

# SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

## EVENTS

### Afghan quake

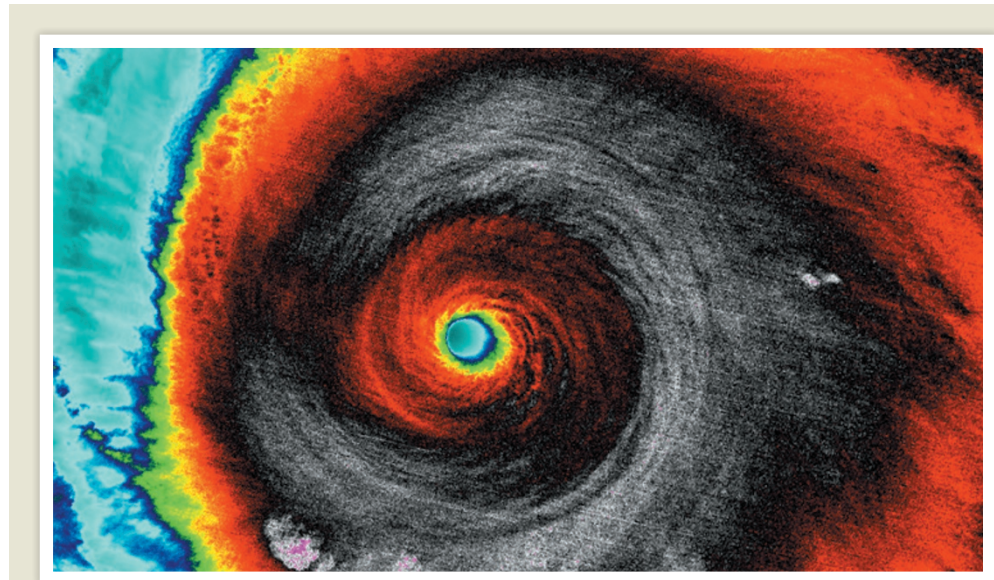
At least 300 people have been killed, with the number expected to rise, after a magnitude-7.5 earthquake hit northeast Afghanistan on 26 October. The strong quake, which according to the US Geological Survey struck 76 kilometres south of the city of Fayzabad at a depth of around 210 kilometres, caused landslides and avalanches in the remote Hindu Kush region and sent tremors that were felt in neighbouring Pakistan and as far away as Delhi in India. Earthquakes in the tectonically active region result from the collision of the Indian subcontinent with central Asia.

### Science subpoenaed

The chairman of a US congressional committee has issued a subpoena requesting to see all documents and communications related to a June study by federal scientists showing that global warming has continued unabated over the past 15 years. Lamar Smith (Republican, Texas), chair of the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, issued the subpoena on 13 October after the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration refused to provide internal communications. The subpoena came to light publicly on 23 October after Democrat Bernice Johnson from Texas objected to the “illegitimate harassment of our Nation’s research scientists”.

### Meltdown payout

Japan’s Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare has said that it will pay industrial-accident compensation to a member of the clean-up crew who worked on the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant and who has



UW/CIMSS/WILLIAM STRAKA III

## Hurricane Patricia smashes records

Hurricane Patricia broke a slew of meteorological records just before it pounded the west coast of Mexico on 23 October (pictured in an infrared satellite image). The category-5 storm intensified rapidly before making landfall, with wind speeds of almost 324 kilometres per hour and a central pressure of 87.9 kilopascals, making

it the strongest hurricane ever recorded in the Western Hemisphere. Heavy rains raked the coast between the cities of Puerto Vallarta and Manzanillo, causing landslides, but the devastation was less than feared because the most intense winds and storm surge struck in relatively lightly populated areas.

recently developed cancer. According to the Japanese media, the ministry said on 20 October that the causal link between the worker’s exposure and his leukaemia was “unclear”. The government could be exposed to many more claims. Thousands of workers took part in the clean-up operations after three reactors went into meltdown in March 2011, following an earthquake and a tsunami.

## POLICY

### Bonn climate talks

A draft text for a global greenhouse-gas-reduction agreement was drawn up at talks in Bonn, Germany, between 19 and 23 October. During the talks, Sri Lanka and the United Arab Emirates

became the 155th and 156th countries to submit pledges for mandatory domestic action, which will be at the core of any United Nations climate agreement made in Paris this December. Meanwhile, in a briefing released on 21 October, the International Energy Agency said that US\$13.5 trillion need to be invested globally in energy-efficiency and low-carbon technologies over the next 15 years to compensate for the planned reduction in fossil-fuel use.

### Marine reserve

The Congress of Palau approved plans to create a 500,000-square-kilometre marine reserve around the Pacific island nation on 22 October. The

announcement came in the same week as an analysis showed that the amount of the world’s oceans that is ‘strongly protected’, with some fishing allowed, or ‘fully protected’ has increased from 0.1% to 1.6% in the past decade (J. Lubchenco and K. Grorud-Colvert *Science* **350**, 382–383; 2015). The area that is afforded some level of protection is 3.5%, still well short of the internationally agreed target of 10% by 2020.

