

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

POLICY

Flu not censored

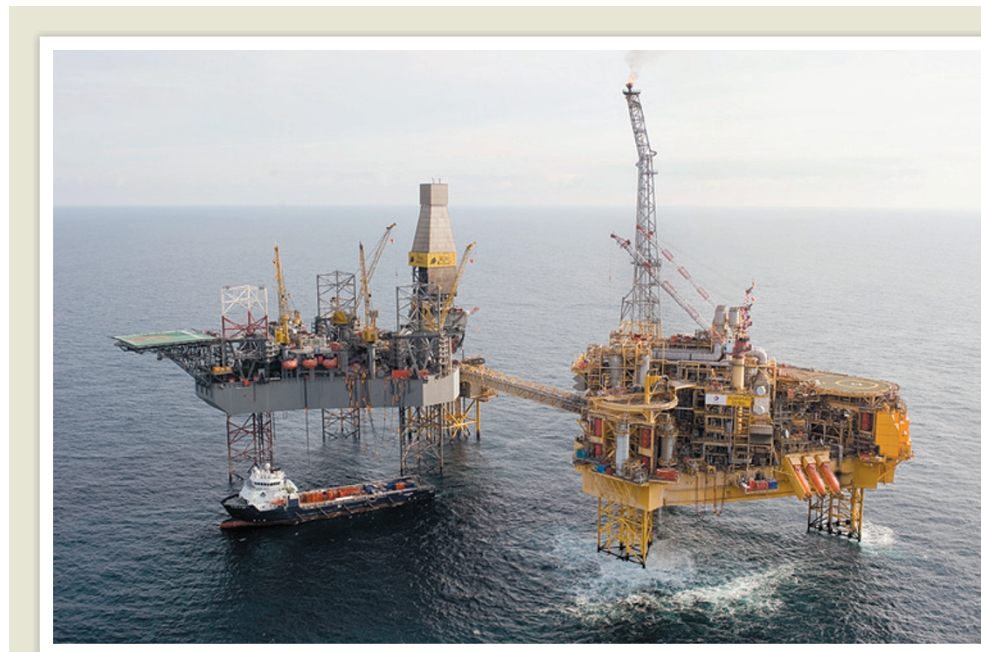
Two studies that created ferret-transmissible versions of the avian H5N1 flu virus should be published, the US National Science Advisory Board for Biosecurity recommended on 30 March. The board had earlier said that the research should be censored, but its revised stance brings it into line with the World Health Organization. The decision was informed by the release on 29 March of a US government policy that all federal research agencies must review proposals involving specific dangerous pathogens to assess the risk of accidental pathogen-release or deliberate use to damage public health. See go.nature.com/lgbbjt for more.

Emissions controls

The US Environmental Protection Agency proposed its first standards for greenhouse-gas emissions from power plants on 27 March, finally wielding the authority granted to it by a 2007 Supreme Court ruling that declared carbon dioxide a pollutant under the Clean Air Act. The standards effectively ban new coal-fired power plants that are not equipped to capture and sequester carbon dioxide. They do not cover existing plants, and would allow advanced natural-gas plants to go ahead. See go.nature.com/rgi2mu and page 5 for more.

Sharing big data

The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) has unveiled a US\$200-million initiative to improve the management, analysis and sharing of the vast data sets that are accumulating as a consequence of federal research. “The world is now generating zettabytes (10²¹ bytes) of information every



TOTAL E&P UK

Gas leak in the North Sea

It might take six months to stop a gas leak at the Elgin drilling platform in the North Sea, says the site's owner, oil company Total. The leak, which began on 25 March, is not thought to be environmentally damaging, but demonstrates the uncertainties of offshore drilling. Total says

that the well's main gas reservoir, 5.5 kilometres below the sea bed, was plugged more than a year ago, but gas is emerging from higher pockets, 4 kilometres below the sea bed. The company is considering pumping mud to block the well, or drilling relief wells.

year,” said OSTP director John Holdren at a 29 March news briefing. Among efforts announced by various federal agencies, the National Institutes of Health will make data from its 1000 Genomes project, the world's largest collection of human genetic information, publicly available for analysis through the Amazon Web Services cloud computing platform. See go.nature.com/z2sqbl for more.

No US ban for BPA

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will not ban the controversial chemical bisphenol A (BPA) from food and beverage containers, it announced on 30 March. BPA, a hormone-disrupting plasticizer used in

food-can linings and bottles, has been linked to heart disease, reproductive problems, behavioural problems and cancers. The FDA was forced to rule on the chemical as part of a settlement to a lawsuit from the National Resources Defense Council, an environmental group based in New York. It was not a “final safety determination”, the agency emphasized, adding that it still supports research into the safety of BPA. See go.nature.com/sxxzyn for more.

FUNDING

Cuts in Spain

Science funding was among areas hit with drastic cuts in Spain's draft budget, which was announced in outline on

30 March. As *Nature* went to press, a full accounting was not available, but central government departments saw their funding slashed by an average of 17%. One government organization, the Centre for the Development of Industrial Technology, which fosters research at technology firms, saw its funding cut by 79%, to €114 million (US\$152 million). See go.nature.com/yalqgl for more.

Ocean job losses

Lay-offs at the United Kingdom's National Oceanography Centre (NOC) could damage international collaborations in the field, oceanographers warned last week. Thirty-five scientific posts — almost one-quarter

M. BRICE, J. BENOIT/CERN

of the science staff — are to be lost at NOC sites in Southampton and Liverpool owing to cuts driven by a squeeze on the centre's main funding agency, the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC). Cuts are also likely at other centres funded by NERC: the British Geological Survey, based in Keyworth, and the British Antarctic Survey, based in Cambridge. See go.nature.com/lhtgfp and page 6 for more.

Cuts in Canada

Scientists in Canada are dismayed by cuts announced in the country's budget on 29 March. The Conservative government outlined Can\$5.2 billion (US\$5.2 billion) of cuts for the three years up to 2015, and slashed funding for many federal agencies. In particular, it reduced its environment portfolio by 8.3%, including eliminating a federal advisory panel on the environment. The country's main research-granting agencies were told to generate savings to find more money for partnerships between industry and academia, and the National Research Council (which runs federal laboratories) was told to switch its focus to business-driven, industry-relevant research. See go.nature.com/faqq5e for more.

RESEARCH

Biobank opens

The UK Biobank, unusual for its size and depth of data, has opened up its collection to researchers. Scientists can now send in applications to use the data, which include around 10 million samples of blood, urine and saliva collected from more than 500,000 people aged 40–69 years between 2006 and 2010. The biobank has been allocated nearly £100 million (US\$160 million) in funding so far. See go.nature.com/oshu2i for more.

Neutrino finale

The collaboration that last year measured neutrinos travelling faster than light has confirmed two sources of error that explain the findings — and two team leaders have resigned. Analyses posted publicly on 30 March show that a faulty cable caused a 73-nanosecond delay in electrical signals, shortening the neutrino's apparent journey time; a drift in the OPERA experiment's master clock brought the error in arrival time down to 60 nanoseconds. OPERA's physics coordinator, Dario Auterio (pictured), and its spokesman, Antonio Ereditato, have both resigned from the collaboration after months of internal tension



and a vote of no confidence against Auterio by OPERA's board. See go.nature.com/zkuhip for more.

Collider record

The Large Hadron Collider at CERN, Europe's particle-physics lab near Geneva, Switzerland, has collided its first protons at a record 8 teraelectronvolts — the highest energy yet for the machine. The ATLAS detector reported the first test collisions on 30 March. The full experimental run is scheduled to begin around 6 April, and physicists hope to nail down a possible signal for the long-sought Higgs boson by the end of the year.

Autism increase

Autism prevalence in children aged eight increased by around 80% between 2002 and 2008 in surveyed sites in the United States, according

COMING UP

6 APRIL

The Large Hadron Collider begins its full-power run for the year. <http://atlas.ch/>

12–13 APRIL

Researchers and space-policy analysts gather in Strasbourg, France, to discuss whether the International Space Station can be used to test technologies for sending people to Mars. go.nature.com/q5dool

to a report released by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia, on 30 March. The report said that by 2008, around 1 in 88 eight-year-old children had been diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, autism or a related autism spectrum disorder, an increase from 1 in 110 in 2006, and 1 in 150 in 2002. Autism spectrum diagnoses have been increasing for decades, although it is not clear why (see *Nature*, 479, 22–24; 2011).

PEOPLE

Physicist in court

After two-and-a-half years behind bars, French-Algerian physicist Adlène Hicheur has appeared in court. In a two-day hearing starting on 29 March, prosecutors argued that Hicheur had plotted terror attacks in conjunction with al-Qaeda's North African branch. Hicheur's lawyers made the case that online exchanges between the researcher and alleged terrorists were not enough to justify his arrest and detention. A decision is expected on 4 May. Prosecutors are seeking a 6-year prison sentence.

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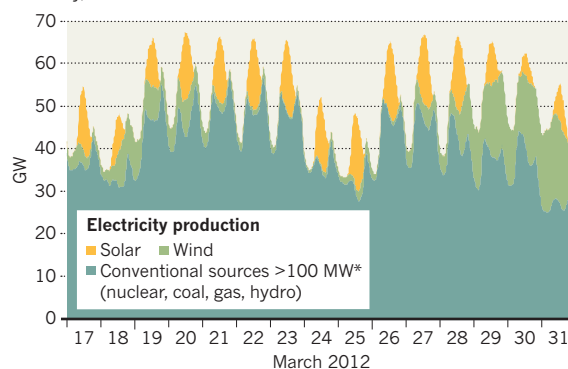
For daily news updates see: www.nature.com/news

TREND WATCH

Cuts of up to 29% in subsidies for solar-power producers took effect in Germany on 1 April, in a bid to slow a frantic pace of solar-plant installation. Last year saw an increase of 7.5 gigawatts (GW) in solar capacity, bringing the total to 25 GW; another 3 GW is expected for this year's first quarter. Last year, solar supplied 1–10% of daily electricity demand. Real-time data (see chart) show solar energy partially, but not entirely, smoothing out demand for power from conventional sources by topping up supply during peaks.

SOLAR PEAKS IN GERMANY

Solar power is helping to smooth out peaks of electricity demand in Germany, but installations will slow now that subsidies have been cut.



*Small (<100 MW) conventional sources are not captured in real-time data; these typically add 10% to production when accounted for.

SOURCE: B. BURGER/FRAUNHOFER/ISE/EEZ