

# SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

## EVENTS

### Mercury transit

NASA's Solar Dynamics Observatory captured Mercury's 7.5-hour trek across the face of the Sun on 9 May. Such planetary transits are relatively rare: Mercury and Venus pass between Earth and the Sun only occasionally. Because Mercury's orbit is tilted by 7° relative to Earth's, the innermost planet of the Solar System passes between our planet and the Sun only about 13 times a century; the next time will be in 2019. Mercury's transit of the Sun can give scientists spectroscopic clues about the chemistry of the planet's thin atmosphere.

## POLICY

### E-cig clampdown

A US clampdown on electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) is in the offing after the US Food and Drug Administration finalized its stance on the controversial products. The agency, which currently regulates cigarettes and rolling tobacco, announced on 5 May that it would extend its authority to cover e-cigarettes, hookah tobacco and other products containing nicotine from 8 August. This will prevent their sale to under 18s. Researchers are divided over the benefits and harms of e-cigarettes, but Sylvia Burwell, the US Secretary of Health and Human Services, said that the "drastic leap" in the use of such products was "creating a new generation of Americans who are at risk of addiction". See page 146 for more.

### TTIP opposition

The controversial trade deal being negotiated between the European Union and the United States is in jeopardy after French President



OPHER SEGUIN/REUTERS

## Blazing inferno in Alberta

Almost 90,000 people were evacuated from the city of Fort McMurray last week after wildfires raged in the Canadian province of Alberta. By 8 May, the huge blaze had destroyed some 160,000 hectares of land and forest. Thanks to wet weather, fire-fighting conditions became more favourable over the weekend, but several

fires in the region are still out of control. Although the flames have not reached any of Alberta's oil-processing facilities, these have been closed, and efforts to stop the fire from spreading to neighbouring Saskatchewan may continue for weeks, authorities said. The cause of the disaster is still under investigation.

François Hollande said on 3 May that he will not accept poorly regulated free trade that questions some of France's "essential principles". His comments followed the leak on 2 May of negotiation papers concerning the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Among other things, critics say that TTIP could force the EU to abandon its precautionary principle in dealing with health, environmental and food-safety issues. Currently, some manufacturers and importers have to prove that their product is harmless if scientific data do not permit a complete evaluation.

Although France has no veto over the deal, it could block the negotiation process.

### Australian budget

There were no big winners or losers for science in Australia's 2016–17 federal budget, released on 3 May. But the government announced long-term investment plans for the Australian Antarctic Territory. The budget — which is released ahead of national elections in July — includes Aus\$496.2 million (US\$364 million) by 2050 to protect Australia's strategic interests in Antarctica and to sustain its scientific, environmental and economic operations there. The

government will also provide Aus\$55 million over the next decade for enhanced research and transport infrastructure in the territory, including support for over-ice convoys to research stations or drilling sites and year-round aviation access.

## PEOPLE

### UN climate chief

A seasoned Mexican diplomat and former foreign minister is to become the world's top climate official. Patricia Espinosa Cantellano, currently Mexican ambassador to Germany, was nominated on 3 May as executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate

Change by UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon. Espinosa, a human-rights specialist with 30 years of high-level experience in international relations, is to succeed Costa Rica's Christiana Figueres, who will leave in July after six years in office.

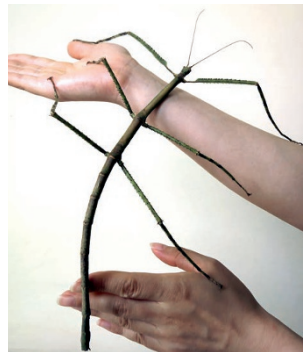
## Rockefeller head

Geneticist Richard Lifton will be the 11th president of the Rockefeller University in New York City, the university announced on 5 May. Lifton, 62, who received the 2014 Breakthrough Prize in Life Sciences for his work on the genetic causes of high blood pressure, will take office in September. Currently the Sterling Professor of Genetics and chair of genetics at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, Lifton will succeed Marc Tessier-Lavigne, who is leaving Rockefeller to become president of Stanford University in California.

