

# SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

## BUSINESS

### Gene-patent justice

The US Supreme Court said on 30 November that it would re-examine the question of whether human genes are patentable. The move is the latest in a three-year legal battle between Myriad Genetics, a diagnostics company in Salt Lake City, Utah, and a coalition of medical associations and physicians that has challenged the validity of the company's patents on the *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* gene variants — linked to inherited breast and ovarian cancer. See [go.nature.com/jbqdxl](http://go.nature.com/jbqdxl) for more.

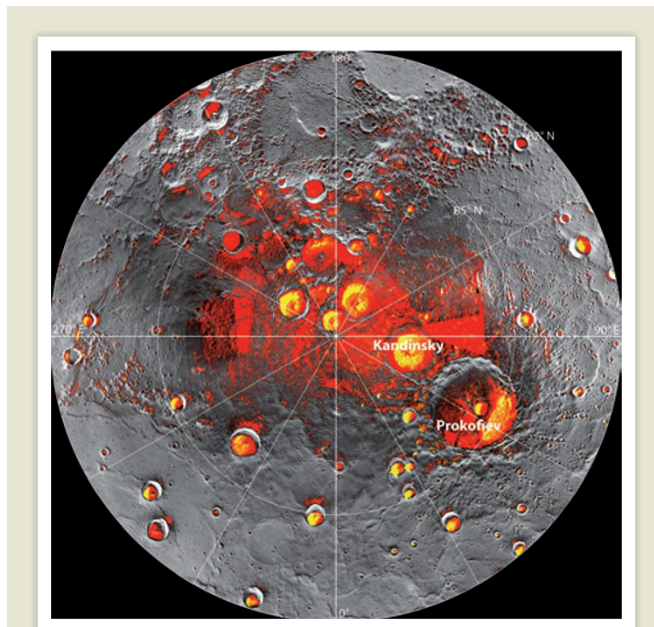
### Stem-cell ruling

In a landmark decision, the German Federal Court of Justice ruled on 27 November that patents may be granted on human embryonic stem cells if claims are restricted to the use of cells that are obtained without destroying a viable embryo. A European Court of Justice ruling had said last year that research patents depending even indirectly on human embryonic stem cells should be outlawed on moral grounds. The European court also equated human embryonic stem-cell lines with embryos, but the German court explicitly stated that they are not equivalent.

## RESEARCH

### Collider cuts

SuperB, a particle accelerator that was to be built in southeast Rome to produce B mesons by smashing together electrons and positrons, may have to be scaled back or cancelled altogether. The project was officially launched in October 2011 (see [go.nature.com/xt0000](http://go.nature.com/xt0000)), but the Italian government said on



## Water ice on Mercury

Craters on Mercury may hold as much as one trillion tonnes of water ice, according to results from NASA's MESSENGER probe, published on 29 November in *Science*. Although the surface of the planet reaches temperatures of 400 °C, the depths of many polar craters never see the Sun and are thought to remain below -170 °C. The suspected ice (pictured in red) may have been deposited by comet or asteroid impacts. See [go.nature.com/mhxe15](http://go.nature.com/mhxe15) for more.

27 November that it would not contribute more than its initial investment of €250 million (US\$326 million) after the project's estimated costs increased to €1 billion and it failed to secure enough investment from international partners. See [go.nature.com/u5g4ey](http://go.nature.com/u5g4ey) for more.

### GM study rebutted

A final review by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), published on 28 November, has rejected the findings of a controversial paper published in September (see [go.nature.com/3slkys](http://go.nature.com/3slkys)) claiming that rats fed genetically modified maize (corn) showed adverse health effects, including higher incidence of tumours and

earlier mortality than controls. The review's conclusion that the study was "inadequately designed, analysed and reported" and "does not meet acceptable scientific standards" is in line with both the EFSA's initial review published in October (see [go.nature.com/rypoy5](http://go.nature.com/rypoy5)) and assessments by six European Union member states.

### Mental-health guide

The upcoming revision of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)* has passed the final hurdle before it heads to the presses. On 1 December, the American Psychiatric Association's board of trustees approved the revised text,

which includes controversial changes to the definitions of autism and major depression (see *Nature* **482**, 14–15; 2012). The manual is slated to be published by May 2013.

### Mess in Texas

The Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT) announced the freezing of an US\$11-million commercialization grant to Peloton Therapeutics in Dallas on 29 November, after an audit revealed that the 2010 award was made without commercial or scientific review (see [go.nature.com/ctjei4](http://go.nature.com/ctjei4)). The finding comes on the heels of months of controversy about an \$18-million unreviewed CPRIT grant to the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston (see *Nature* **486**, 169–171; 2012).

### 'Two strikes' rule

The US National Institutes of Health has said that it will continue an unpopular policy that prevents grant applicants from resubmitting rejected proposals more than once. Before January 2009, when the policy was introduced, applicants were allowed to resubmit unsuccessful grants twice. See page 7 and [go.nature.com/pkskun](http://go.nature.com/pkskun) for more.

