

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

POLICY

US budget proposal

President Barack Obama proposed nearly US\$143 billion for research and development in his 10 April budget plan, an increase of about 1% above 2012 levels. Applied research is slated to get \$1.8 billion more than basic science in the battle for funds. See go.nature.com/8i6bon and page 277 for more.

Global health plan

The United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organization on 12 April announced a US\$6.7-billion plan to treat and prevent childhood pneumonia and diarrhoea, which together kill 2 million children under the age of 5 each year. The Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Pneumonia and Diarrhoea aims to cut deaths from these conditions by 67% and 95%, respectively, by 2025. It outlines 15 initiatives including wider vaccination, improved sanitation, provision of antibiotics and promotion of hand-washing.

Polio campaign

Leading scientists have supported a new global strategy to rid the world of polio by 2018. More than 400 researchers and public-health experts signed a

NUMBER CRUNCH

\$2.27 m

The amount paid at auction for Francis Crick's Nobel medal. The buyer was Jack Wang, chief executive of Chinese firm Biomob, which sells electromagnetic aids for healing. See go.nature.com/w43awo for more.



KATE HOLT/EYEVINE

Drought kills agricultural profit

Land degradation and desertification are causing huge reductions in agricultural profits in the world's poorest nations, according to a report presented at the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). The first assessment of its kind in more than 20 years calculates that Guatemala, for example, lost 24% of its agricultural gross domestic product to environmental degradation. The findings were presented at the UNCCD's second scientific

conference, on 9 April in Bonn, Germany. Nearly 3.7 million people in East Africa still require food assistance after droughts in Kenya (pictured) and other nations wiped out crops in 2011, the UNCCD says. "Desertification, land degradation and drought are key constraints to building social and environmental resilience, achieving global food security and delivering meaningful poverty reduction," said UNCCD executive secretary Luc Gnacadja at the meeting.

letter published on 11 April, endorsing plans to halt the spread of the virus in Nigeria, Pakistan and Afghanistan (the three countries never to interrupt transmission), and to integrate polio immunization with the delivery of other childhood vaccines. See page 290 for more on polio eradication.

RESEARCH

The costs of storms

Economic losses from powerful thunderstorms in the United States (those that cause more than US\$250 million in damages) doubled between 1970 and 2009, even when

normalized for socioeconomic changes and the growth of urban areas. Risk researchers with the insurance company Munich Re, based in Germany, presented the result at the meeting of the European Geosciences Union in Vienna last week. The increase mirrors the growing frequency of meteorological conditions that favour formation of thunderstorm cells, they say. See go.nature.com/qfltrq for more.

Telescope go-ahead

Hawaiian officials have given permission for the construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) on

the 4,200-metre-high Mauna Kea mountain in Hawaii, project leaders announced on 13 April. Building could begin as early as April 2014. Thirteen telescopes already dot the sacred mountain, but the TMT would be the largest; the biggest optical instruments currently on Mauna Kea are the twin 10-metre Keck telescopes. See go.nature.com/cy6r5s for more.

BUSINESS

Publishing deal

The British start-up company Mendeley — a social academic network based in London, through which more than

MATT DUNHAM/AP

2 million users share and comment on research papers and references — has been bought by Elsevier, the Amsterdam-based science-publishing giant announced on 9 April. Neither company declared how much Mendeley had sold for, but observers familiar with the deal said that Elsevier had paid £45 million (US\$69 million).

Lab kit billions

A company that manufactures scientific instruments has announced one of the largest business deals of 2013 so far. Thermo Fisher Scientific, headquartered in Waltham, Massachusetts, said on 15 April that it will buy biotech-equipment manufacturer Life Technologies of Carlsbad, California, for US\$13.6 billion. The aim of the acquisition is to create a leading company in lab-kit production for research in proteomics, genomics and cell biology. See go.nature.com/27q9hf for more.

