

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

POLICY

US labs to close

The US Department of Energy is planning to temporarily close some of its national laboratories, as the ongoing US government shutdown prevents the agency from paying the contractors that run the labs. Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico will close on 18 October, and the nearby Sandia National Laboratories in Albuquerque will close on 21 October. Other facilities, including Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland, Washington, have funds to remain open until at least early November. See go.nature.com/ehltbi for more.

Antarctic freeze

The US National Science Foundation is recalling staff and scientists from Antarctica as a result of the US government shutdown, it announced on 8 October. Almost all science at the three US bases will cease, and only a minimal crew will stay to maintain facilities. Depending on the length of the shutdown, which began on 1 October, the move could effectively end this year's fieldwork at McMurdo, Amundsen–Scott and Palmer stations. See go.nature.com/w48czc for more.

Mercury treaty

More than 90 countries signed a treaty to limit mercury use and pollution at a United Nations conference in Kumamoto, Japan, on 10 October. The Minamata Convention on Mercury seeks to curb emissions of the metal from power plants and other industrial facilities, and to limit its use in products from batteries and light bulbs to cosmetics and medical equipment (see go.nature.com/vqch6y). The treaty will enter into force once it has been



BISWARJAN ROUT/AP

Warnings save lives in Indian cyclone

India's strongest cyclone in 14 years tore up crops and blew away buildings, but caused fewer casualties than feared owing to advance evacuations of at least 1 million people. Cyclone Phailin hit northeastern India on 12 October, with satellite estimates from the US Joint Typhoon Warning Center suggesting that, before

it made landfall, storm winds blew at up to 260 kilometres per hour: on a par with a 1999 cyclone that killed some 10,000 people in the region. Phailin weakened before it hit land; it caused hundreds of millions of dollars of damage, but, in contrast to the 1999 storm, only 27 deaths had been reported as *Nature* went to press.

ratified by 50 countries, which is expected to take three to four years.

Stem-cell trial off

Italy's health minister put an end to a planned clinical trial of a controversial stem-cell therapy on 10 October, which the government had previously agreed to finance with €3 million (US\$4 million). In a stinging report, the scientific advisory committee appointed by the minister said that the clinical protocol proposed by the Brescia-based Stamina Foundation was inadequately described, lacked a scientific basis and was potentially dangerous. The therapy has divided Italian society for more than a year (see *Nature* 495, 418–419; 499, 125; 2013).

Fracking studies

The European Parliament proposed on 9 October to toughen regulations on the use of hydraulic fracturing for oil and gas exploration. The technique, also known as fracking, involves pumping a slurry of water, sand and chemicals underground to fracture shale formations and release hydrocarbons. Under the proposed rule, which was adopted by 332 votes to 311, companies seeking to exploit shale formations would first be required to conduct environmental-impact studies.

E-cigarette vote

On 8 October, the European Parliament voted to tighten regulations on tobacco products across the European Union (EU), but opted to

scale back proposed rules for electronic cigarettes. The European Commission and the European Council, which represents the governments of the 28 EU member states, have pushed for regulation of e-cigarettes as medical devices. The parliament voted to treat them as tobacco products unless they are marketed with health claims. Europe's legislative bodies must now negotiate and agree on the final legislation. See go.nature.com/fpk7ra for more.

RESEARCH

Malaria trial

GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) will apply next year for European regulatory approval of the candidate malaria vaccine

RTS/S/AS01, the London-based pharmaceutical giant announced on 8 October. GSK and the PATH Malaria Vaccine Initiative, a global programme that is co-developing the treatment, released 18-month follow-up data from a phase III clinical trial of children in Africa, which largely reinforced results reported at 12 months (see go.nature.com/2bgpl8). The treatment offered only modest protection for most children. It showed especially weak results in babies treated at 6–12 weeks of age — the vaccine's target group (see go.nature.com/gmw9ib). See page 271 for more.

Badger beef

A UK experiment to control the spread of bovine tuberculosis by culling badgers (*Meles meles*) is causing political strife. After markedly fewer badgers were killed than originally mandated for the six-week pilot cull, the UK environment department said that it would extend the experiment. Environment minister Owen Patterson said that there were fewer badgers than thought in the pilot regions, so the cull had been successful. Asked last week if he was “moving the goalposts” to make this claim, he replied that “the badgers have moved the goalposts”.



PEOPLE

New space chief

Russian space agency chief Vladimir Popovkin was replaced on 10 October following a series of failed launches. In July, a Russian Proton-M rocket carrying navigation satellites crashed seconds after launching. Former deputy defence minister Oleg Ostapenko (pictured) was named to take over the federal space agency Roscosmos. See go.nature.com/vwuqun for more.

Chemistry Nobel

This year's Nobel Prize in Chemistry was won by computational biologist Michael Levitt at Stanford University School of Medicine, California, together with chemists

Martin Karplus at the University of Strasbourg in France and Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Arieh Warshel at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, for their work on computer modelling of chemical interactions. See page 280 for more.

Nobel Peace Prize

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons was awarded the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize on 11 October. The international body, which is based in The Hague, the Netherlands, was recognized for its extensive efforts to eliminate chemical weapons, which include overseeing the current process to destroy Syria's arsenal. See go.nature.com/3lf4kv for more.

BUSINESS

Carbon-capture fall

Plans for large-scale projects to capture and store carbon dioxide emissions are declining, according to the Global Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) Institute, a non-profit CCS-supporting company based in Melbourne, Australia. In its annual report, published on 10 October, the institute counted 65 planned and ongoing projects, down from

COMING UP

21–27 OCTOBER
Improved assessment tools and science-based management of marine ecosystems are discussed at the 3rd International Marine Protected Areas Congress in Marseilles, France.
go.nature.com/hrtazt

22–25 OCTOBER
São Paulo, Brazil, hosts a conference celebrating 15 years of the SciELO Network, an open-access platform for scientific publishing. Topics include trends in open access, metrics for journal quality and research-communication policy.
go.nature.com/tw2tkd

75 in 2012 — a decrease it attributes in part to policy uncertainty. None of the 12 projects now in operation is at a power plant, but one large coal plant in Saskatchewan, Canada, is scheduled to start capturing carbon in April.

Lithium concerns

The US Government Accountability Office in Washington DC has warned of a looming shortage of lithium-7, a radioactive isotope used to maintain safe cooling at more than half of the 100 nuclear power plants in the United States. On 9 October, the agency said that previous government assessments underestimated the country's demand for the isotope and overlooked uncertainties about future supplies. The isotope has not been produced in the United States since 1963, and can be obtained only from Russia or China.

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TREND WATCH

The number of planets detected outside the Solar System was expected to surpass 1,000 this week, according to the Extrasolar Planets Encyclopaedia, which is run by Jean Schneider of the Paris Observatory. But Schneider notes that the precise count is complicated by the lack of any consensus on what defines a planet, and uncertainty about some remote measurements. NASA's Kepler mission has identified thousands more candidate exoplanets that have yet to be confirmed.

EXOPLANET CATALOGUE NEARS 1,000

Most recent exoplanets were found by NASA's Kepler mission, which detected dips in starlight caused by a transiting planet.

