

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

POLICY

Science adviser

The post of chief scientific adviser to the European Commission came under attack again on 19 August when nearly two dozen non-governmental organizations called on the incoming president of the commission to scrap the job. In an open letter to Jean-Claude Juncker, groups including Friends of the Earth Europe added their weight to an existing campaign to abolish the science role. The letter argues that the position “concentrates too much influence in one person”. The mandate of the commission’s current chief scientific adviser, Anne Glover, is scheduled to end later this year.

Trial enrolment

The US Food and Drug Administration published a plan on 20 August to ensure that women and racial and ethnic minority groups are adequately included in clinical trials. The action plan aims to collect data on population subgroups in trials, to encourage and enable more women and minority groups to enrol, and to make the demographic make-up of trials more transparent. It will be implemented in stages over the next five years. The agency also published guidance on evaluating how medical devices might function differently in men and women.

EVENTS

Icelandic volcano

After a reported eruption on 23 August turned out to be a false alarm, Iceland’s Bárðarbunga volcano continued to rumble deep underground. Since seismic activity began on 16 August, thousands of earthquakes have shaken the ground north and

east of the volcano. They show where magma is squirting up from below and forming a freshly cooled sheet of rock, or dyke, a few kilometres deep. As of 25 August, the dyke was thought to be nearly 35 kilometres long and to contain 300 million cubic metres of magma. Aviation authorities remained on alert in case an eruption spewed ash into the air. See go.nature.com/iidaau for more.

Ebola in fifth nation

The Democratic Republic of Congo became the fifth African nation to confirm cases of Ebola, on 24 August. On the same day, a Senegalese epidemiologist was reported as the first person working for the World Health Organization (WHO) to

contract the disease. On 22 August, the WHO said that the official count of 2,615 cases and 1,427 deaths probably underestimates the true size of the epidemic. It blamed community resistance to reporting cases and a lack of adequate treatment facilities. The agency thinks that the epidemic could last for another 9 months. See page 355 for more.

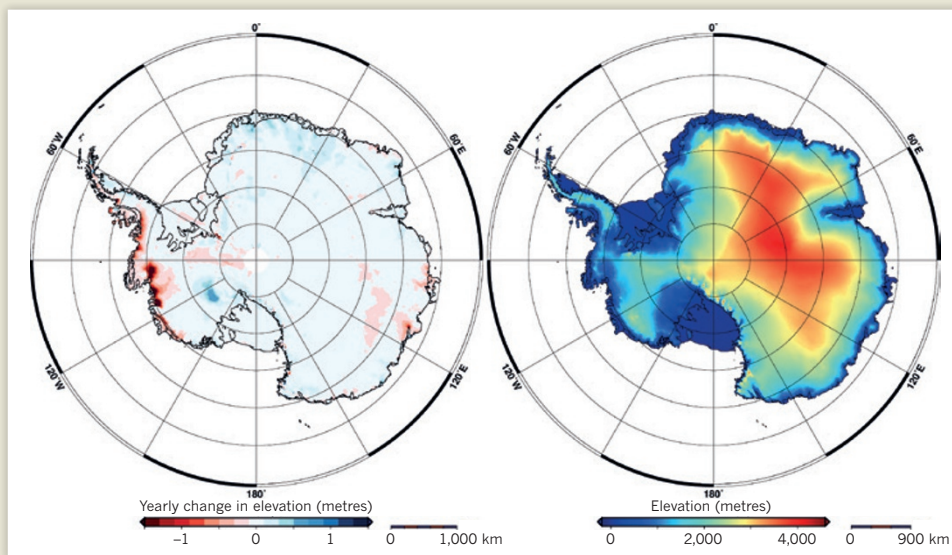
Wonky orbit

The latest pair of satellites in Europe’s Galileo global positioning system went into the wrong orbit after a botched launch from French Guiana on 22 August. The satellites were supposed to adopt a circular orbit, but are now travelling on an elliptical path and at a lower altitude than

planned. Arianespace, the French company responsible for the launch, said that it is investigating whether the problem was due to the Soyuz launch rocket. The satellites are the fifth and sixth out of a total constellation of 30 Galileo spacecraft.

Drone lawsuit

An association of 188 US universities is taking the government to court in an attempt to overturn rules that restrict researchers’ use of drones. On 22 August, the Council on Governmental Relations in Washington DC filed a complaint in the federal appeals court, arguing that restrictions on the ‘commercial’ use of drones — imposed by the US Federal Aviation Administration



Satellites pinpoint ice loss

The massive ice sheets in Antarctica (pictured) and Greenland are together shrinking at a rate of 500 cubic kilometres per year — the fastest pace since satellite altimetry began 20 years ago. The European Space Agency’s CryoSat-2 probe collected precise elevation data for both ice sheets (Antarctica’s shown on right). The

greatest ice loss (shown on left in red) between 2011 and 2014 occurred at Pine Island glacier in western Antarctica and at Jakobshavn glacier in Greenland. The findings were reported on 20 August by researchers from the Alfred Wegener Institute in Potsdam, Germany (V. Helm *et al. Cryosphere* 8, 1539–1559; 2014).