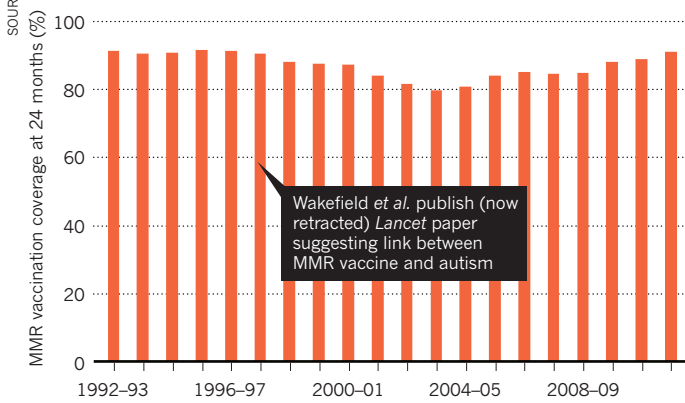
## POLICY

### Tree felling drops

The rate at which trees are being cut down in the Brazilian Amazon has fallen by 27% in the past year, to a record low. Preliminary work by the National Institute for Space Research (INPE), published on 27 November, suggests that 4,656 square kilometres of forest were clear-cut between August 2011 and July 2012, compared with 6,418 km<sup>2</sup> in the previous 12 months. See [go.nature.com/ttnvqa](http://go.nature.com/ttnvqa) for more.

NASA/JHUAPL/CARNegie INST. WASHINGTON/NAIC, ARCI/BO OBSERV.

**MMR VACCINES REVIVED**  
Childhood immunization against measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) in England is now more than 90%.



Wakefield *et al.* publish (now retracted) *Lancet* paper suggesting link between MMR vaccine and autism

**MMR vaccination**

The immunization of children in England against measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) by 24 months of age has now reached more than 90%, its highest level since 1997-98 (see **graph**). Vaccinations dipped to as low as 79% after authors led by Andrew Wakefield published a now-retracted paper in *The Lancet* suggesting a link between the MMR vaccine and autism. The World Health Organization's recommended target is 95%.

**Funder concessions**

The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), Britain's biggest public funder of physics, mathematics and engineering, has agreed to remove controversial wording that asked grant applicants to

outline the national importance of their work "over a 10-50 year time-frame". In an article in *Times Higher Education* on 29 November, EPSRC chairman Paul Golby wrote that the research council would commission independent reviews to examine its peer-review processes and how it seeks strategic advice. The announcement follows protests by scientists in May (see *Nature* **488**, 20-22; 2012).

**Science down under**

The Australian government published its National Research Investment Plan on 28 November. The plan identifies eight 'key challenges' for the country, including the production of energy and food, that will guide public spending on research during 2013-16. It also highlights

areas in need of further action by the government and research funders, such as developing better links between universities and industry and more support for international collaboration.

**PEOPLE**

**Fraud verdict**

A culture of "flawed science" in social psychology owing to weak peer review allowed Diederik Stapel, formerly based at Tilburg University in the Netherlands, to commit extensive research fraud that spanned more than a decade, says a 28 November report issued by the committees investigating him (see *Nature* **479**, 15; 2011). The committees identified 55 publications in which fraud was certain, 11 papers with indications of fraud, and 10 tainted doctoral dissertations.

**Confucius prize**

Agricultural scientist Yuan Longping is to share US\$1.5 million in prize money with former United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan, it emerged last week. The pair were awarded the Confucius Peace Prize in early November but the amount of the prize, which varies each year, had not been confirmed. The Chinese prize was set up in 2010 after the Nobel Peace Prize was

**COMING UP**

**7 DECEMBER**  
Climate negotiators end a fortnight of debate at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Doha.  
[go.nature.com/wnhovv](http://go.nature.com/wnhovv)

**12 DECEMBER**  
British scientists start 100 hours of drilling to reach Antarctica's subglacial Lake Ellsworth, buried under more than 3 kilometres of ice (see *Nature* **491**, 506-507; 2012).  
[www.ellsworth.org.uk](http://www.ellsworth.org.uk)

awarded to dissident Chinese writer Liu Xiaobo. Last year's winner was Russian president Vladimir Putin.

**Committee head**

Republican Congressman Lamar Smith was selected as the next chairman of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology on 28 November. In 2009, Smith criticized parts of the US media for coverage that was "slanted in favour of global warming alarmists". He replaces Ralph Hall, who is stepping down at the end of this year. See page 17 and [go.nature.com/6z6u1a](http://go.nature.com/6z6u1a) for more.

**Neurologist leaves**

Sidney Gilman, a neurologist at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor implicated in insider trading, has retired, a university spokesman confirmed on 28 November. Gilman tipped off CR Intrinsic Investors, a hedge fund in Stamford, Connecticut, about safety data from clinical trials of a drug for Alzheimer's disease before the results were made public. See [go.nature.com/n8tnbi](http://go.nature.com/n8tnbi) for more.

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**TREND WATCH**

Global funding for work on neglected diseases totalled US\$3.32 billion in 2011, essentially stable in real terms compared with 2010, according to the *G-FINDER* investment survey by Policy Cures, a health-policy analysis firm based in London and Sydney, Australia. Over the past three years, public and philanthropic funding has declined as some government aid budgets have been cut, whereas industry funding has grown (mostly owing to investments in trials for dengue vaccines).

**FLAT FUNDING FOR NEGLECTED DISEASES**

Public funding still supplies more than 60% of financial support for diseases such as HIV, malaria and tuberculosis.

