

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

EVENTS

UK election impact

The incumbent Prime Minister David Cameron and his Conservative Party won the United Kingdom's election on 7 May with a surprise outright majority that flummoxed pollsters. The win has implications for research because ministers are likely to emphasize austerity allied to economic growth — a pillar of the previous Conservative-led coalition government. There are no promises to protect science funding, which has been frozen for five years. The Conservative pledge to hold a 2017 referendum on Britain withdrawing from the European Union could adversely affect UK science if

RAY BARKER

Nature's viability and health is as much dependent on its business leaders as on its editors. It is with sorrow that we record the death of Ray Barker (1936–2015), who was managing director of Macmillan Magazines from 1991 to 1999. He had a deep knowledge of publishing, and as publisher of *Nature* he increased financial robustness following a period of weakness. He also oversaw substantial growth of the stable of *Nature* research journals. His colleagues remember his exceptional ability to recognize their contributions; according to Stefan von Holtzbrinck, of the publishing family that bought Macmillan during Ray's tenure, "Many of the company's achievements stemmed from Ray's unique gift to spot and train extraordinary talents. His charisma inspired everyone to do the best possible job and go the last mile."



JAMES GIAHYUE/REUTERS

Liberia celebrates becoming Ebola free

Liberia has become the first of the three main countries affected by Ebola to be declared officially free of the disease, ending its 15-month epidemic. The last person in Liberia known to have Ebola died on 27 March and was buried the next day. This means that, as of 9 May, the country has had no new cases for

42 days (twice the maximum incubation time) since the last burial — the criterion used by the World Health Organization (WHO) for declaring a country Ebola free. But with cases continuing in Sierra Leone and Guinea, the WHO has warned against complacency. See go.nature.com/mhimlt for more.

the country leaves. Jo Johnson, a modern-history graduate, former banker and journalist, has been appointed as Minister for Universities and Science. See page 134 for more.

Arab Mars mission

The United Arab Emirates plans to launch a spacecraft to Mars in 2020, it announced on 6 May. The probe, named Hope, will be the first Arab spacecraft to go to the red planet. It will aim to model Mars's atmosphere from an elliptical orbit, studying temperature, gases and weather phenomena on each pass. It will be managed by the UAE Space Agency and controlled from the Mohammed bin Rashid Space Centre in Dubai. Partners in the mission include the

University of Colorado Boulder, the University of California, Berkeley, and Arizona State University in Tempe.

BUSINESS

Mega-merger bid

Monsanto announced on 8 May that it had attempted to buy another leading agricultural-technology company, Syngenta of Basel, Switzerland. The offer — 449 Swiss francs (US\$481) per Syngenta share, or about US\$45 billion in total — was rejected, with Syngenta arguing that Monsanto, based in St Louis, Missouri, had undervalued the firm. If the purchase were to be successful eventually, it would unite Syngenta's business, a leader

in pesticides and herbicides, with Monsanto's strong seed business, which trades in both conventionally bred and genetically engineered crops.

Drug-use panel

Johnson & Johnson has set up an independent bioethics panel to decide whether to grant patients access to experimental medicines, the New Jersey drug firm said on 7 May. The panel will be chaired by Arthur Caplan, a bioethicist at New York University. It will operate on a trial basis to consider compassionate-use requests for a single, experimental drug that is being developed by the firm's subsidiary Janssen. More than 20 US states are considering 'right to try' laws that would encourage drug companies to

offer investigational medicines to patients. See go.nature.com/84wob6 for more.

Rare-disease deal

Alexion Pharmaceuticals in Cheshire, Connecticut, has agreed to pay US\$8.4 billion to buy Synageva BioPharma in Lexington, Massachusetts. Synageva is developing a drug for a rare genetic disease called lysosomal acid lipase deficiency; the therapy is in late-stage clinical trials. The deal, announced on 7 May, highlights the pharmaceutical industry's growing interest in treatments for rare conditions, and will expand Alexion's repertoire of therapies for metabolic diseases.

TECHNOLOGY

Escape-pod test

Private spaceflight company SpaceX passed a crucial test by successfully deploying the emergency escape pod of its Crew Dragon rocket system. The capsule launched (pictured) from Cape Canaveral, Florida, on 6 May. As planned, it flew 1.5 kilometres above the Atlantic Ocean before the escape pod detached, unfurling three parachutes to splash down safely into the sea. Sensors aboard the pod showed that the conditions would have been safe for humans. SpaceX,



which is headquartered in Hawthorne, California, is expected to start shuttling astronauts into space in 2017.

POLICY

Disease monikers

The World Health Organization (WHO) has issued guidelines for naming new diseases. The rules, released on 8 May, recommend naming diseases according to what they do rather than after the individual, region or species in which they were found. The name swine flu, for instance, has hurt the pork industry even though the virus is not specific to pigs, and Middle Eastern countries have been concerned that the name of the viral infection Middle East Respiratory Syndrome will lead to stigmatization. Researchers should also avoid names with frightening words such as 'fatal', the WHO said.

RESEARCH

Symbolic CO₂ peak

The global monthly concentration of atmospheric carbon dioxide has exceeded 400 parts per million (p.p.m.) for the first time since agencies began to track it in the 1960s. Analysing air samples from 40 sites worldwide, the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration calculated an average CO₂ level of 400.83 p.p.m. for March. Calibrated data for April are not yet available, but scientists expect CO₂ concentration to remain above 400 p.p.m. for April and throughout May, when it normally peaks. Daily levels first surpassed 400 p.p.m. in 2012 at Arctic sites.

Tailored tests

Personalized screening and medicines could save the United States billions of dollars, but such interventions are unlikely to emerge because of the structure of its health-care system, says a panel of doctors and economists in *The Lancet* (V. J. Dzau *et al. Lancet* <http://doi.org/4km>; 2015). Modelling by the group, led by Victor Dzau of the Institute of Medicine in Washington DC, found a 10% fall in diabetes and cancer cases as a result of using tailored tests would generate US\$166 billion in improved health over 50 years.

COMING UP

16–20 MAY

Scientists and health-care professionals meet in Dublin for the European Congress of Endocrinology to discuss the latest advances in the field. go.nature.com/p5mtmq

18–22 MAY

The latest research in the science of sound is presented at the Acoustical Society of America's spring meeting in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. go.nature.com/wseczh

18–26 MAY

The World Health Organization holds its general assembly in Geneva, Switzerland. Delegates from all its member states discuss and decide on health policies, programmes and budgets. go.nature.com/klqaym

But the group notes that private insurers cover therapies by judging only short-term gains.

High-energy ties

The United States and CERN, Europe's high-energy physics lab near Geneva, Switzerland, pledged to align their long-term strategies for particle physics on 6 May. Although the United States has only observer status in CERN, it is a major contributor to experiments such as those at the Large Hadron Collider. CERN will now reciprocate with more-direct involvement in US-based experiments, notably in neutrino science. Also on 6 May, Turkey formalized its associate membership of CERN, which grants it access to CERN Council meetings.

► NATURE.COM

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

TREND WATCH

The US Department of Energy should create a sustained and predictable programme of funding focused on new solar technologies, to support a "massive expansion" of solar power by mid-century, says a report from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge (see go.nature.com/ogv7wa). Released on 5 May, it urges policies to promote solar energy, including subsidies for generating technologies and incentivized programmes for developing low-cost technologies.

SOLAR SUPPORT

The US government has a long history of funding solar-energy technologies, but will need to raise investment in the future.