BEHROUZ MEHRI/AFP/GETTY

(FAA) in June — unfairly hamper the application of drones in science (see also *Nature* **512**, 231; 2014). The FAA says that commercial use includes research activities at private universities.

PEOPLE

Nuclear spy

A former employee of the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico was convicted on 20 August of conspiring with her husband to sell US nuclear secrets to Venezuela. Marjorie Roxby Mascheroni, who was a writer and editor at the lab between 1981 and 2010, was handed a 366-day prison sentence. The charges arose from the interactions of her husband, formerly a physicist at the lab, with an undercover FBI agent posing as a Venezuelan government official. Pedro Leonardo Mascheroni, who awaits sentencing, claims that his dealings were part of an attempt to fund construction of a laser for nuclear fusion.

Minister dismissed

Iran's parliament voted on 20 August to dismiss the country's science and technology minister, Reza Faraji-Dana (**pictured**), for attempting to liberalize universities and allegedly politicizing Iran's academic environment. Faraji-Dana, an



electrical engineer and former chancellor of the University of Tehran, had joined the cabinet of reformist president Hassan Rouhani last year. He upset hardline parliamentarians when he tried to allow activist students and professors back onto campus after they had been banned by Rouhani's conservative predecessor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad following anti-government unrest in 2009.

RESEARCH

MERS model

Marmosets are the best animal model for Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). Research on the MERS coronavirus was hindered by the lack of an animal model that showed the same respiratory symptoms as humans when infected with the virus. In two studies published on 21 August,

researchers from the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases showed that the virus could infect marmosets, and that the animals' symptoms mimic the severe pneumonia seen in humans (D. Falzarano *et al.* *PLoS Pathog.* **10**, e1004250 (2014); N. van Doremalen *et al.* *J. Virol.* **88**, 9220–9232 (2014)).

African farming

The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), a science-based non-governmental organization in Nairobi has helped 1.7 million African farmers to rejuvenate 1.6 million hectares of land, and to double, or even triple, crop yields over the past five years through its Soil Health Programme. AGRA reported the results on 22 August. The programme tests and teaches techniques to improve soil fertility and makes chemical fertilizers more affordable for poor farmers. Depleted soils cost African farmers US\$4 billion a year in lost productivity.

Stem-cell go-ahead

Regulators in the United States have cleared the way for a clinical trial of a prospective stem-cell-derived treatment for type 1 diabetes. On 19 August, ViaCyte of San Diego, California, said that the Food and Drug

COMING UP

2–4 SEPTEMBER

Agricultural scientists meet at the Africa Green Revolution Forum in Addis Ababa to discuss how to boost agricultural productivity in the developing world. www.agrforum.com

5–9 SEPTEMBER

Researchers meet at the Interscience Conference on Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy in Washington DC to discuss infectious-disease control and prevention on a global scale. go.nature.com/8cjcaa

Administration has given it permission for a phase I/II clinical trial of a product that consists of pancreatic precursor cells packaged in a mesh pouch. ViaCyte's treatment could become one of only a handful of human embryonic-stem-cell-derived products to be trialled in people, and will be an important test for the effectiveness of California's state stem-cell institute, which provided funding to develop the product.

BUSINESS

Pharma takeover

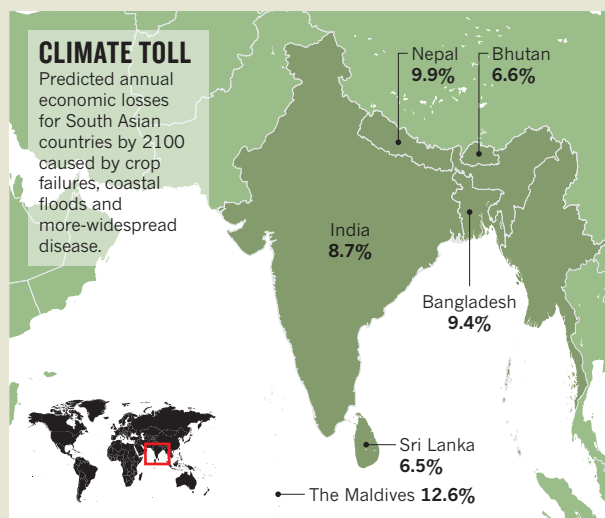
Swiss pharmaceutical giant Roche announced on 24 August that it will be purchasing the biotechnology firm InterMune for US \$8.3 billion. Headquartered in Brisbane, California, InterMune owns a drug called pirfenidone for treatment of idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis. The drug is sold in Europe and Canada, but has yet to gain approval in the United States.

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TREND WATCH

Climate change will cause the collective economy of the six countries of South Asia to lose an average 1.8% of its annual gross domestic product by 2050, rising to 8.8% by 2100. The data, from the Asian Development Bank and published on 19 August, show that the Maldives and Nepal will be hardest hit (see map). The forecast assumes a 4.6°C rise in global temperatures. South Asia will need to spend at least US\$73 billion a year between now and 2100 to adapt to climate change, the report says.



SOURCE: ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK