

POLICY

Stem-cell regulation

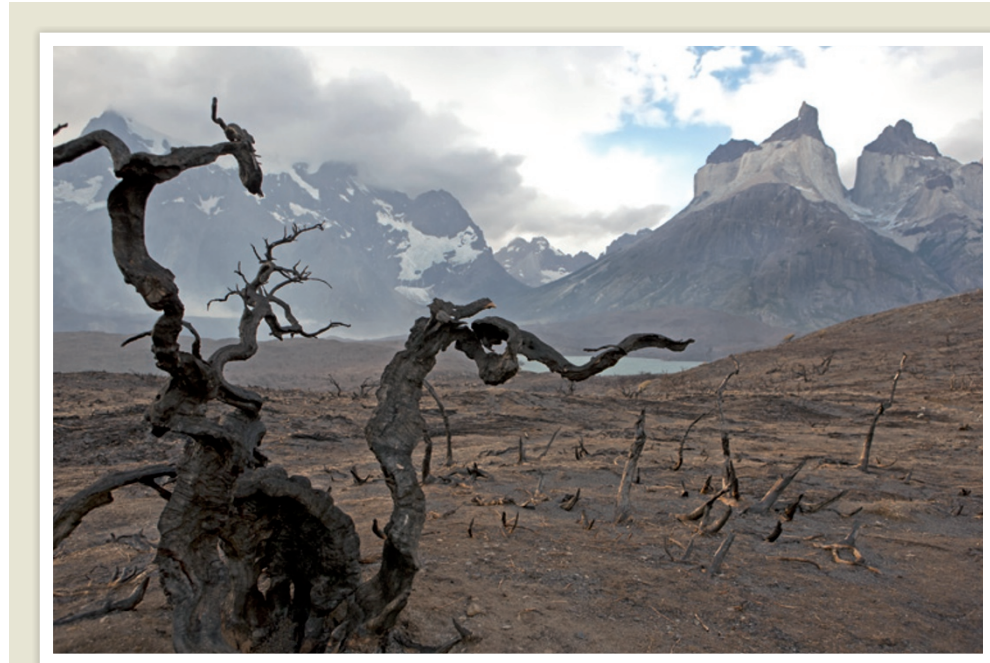
China has ordered a halt to unapproved stem-cell treatments, and says that it will stop accepting new applications for clinical trials using stem-cell products until July. The 10 January announcement by the government's health ministry was viewed as an effort to crack down on a flourishing trade in unproven stem-cell therapies, which are widely offered and loosely regulated in the country.

Telescope rivals

The US National Science Foundation (NSF) has launched a competition for a giant ground-based telescope — even though it can't provide funds to build or operate such an instrument until at least 2020 (see *Nature* 479, 18–19; 2011). Two rival US projects, the Thirty Meter Telescope and the Giant Magellan Telescope, hope to earn some backing from the government agency, despite the lack of spare cash. The NSF intends to announce the winning proposal by October 2012.

Indian overhaul

India needs to transform its scientific landscape if it is to avoid falling further behind other nations, says the country's Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh. His remarks, at the country's largest annual science congress, in Bhubaneswar on 3 January, were triggered by a December 2011 report from his scientific advisory council, which urged him to make structural administration changes, send people abroad for PhD studies and create centres of excellence. India's scientists have heard calls for reform before — but the council's chair, C.N.R. Rao,



PURAVIDA FOTOGRAFIA/DEMOTIX/CORBIS

Chilean reserve scorched by wildfires

Forest fires in Chile have ravaged almost 15,000 hectares of native forest and steppe in the Torres del Paine National Park in Patagonia — burning more than 8% of one of Chile's most important protected areas. The fires began on 27 December, allegedly caused by a tourist, and by 5 January, five of six pockets of fire in

the park region had been controlled. Chile continues to battle fires in other regions. Fires in 2005 and 1985 caused similar destruction in the park, which the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has designated as a biosphere reserve. See go.nature.com/ubvjvq for more.

thinks that the government will take the panel's advice seriously. See go.nature.com/cksmj6 for more.

Beijing smog

Residents of China's capital can expect to get more realistic assessments of the city's air quality. The municipal government said on 5 January that it would publicly report data on levels of particles smaller than 2.5 micrometres across (PM_{2.5}), and would report hourly (rather than daily) on other pollutants, such as sulphur dioxide. Without PM_{2.5} monitoring, public assessments had always underestimated Beijing's air pollution, much to residents'

anger. China is working towards a stricter nationwide air-quality standard that includes measurements on ozone and PM_{2.5}, but this will not be rolled out until 2016.

Antibiotic ban

The US Food and Drug Administration is restricting some uses of a major class of antibiotic in farm animals, to slow down the rate at which microbes acquire resistance to the drugs. On 4 January, the agency banned unapproved uses of cephalosporins in cattle, pigs, chickens and turkeys — a ban that it had already ordered in 2008, but revoked after protests from farmers, drug firms and

veterinary surgeons. The new order is less strict than the 2008 rule. See page 125 for more.

