

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

POLICY

Russian ISS plan

Russia's space agency Roscosmos announced on 24 February that it will continue its involvement in the International Space Station (ISS) until 2024 — a timeline that the United States had committed to last year. Roscosmos also added that after 2024 it will consider taking the Russian-built ISS modules and assembling them into a separate space station. Last year, as US–Russian tensions rose over the crisis in Ukraine, Russia's deputy prime minister Dmitry Rogozin said that the country would pull out of the ISS by 2020.

UK embryo law

Mitochondrial donation will become legal in the United Kingdom after the final vote in a debate on 24 February that may set an international precedent. The House of Lords voted overwhelmingly to approve regulations on human fertilization that would allow the creation of embryos with DNA from three people. The technique aims to prevent disease passing from mother to child through the mitochondria — the cell's energy-producing structures, which have their own genes. Only 48 members of the Lords voted against the regulations, and 280 voted for them. The previous vote in the House of Commons was more closely contested (see go.nature.com/hyirxf).

Green-card spouses

Spouses of highly skilled foreign workers will soon be allowed to work legally in the United States, the US government announced on 24 February. The measure, due to take effect on 26 May, will apply to those married

to individuals who are in the process of obtaining permanent residency (or a 'green card') while on an H-1B visa — many of whom are scientists or engineers. The US Citizenship and Immigration Services estimate that nearly 180,000 couples will benefit from the policy change in its first year and 55,000 per year after that.

Pipeline veto

US President Barack Obama vetoed legislation on 24 February that would have authorized the construction

of a controversial pipeline intended to carry oil from Canada's tar sands in Alberta to the US Gulf Coast. Republican majorities in both houses of Congress passed the legislation earlier this year, arguing that the Keystone XL pipeline would boost economic development; environmentalists argue that it would increase greenhouse-gas emissions because it promotes a dirty source of energy. The fate of the project now rests with the White House pending an environmental review by

has grown, panda populations are increasingly isolated, their habitats fragmented by roads, railways, dams and mines. Climate change threatens their food source, bamboo. And it is not clear that numbers from the latest survey can be directly compared to the previous search around ten years ago. See go.nature.com/h93hle for more.

Chinese pandas increasingly isolated

China's wild pandas have seen an increase in living space, and there are now 1,864 of them — compared with 1,596 a decade ago — all of which sounds like good news. But the results of a four-year survey announced on 28 February are not necessarily cause for celebration, and some experts are still concerned. Although living area



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the US Department of State, which is expected in the coming weeks.

PEOPLE

Tributes to Spock

Scientists on Earth and in space have paid tribute to Leonard Nimoy, who died on 27 February aged 83. NASA administrator Charles Bolden said that the actor, who played *Star Trek's* half-Vulcan science officer Mr Spock, was “an inspiration to multiple generations of engineers, scientists, astronauts, and other space explorers”, adding

that “he made science and technology important to the story”. Astronaut Terry Virt aboard the International Space Station tweeted an image of a Vulcan hand salute from orbit. US President Barack Obama hailed Nimoy as a “supporter of the sciences”, saying: “Long before being nerdy was cool, there was Leonard Nimoy.”

Guilty plea

A US scientist has pleaded guilty to fraudulent HIV vaccine research. On 25 February, the Southern District of Iowa attorney's office said that Dong Pyou Han, formerly a researcher at Iowa State University in Des Moines, pleaded guilty to two counts of making false statements to the US National Institutes of Health. Han admitted adding human HIV antibodies to rabbit blood to make it appear as if his vaccine had induced an immune response in the rabbits. He will be sentenced in May and faces a maximum of 10 years in prison and a US\$500,000 fine.

Cosmic outreach

Astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson (**pictured**), director of the Hayden Planetarium in New York City, received the 2015 Public Welfare Medal from the US National Academy of Sciences, the



academy announced on 26 February. The medal recognizes Tyson's efforts to excite the public about science. Most notably, he hosted last year's 13-part television series *Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey*, inspired by Carl Sagan's classic 1980 *Cosmos* series.

RESEARCH

Ebola trial result

Scientists reported the first positive results from a human clinical trial of a drug to treat Ebola on 25 February. A team led by researchers at the French Institute of Health and Medical Research announced that an antiviral drug, favipiravir, halved the mortality rate among people with low amounts of the Ebola virus in their blood. The death rate in the 40-person trial group was 15%, compared with 30% in the historical control group. But the trial leaders caution that the study

numbers are small, among other caveats. The results were announced at the annual Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections in Seattle, Washington.

Minnesota review

An external review commissioned by the University of Minnesota has found that “substantial change is necessary” in the way in which the university monitors clinical trials. The report, dated 26 February, states that the university's ethical review committees are not sufficiently staffed or trained, and do not adequately consider the needs of vulnerable research subjects, such as children or people with mental illnesses. The report was intended to address faculty concerns that human-research oversight at the university may not be sufficient after a clinical-trial participant with a psychiatric disorder took his own life in 2004.

Placenta project

A mysterious but crucial organ, the placenta, is getting its day in the sun thanks to a US\$41.5-million investment by the US National Institutes of Health (NIH). On 26 February, the agency announced that the Human Placenta Project will fund eight or nine research teams to develop tools to monitor the placenta in real time as a proxy for tracking

COMING UP

6 MARCH

NASA's Dawn spacecraft will arrive at the dwarf planet Ceres in the main asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter. go.nature.com/edumwi

9–11 MARCH

The University of Tokyo has organized the 1st International Workshop on Topological Electronics at the Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology. This new area looks at the interaction between topology, electrical properties and quantum phenomena. go.nature.com/ykezpt

the developing fetus's health. This could include imaging technologies and ways to detect fetal biomarkers in the mother's blood. Much of the programme's budget is redirected from the NIH's \$150-million National Children's Study, which was cancelled in December. See go.nature.com/ohijm5 for more.

FUNDING

India's budget

Scientists were disappointed by a below-inflation rise for research funding in India's latest budget, announced on 28 February. The overall allocation for science stood at 419 billion rupees (US\$6.8 billion), 3.4% more than was pledged last year. Renewable-energy research was slashed by 68%. But the country's main agency for disbursing research grants, the Ministry of Science and Technology, received an 8% increase, slightly above inflation. See go.nature.com/26qfbq for more.

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TREND WATCH

Around half of Europe's rivers and lakes are still polluted, a major environmental review has found, despite a 15-year-old target to restore the continent's waters to good ecological health by 2015. And Germany and the Netherlands are among the worst offenders. The report, by the European Environment Agency in Copenhagen, charts a litany of other environmental failures, including increasing biodiversity loss and continued air and noise pollution. See go.nature.com/cjsoda for more.

