010 emissions cover around half of the nation's direct emissions. See page 247 for more.

after all. The institute filed for bankruptcy last October, after accumulating debts of €1.5 billion (US\$1.9 billion), and a consortium led by the Vatican Bank put in a bid to rescue it (see *Nature* 478, 296–297; 2011). But Milanese businessman Giuseppe Rotelli, head of the private-health group San Donato, which runs 18 hospitals in northern Italy, unexpectedly outbid the consortium on 10 January. Scientists had been concerned that Vatican influence could have distorted research agendas.

FUNDING

San Raffaele saved

The debt-ridden San Raffaele Scientific Institute in Milan, one of Italy's most prestigious biomedical research institutes, will not be taken over by the Vatican

Low odds at the NIH

The success rate for scientists seeking grants from the US National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, fell to a historic low of 18% in 2011, the agency announced on 13 January. The decline was driven by an 8% increase since

C. AUSTIN/LOUISIANA STATE UNIV.

2010 in applications submitted for competitive awards, to almost 50,000. At 15%, women's success rates were equal to those of men for new grant applications, but when competing for the renewal of existing grants, women's 33% success rate trailed men's 36%.

Clean-energy spend

Global government spending on research and development in clean energy fell by 22% from 2010 to US\$13.2 billion last year, according to figures released by analysts Bloomberg New Energy Finance on 12 January. Corporate research spending also slipped back, falling by 14% from 2010 to \$13.2 billion. But total investment in the sector — which includes the financing of energy projects such as large solar installations and rooftop photovoltaics — surged by 5% from 2010 to reach \$260 billion worldwide.

RESEARCH

Frogs in size war

Barely a month after a frog took the title of world's tiniest tetrapod, an even smaller frog has emerged to steal the crown. With an average length of just 7.7 millimetres from snout to vent, *Paedophryne amauensis* (pictured) is 1 mm shorter than the previous record-holder, *P. dekot*. Both frogs live in leaf litter in the forests of



Papua New Guinea and make up two of the six minuscule *Paedophryne* species so far identified on the island. The latest find was reported on 11 January (E. N. Rittmeyer *et al.* *PLoS ONE* <http://doi.org/hmw; 2012>).

Transgenic flight

The German chemical giant BASF is shifting its transgenic-plant operations from Europe to the Americas, it says, because of widespread opposition to the technology from consumers, farmers and politicians at home. On 16 January, the company said that it would move its plant-science headquarters from Limburgerhof, Germany, to Raleigh, North Carolina, cutting 140 jobs in Europe, although it would retain research centres in Berlin and Ghent, Belgium. Jonathan Jones, a plant researcher at the Sainsbury Laboratory in Norwich, UK, said the move

was "a sign that Europe is not open for business in this area". See go.nature.com/nramri for more.

Nuclear security

Australia is the most secure of the 32 countries that hold at least one kilogram of weapons-useable nuclear material, according to a first-of-its-kind study that asked experts to assess risks of nuclear theft. North Korea is listed last, and the United Kingdom ranks highest among nuclear-armed states, in tenth place. The 11 January study (www.ntiindex.org) from the Nuclear Threat Initiative, a non-profit organization in Washington DC, also examined security conditions in 144 non-nuclear states that might be used as safe havens or transit points for stolen material.

PEOPLE

Astrophysicist dies

Steven Rawlings, an astrophysicist at the University of Oxford, UK, who helped to instigate and coordinate the proposed Square Kilometre Array (SKA) telescope project, died in mysterious circumstances on 11 January, aged 50. His body was found at the house of a friend and police are now investigating the death. Shocked scientists added that it was a great loss to the SKA

COMING UP

22–27 JAN

The sixth 'Arctic Frontiers' conference, in Tromsø, Norway, discusses the potential of energy resources in the Arctic.

www.arcticfrontiers.com

23 JAN–17 FEB

The World Radiocommunication Conference of the International Telecommunication Union in Geneva, Switzerland, will vote on whether to abolish the leap second, pulling our reference time out of sync with the Sun (see *Nature* **479**, 158; 2011).

go.nature.com/qq1zi7

project. Telescope construction would not start until 2016, but a pivotal decision about whether to locate it in South Africa or Australia is expected by March. See go.nature.com/c8bhnn for more.

Red-wine fraud

A three-year investigation into a biology laboratory at the University of Connecticut has found its chief guilty of falsifying and fabricating data in at least 23 papers and 3 grant applications. Dipak Das, director of the Cardiovascular Research Center at the University of Connecticut Health Center (UCHC) in Farmington, is a cardiologist whose studies included work on the red-wine chemical resveratrol. On 11 January, the UCHC issued a 60,000-page report detailing extensive misconduct; on the same day, Das was dismissed as co-editor-in-chief of *Antioxidants & Redox Signaling*, and two of his articles in the journal were retracted. See go.nature.com/faxbyj for more.

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SOURCE: ORI

TREND WATCH

The US Office of Research Integrity (ORI) is sharpening its eye for plagiarism. In the past, the office has censured researchers mostly for fabricating (making up) and falsifying (manipulating or omitting) data, but two of its three latest findings involved plagiarism. John Dahlberg, head of investigative oversight at the ORI, says that such cases are surfacing because of increased use of plagiarism-detection software, so the office is toughening its stance. See go.nature.com/qvp8qg for more.

US AUTHORITIES CRACK DOWN ON PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is increasingly being cited in research misconduct findings from the US Office of Research Integrity.