### RESEARCH

## Giant stick insect

Scientists in China say that they have found the world's longest insect — a new species of stick insect that is well over half a metre long. Zhao Li of the Insect Museum of West China in Chengdu told the Xinhua news agency that he found the creature in 2014, on a mountain near Liuzhou City in southern



China. At 62.4 centimetres long, the insect — which has been dubbed *Phryganistria chinensis* Zhao (pictured), although it has not yet been formally described — is almost 6 cm longer than the previous record holder, *Phobaeticus chani*, a stick insect from Malaysia discovered in 2008.

## Millions for LIGO

More than 1,000 scientists and engineers will share a US\$3-million Special Breakthrough Prize in Fundamental Physics for the discovery of gravitational waves from colliding black holes. Ron Drever, Kip Thorne and Rainer Weiss, who co-founded the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) — two US detectors where signals of elusive gravitational waves were first discovered last September — receive equal parts of \$1 million, a prize committee announced on 2 May. The

other 1,012 contributors to the experiment worldwide will share the remaining \$2 million equally. On 4 May, the LIGO team was also awarded the \$500,000 Gruber Foundation Cosmology Prize.

### FACILITIES

## Boaty no more

The United Kingdom's new polar research ship will be named after naturalist and broadcaster David Attenborough, the UK government announced on 6 May. A public vote to suggest a name for the planned £200-million (US\$289-million) vessel was overwhelmingly in favour of Boaty McBoatface. Instead, the ship will be christened RRS *Sir David Attenborough* — but Boaty McBoatface will live on as the name of the ship's remotely operated submersible.

## Chimp haven

The world's largest chimpanzee research facility is retiring its chimps. The New Iberia Research Center (NIRC) in Lafayette, Louisiana, announced on 3 May that in the summer it will begin to relocate all of its 220 primates — at up to 10 at a time — to Project Chimps, a sanctuary for chimpanzees in Blue Ridge, Georgia. NIRC was among the last labs in the world to allow invasive biomedical research on

## COMING UP

### 17–18 MAY

Details of a €1-billion initiative in quantum technology are announced at the Quantum Europe Conference in Amsterdam. See [go.nature.com/7xdf34](http://go.nature.com/7xdf34) for more. [go.nature.com/hne6pn](http://go.nature.com/hne6pn)

### 17–22 MAY

The 10th World Biomaterials Congress takes place in Montreal, Canada. [www.wbc2016.org](http://www.wbc2016.org)

chimpanzees before the United States effectively banned the practice in 2015 and declared captive chimpanzees to be an endangered species. NIRC says that its retirement plans had been in place since 2014.

### PUBLISHING

## Access control

Thousands of journals are being removed from the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) in response to concerns about the increasing number of 'predatory publishers' with dubious peer-review and publishing practices. In a bid to tighten standards for inclusion, the DOAJ had asked more than 11,000 open-access journals listed on the directory to provide details about their operations. About 3,300 journals did not submit the requested information in time, so will now be delisted, says Lars Bjørnshauge, the directory's managing director. Over the past 2 years, the DOAJ has rejected more than 5,400 open-access journals, often owing to questionable publishing ethics or lack of editorial transparency. See [go.nature.com/t7aioi](http://go.nature.com/t7aioi) for more.

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## TREND WATCH

Social habits in a country dictate how long its residents sleep at night. Data were collected from 5,459 people in 20 countries who used a smartphone app called ENTRAIN to record their daily bed times, wake times and exposure to outdoor and indoor light over 1 year. The analysis showed that social pressures to ignore the biological signals of sleepiness send people — particularly men — to bed late, but do not affect the time they wake up (O. J. Walch *et al. Sci. Adv.* 2, e1501705; 2016).

## GET AN EARLY NIGHT

A smartphone app reveals how sleep habits differ between countries.

