

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

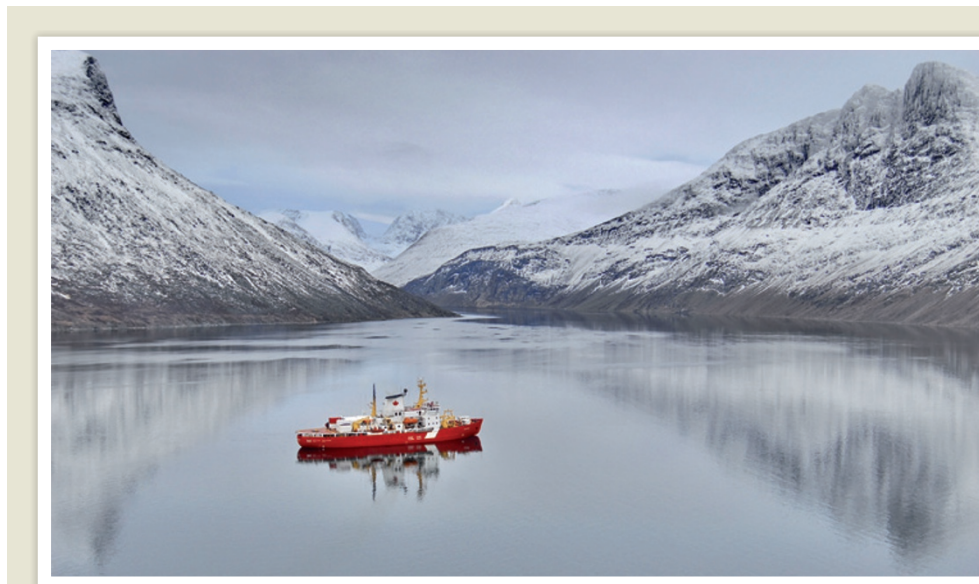
POLICY

Global Fund turmoil

The executive director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, Michel Kazatchkine, has resigned after five years in charge. Kazatchkine, a French clinical immunologist, said on 24 January that he couldn't continue after the fund's board created the position of general manager, part of a restructuring plan agreed after the fund found corruption affecting some US\$39 million of its grants (see *Nature* 470, 6; 2011). Based in Geneva, Switzerland, the fund is struggling to raise cash and has frozen the funding of new grants until 2014. But on 26 January, it received a \$750-million bonus pledged from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. See page 7 for more.

Russian restraints

Physicists at one of Russia's leading research institutes have mounted an Internet campaign to draw attention to strict new budgetary and security policies that they say are hindering their work. Last year, Russia's government moved the Institute for Theoretical and Experimental Physics (ITEP) in Moscow, and two other



K. LEVESQUE/ARCTICNET

Engine trouble scuppers Arctic work

Canada's Arctic research vessel the CCGS *Amundsen* (pictured) has been put out of action while cracks in four of its six engines are repaired, forcing researchers to cancel the ship's research programme for 2012. The *Amundsen* can be used for science for up to 152 days a year, but only two six-week legs

had been planned for this year. "If it had to happen, this was a good year for it," says Martin Fortier, executive director of ArcticNet, a research network based at Laval University in Quebec City, Canada, that provides funding and logistics for Arctic research in Canada. See go.nature.com/7dqkt1 for more.

institutions, out of the state-owned nuclear corporation Rosatom and into the jurisdiction of the Kurchatov Institute in Moscow. The new administration has restricted trips abroad for scientists, and blocked visits from foreign researchers, ITEP physicists say. See go.nature.com/getmp7 for more.

Nanotech risks

The US National Research Council has added its voice to calls for high-quality research into the risks of nanotechnology. A report released on 25 January urges a more coordinated research strategy to cover questions such as how many nanoparticles of different kinds are being released into the environment, and who is

being exposed to them. It also criticizes the dual role of the US National Nanotechnology Initiative: promotional activities should be separate from the oversight of research into risks, the report says. See go.nature.com/8zospl for more.

Indian space fracas

The former chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) in Bangalore and three of his former ISRO colleagues have been barred from holding any government job. Gopalan Madhavan Nair was sanctioned after an investigation into a satellite deal between Antrix, the ISRO's commercial arm, and Bangalore-based telecommunications company, Devas Multimedia. The 2005

deal was well below market value, and the government scrapped it in February 2011. Nair and others deny wrongdoing; Nair blames his troubles on his successor at the ISRO, Koppilli Radhakrishnan. See go.nature.com/wl5avm for more.