### Climate regulation

Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif endorsed proposals to regulate hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) under the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. Commonly used as refrigerants, HFCs were created as alternatives to

chlorofluorocarbons, which damage the ozone layer — but HFCs are still powerful greenhouse gases. Sharif declared his support in a joint statement with US President Barack Obama on 22 October after a visit to the White House. At a meeting in Dubai on 1–5 November, parties to the Montreal Protocol will consider amendments intended to phase out HFCs.

## PEOPLE

**Science top job**

Australia's new prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, appointed engineer Alan Finkel as chief scientist on 27 October. Finkel, who co-founded the popular-science magazine *Cosmos* and is currently chancellor of Monash University, is a vocal advocate of nuclear power as a carbon-neutral energy source, and of the need for policies to combat climate change. Media reports suggest that Finkel's appointment may signal a policy shift in a country in which nuclear energy is banned and whose previous prime minister was a notorious climate-change sceptic. Finkel said in a press conference that he wanted to see the end of the use of coal, oil and gas in the country, with renewables and nuclear power being explored to achieve zero-emissions energy.

**Lisa Jardine dies**

Historians of science, politicians and researchers paid tribute on 26 October after it was announced that historian Lisa Jardine (pictured) had died. Jardine's hugely varied career included work on eighteenth-century scientist Robert Hooke and the scientific revolution. She chaired Britain's Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority between 2008 and 2014, during a period when the agency led the way in regulating mitochondrial replacement and other cutting-edge scientific advances. Mitochondrial-replacement therapy was made legal in Britain in February 2015.

## RESEARCH

**Mars lander**

Europe's first Mars rover, ExoMars, looks set to land on a vast, clay-rich plain called Oxia Planum, the

European Space Agency (ESA) announced on 21 October. ExoMars, a joint endeavour between ESA and Russia's space agency Roscosmos, will land in 2019 and is designed to look for evidence of life. The craft's instruments will include a drill capable of burrowing 2 metres into the Martian surface. Oxia Planum was picked from a shortlist of four potential landing sites (see *Nature* 508, 19–20; 2014); the agencies will confirm the choice six months before the mission's 2018 launch.

## FACILITIES

**Telescope closed**

The United Kingdom Infrared Telescope (UKIRT) atop Mauna Kea in Hawaii will be permanently shuttered, making it the third closed to accommodate the next-generation Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT). The University of Hawaii took over the UKIRT — the most scientifically productive ground-based telescope worldwide — from the UK Science and Technology Facilities Council last year. The decision to close stems from a long-term decommissioning plan, which identifies the UKIRT as a site to be restored to its natural state. Hawaii's governor has called for closure of one-quarter of Mauna Kea's 13

## COMING UP

**1–4 NOVEMBER**

Researchers hoping to catch up on the latest in cancer genomics can do so at a European Molecular Biology Laboratory conference in Heidelberg, Germany.

[go.nature.com/p5uqwp](http://go.nature.com/p5uqwp)

**1–4 NOVEMBER**

The Geological Society of America holds its annual meeting in Baltimore, Maryland.

[go.nature.com/ks35w9](http://go.nature.com/ks35w9)

**4–7 NOVEMBER**

Budapest hosts the 2015 World Science Forum, themed 'the enabling power of science'.

[www.sciforum.hu](http://www.sciforum.hu)

telescopes by the time the TMT becomes operational in the 2020s (see *Nature* 526, 24–28; 2015).

## BUSINESS

**23andMe revamp**

Genetic-testing company 23andMe, based in Mountain View, California, launched a revamped consumer test on 21 October. The product offers information about a customer's genetic-carrier status for 36 diseases, marking the first time that 23andMe has been allowed to provide medically relevant results since the US Food and Drug Administration banned the inclusion of detailed predictive information in tests in November 2013. Previously, the product tested for 240 health conditions. With a few exceptions, carrier-status tests do not say anything about the health of the individual and are mostly for rare diseases. See [go.nature.com/5vicei](http://go.nature.com/5vicei) and page 609 for more.

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## TREND WATCH

The number of US biomedical postdocs fell 5.5% between 2010 and 2013, to just over 38,000, with losses getting bigger each year, according to an analysis (H. H. Garrison *et al.* *FASEB J.* <http://doi.org/8m3>; 2015). The main reason for the drop seems to be fewer positions for postdocs, but the time that individuals spend as postdocs is also falling. From 1979 to 2010, the number of US postdocs in the biomedical sciences rose steadily, from just over 10,000 to more than 40,000. See [go.nature.com/fbkl5y](http://go.nature.com/fbkl5y) for more.

**POSTDOCS IN DECLINE?**

The number of researchers in US postdoctoral positions is starting to fall, particularly in the biomedical sciences — although the number of new PhDs is still rising.