PEOPLE

IVF pioneer dies

Robert Edwards, Nobel-prizewinning pioneer of human *in vitro* fertilization (IVF), died on 10 April in Cambridge, UK, aged 87. Edwards (**pictured**) and his colleague Patrick Steptoe, who died in 1988, began research



into the technique in the late 1960s despite public criticism and tight research budgets. The first child conceived through IVF, Louise Brown, was born in 1978. Edwards was the sole recipient of the 2010 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for his work; Steptoe was not included because the prizes are not awarded posthumously.

Jewell confirmed

The US Senate voted on 10 April to confirm Sally Jewell, chief executive of the outdoor retailer Recreational Equipment, as the new head of the Department of the Interior, replacing Ken Salazar. As the department's chief, Jewell will oversee conservation, recreation, energy development and mining activities on more than 200 million hectares of public land and almost 700 million hectares offshore.

FUNDING

Space plans

Russia will give its Roscosmos space programme a massive US\$52-billion rise between now and 2020, President Vladimir Putin announced on 12 April. The first mission from its new Vostochny space port will be sent by 2015 with manned missions launching in 2018. 'Super-heavy' rockets capable of Moon missions are slated to be ready by 2020. See go.nature.com/grpejn for more.

EVENTS

Bird flu spread

The H7N9 avian flu virus has expanded its geographical range, with two human cases detected in Beijing, northern China, and two in the central Henan province. Previously, the virus had been limited to Shanghai and neighbouring regions on the eastern seaboard. As *Nature* went to press, 63 human cases including 14 deaths have been reported since China announced the first cases on 31 March. There is not yet any evidence of sustained human-to-human spread. See go.nature.com/bklq5s for more.

Romanian protest

All 19 members of Romania's National Research Council resigned on 12 April in protest at budget cuts and

COMING UP

23 APRIL

The US Institute of Medicine holds a public meeting in Washington DC to talk about priorities for research to reduce the threat of firearm-related violence.

go.nature.com/o5zump

22–25 APRIL

In Darmstadt, Germany, experts meet in a quadrennial gathering to discuss how to detect and clear up space debris — useless chunks of satellites and rockets that clutter Earth's orbit.

go.nature.com/uoyjtj

interference. The government had told the council how it should distribute basic research grants after slashing its budget on 8 April. Two days later, the education ministry launched a call for proposals in applied research, but under new rules removing a legal requirement for international peer review. The council says that such external review is necessary: in January, its respected peer-review system identified plagiarism in grant applications.

To steal a ship

A woman was detained by police in San Diego, California, on 9 April after apparently attempting to steal a research vessel belonging to the Scripps Institution of Oceanography. Members of the institute's science team were aboard the 52-metre-long *New Horizon* at the time but slept through the incident, says a Scripps spokesman. The vessel is now en route to Point Conception in California, where it will replace a climate and ocean-acidification monitoring station.

► NATURE.COM

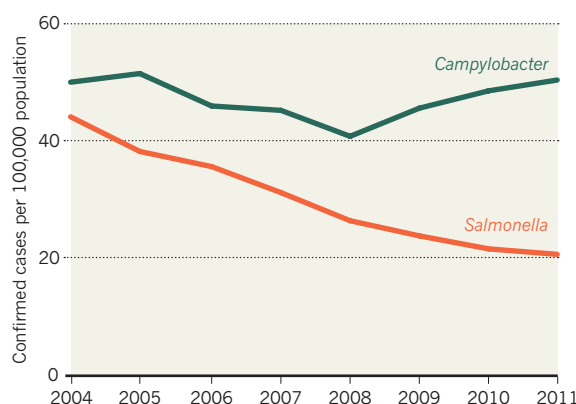
For daily news updates see:
www.nature.com/news

TREND WATCH

A vaccination programme to cut down on *Salmonella* bacteria in poultry is having success in Europe, where reported human cases fell for a seventh consecutive year, the European Food Safety Authority said on 9 April. But human disease caused by *Campylobacter*, the most common cause of food poisoning, is increasing: because infection does not cause disease in poultry, it is difficult to create a vaccine that generates an effective immune response against the bacteria.

BATTLE AGAINST FOOD-BORNE ILLNESS

Europe is cutting *Salmonella* infections — but making little progress in stopping *Campylobacter*.



SOURCE: EFSA/ECDC