Yucca's successor

The United States should create a programme to identify permanent and interim storage systems for nuclear waste, according to a 26 January report by a White House commission. In its final report, the commission — established in January 2010 after the administration of President Barack Obama halted work on the controversial proposed repository at Yucca Mountain

JOURNALISM AWARD



Nature reporter Ewen Callaway last week won a UK Medical Journalists' Association award for 'Fighting for a cause', a News Feature on chronic fatigue syndrome and viruses (*Nature* 471, 282–285; 2011).

NASA/JPL-CALTECH/CORNELL/ARIZONA STATE UNIV.

in Nevada — recommended setting up a new agency with dedicated funding. It also proposed a “consent-based approach” to nuclear storage, which involves finding communities that are willing to host waste.

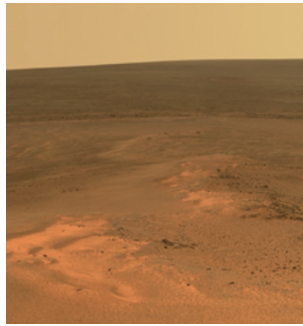
Japanese merger

Japan’s government is planning to cut costs by merging five prominent research organizations. Plans announced on 20 January would create one body to oversee the RIKEN network of basic-research laboratories; the National Institute for Materials Science; the Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology; the National Research Institute for Earth Science and Disaster Prevention; and the Japan Science and Technology Agency, the national funding body. See page 19 for more.

RESEARCH

Eight years on Mars

NASA’s Mars rover Opportunity marked its eighth anniversary on the red planet on 25 January, perched on an outcrop called Greeley Haven (a view from which is pictured), on the rim of a massive crater named Endeavour. The rover, heading into its fifth Martian winter, has driven 34.4 kilometres so far. Its instruments are



fading: the decay of a cobalt-57 radiation source in the rover’s Mössbauer spectrometer, for example, means that measurements of iron-containing minerals that used to take less than an hour now require weeks of work.

Planetary plethora

NASA’s Kepler mission announced the discovery of 26 planets on 26 January, bringing the number of planets verified by the space probe to 61. Around 2,300 candidate planets still await confirmation. The latest findings are scattered across 11 planetary systems. See go.nature.com/hn3icx for more.

Top climate risks

Severe flooding is the United Kingdom’s most pressing climate-change risk, according to an assessment of the nation’s threats and opportunities under various climate scenarios. The study,

which was published on 25 January, has been lauded for its innovative methodology, although it acknowledges that its confidence in many of the findings is ‘low’ or ‘medium’. Britain will decide what actions to take when it publishes a national adaptation plan in 2013. See go.nature.com/7smiq5 for more.

PEOPLE

Chief scientist gap

The post of chief scientist at the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in Washington DC is to remain vacant after the administration of President Barack Obama withdrew its nomination of marine geochemist Scott Doney on 24 January — almost 18 months after Doney was put forward for the role. US Senator David Vitter (Republican, Louisiana) had put a hold on the confirmation process in protest at the administration’s decision to issue a drilling moratorium after the April 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. The agency has not had a chief scientist since 1996.

FUNDING

Neglected diseases

Drug companies, philanthropists, national governments and the World

COMING UP

9 FEBRUARY

The maiden voyage of Europe’s Vega rocket, a launcher for small satellites including research missions, begins. See go.nature.com/yd27mv for more.

Health Organization (WHO) are coordinating to tackle neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) such as sleeping sickness, Chagas disease, leprosy and river blindness. In a joint announcement on 30 January, the WHO laid out a road map to control or eliminate ten NTDs by 2020, and drug companies announced expansions and extensions to drug-donation programmes amounting to 1.4 billion treatments a year. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation says that it will give US\$363 million over five years for NTD research. See go.nature.com/ksscgb for more.

BUSINESS

Illumina bid

A US\$5.7-billion takeover bid for the dominant company in the DNA-sequencing industry spurred a rally in genome-technology stocks last week. On 25 January, the drug giant Roche, based in Basel, Switzerland, announced its intention to buy Illumina in San Diego, California. Roche is betting that the sequencing market will soon lead to clinical applications in diagnostics and drug discovery. Illumina’s board of directors is still considering the proposal but has said it may offer investors cheap shares in the event that Roche starts to gain too much stock, in an effort to make a takeover more expensive. See go.nature.com/2vmedh for more.

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TREND WATCH

Venture-capital biotechnology funding in the United States grew by 22% from 2010 to reach US\$4.7 billion last year, according to a 20 January report. Venture-capital funding rose by 22% overall (see chart), with clean technology up 12%. But investors are sticking to established firms: the number of biotech and medical-device firms raising their first round of venture-capital reached a 15-year low, says Jonathan Leff, managing director of private-equity firm Warburg Pincus in New York.

VENTURE CAPITAL'S RECOVERY

Investment in young US firms is nearing pre-recession levels, with the biotechnology and clean-technology sectors tracking the overall rise.