Airline carbon row

Global airlines are protesting a European law that requires them to pay for some of the carbon emissions from their flights using European airports. Last week, China's airlines said they would not pay the charges; US airlines have raised prices for European flights, but the country's government is said to be looking at ways to counter the policy. From 1 January, aviation was included in the European Union's Emissions Trading System, with airlines

expected to buy permits covering 15% of their carbon dioxide emissions in 2012. First payments will not be collected until next year.

Safer reactors

France's nuclear regulator is demanding stringent safety upgrades for the country's reactors in response to the disaster at Japan's Fukushima nuclear plant. Its 3 January report was sent to the European Commission, which had asked for 'stress tests' of its member states' reactors. By contrast, a 4 January report from the UK nuclear regulator did not find any fundamental weaknesses in its nation's power stations. See page 121 for more.

PEOPLE

MMR lawsuit

Disgraced medical researcher Andrew Wakefield is suing the *British Medical Journal* (BMJ), its editor Fiona Godlee, and journalist Brian Deer over a string of articles that branded him a fraud (F. Godlee *et al.* *Br. Med. J.* 342, c7452; 2011). Wakefield's work posited a now-discredited link between autism and the combined measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine; in 2010, his 1998 research paper on the subject was retracted and he was struck off the UK medical register for serious professional misconduct.

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Wakefield filed the suit on 3 January in a district court in Texas, where he now lives.

EPA research head

The US Environmental Protection Agency's research head and chief science adviser, Paul Anastas, is leaving the agency after two years in charge. Anastas, a pioneer of green chemistry, spent much of his time reforming the agency's programme for assessing the risks of individual chemicals, while also trying to shift its research focus to a more holistic view of sustainability. He told staff on 5 January that he would be returning in mid-February to his research position at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut.

EVENTS



Drought in China

After a decade-long dry spell, China's largest freshwater lake has shrunk to its smallest size in years, state media said on

5 January. The area of Poyang Lake, in the eastern Jiangxi province, was 183 square kilometres early this year, nearly half the average of 344 square kilometres recorded since 1951. The drought has left thousands of fishing boats stranded on the exposed lake bed (pictured).

BUSINESS

Cheap genomes

The US\$1,000 genome has arrived — according to US biotech firm Life Technologies of Carlsbad, California, which promised on 10 January that its new bench-top sequencing device could break the symbolic cost barrier. The company said that its \$149,000 Ion Proton sequencer, the latest version of the Ion Personal Genome Machine that it launched late in 2010 (see *Nature* 475, 278; 2011), would be able to sequence a genome in a day for \$1,000.

Hepatitis C hopefuls

Pharmaceutical giant Bristol-Myers Squibb of New York City has become the latest company to spend billions on the promise of hepatitis C treatments. On 7 January, the firm said that it would pay US\$2.5 billion to acquire Inhibitex, a biopharmaceutical company based in Alpharetta, Georgia. Inhibitex's main asset is a compound against

COMING UP

12 JANUARY

The *British Medical Journal* and Britain's Committee on Publication Ethics host a London meeting on how best to manage research misconduct in the United Kingdom.

13 JANUARY

India may have gone a year without reporting a case of polio — a milestone that could see it removed from the list of countries where the disease is still endemic.

14–16 JANUARY

Russia's failed Mars mission, Phobos-Grunt, is expected to fall back to Earth.

hepatitis C that is in phase II trials. Last November, Gilead Sciences in Foster City, California, splashed out \$11 billion on biotech firm Pharmasset of Princeton, New Jersey, which has three treatments for hepatitis C in clinical trials. See go.nature.com/qjoqfn for more on hepatitis C drugs.

Teva rethink

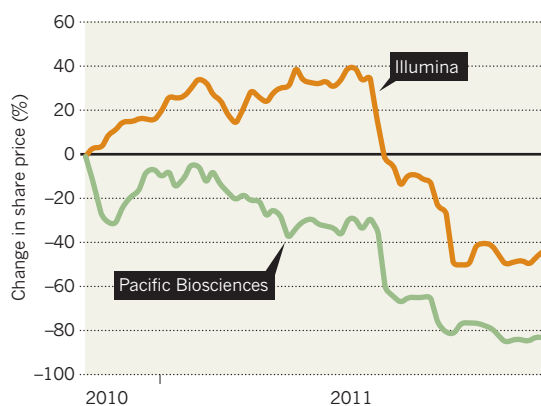
Israeli pharmaceutical firm Teva, the world's largest maker of generic drugs, may shift its focus towards branded medicines after it announced a new chief executive. Jeremy Levin, former head of strategy and alliances at Bristol-Myers Squibb in New York City, has a reputation for making external partnerships and acquisitions and is expected to continue his approach at Teva, which is headquartered near Tel Aviv. "Medicines are medicines," he told investors in a conference call on 3 January. "It doesn't matter if they are branded or generic."

TREND WATCH

Companies in the gene-sequencing industry — such as Illumina of San Diego, California — are suffering because of slack demand for their machines. But one of the hardest hit is Pacific Biosciences, based in Menlo Park, California, whose share price has fallen more than 82% since its initial public offering in October 2010. The firm has also been hit with a class-action lawsuit alleging that it made misleading statements about its technology in a prospectus shown to potential investors.

GENE-SEQUENCING STOCK SUFFERS

Pacific Biosciences has fared worse than other sequencing companies since it went public in 2010.



SOURCE: NASDAQ

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