

POLITICS

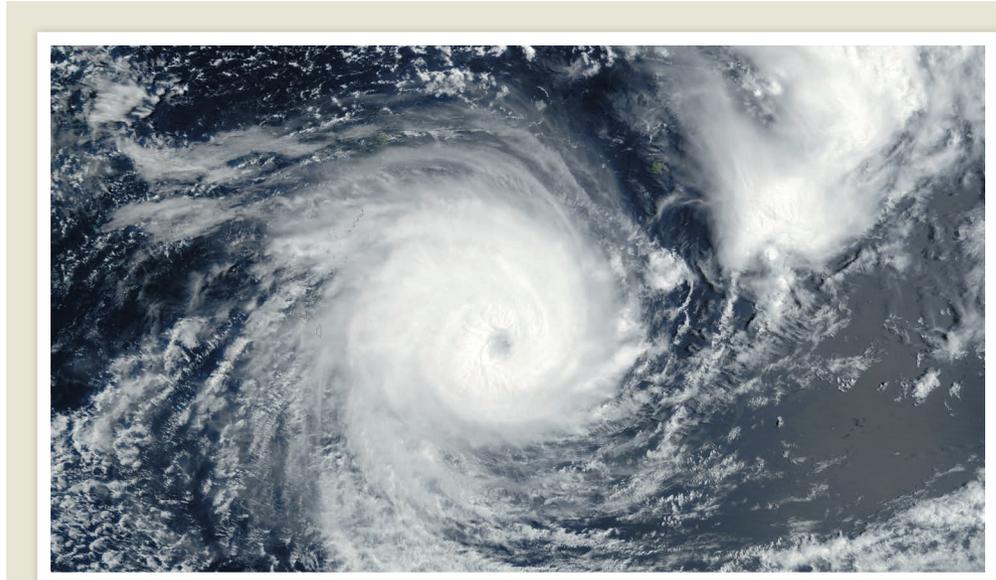
African shifts

Two embattled African leaders resigned last week. South Africa's controversial President Jacob Zuma stepped down on 14 February after pressure from his party, the ruling African National Congress. Zuma's deputy, Cyril Ramaphosa, has replaced him in a move that is expected to bolster international investment confidence in the nation. Ramaphosa's long-time ally Naledi Pandor is South Africa's science minister. The following day, Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn resigned, without naming a successor. The East African country, which is the second most populous on the continent and famous for its archaeological sites, has had three years of civil unrest. Desalegn cited political instability as a reason for his sudden resignation and said that he will continue in the role until his successor is chosen at the next congress of the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front.

AWARDS

Wolf prizes

Quantum-communication pioneers Gilles Brassard at the University of Montreal in Canada and Charles Bennett of IBM in Yorktown Heights, New York, were among the recipients of the 2018 Wolf Prizes on 12 February. In 1984, Brassard and Bennett invented the first technique for sharing an encryption key using quantum effects, which would reveal any eavesdropper's attempt to steal the key. In 1993, they also made the first theoretical proposal for using the quantum phenomenon of entanglement — dubbed spooky action at a distance



NASA EARTH OBSERVATORY

Cyclone Gita wreaks havoc in Pacific

Tropical Cyclone Gita has ravaged several Pacific island countries. The hardest hit was Tonga, where Gita made landfall on 12 February as a category 4 cyclone — with winds reaching 230 kilometres per hour. The cyclone passed over the most populous island, Tongatapu,

destroying more than 100 buildings in the country's capital, Nuku'alofa. Also affected were the nations of Samoa, American Samoa, Fiji and New Caledonia. As *Nature* went to press, Gita had weakened to a category 2 storm, having made landfall in New Zealand on Tuesday.

— to teleport quantum states. The two researchers will share the US\$100,000 physics prize. The Israeli foundation also awarded \$100,000 prizes in agriculture (for honeybee genomics), chemistry (for reticular materials, such as metal-organic frameworks), mathematics and music.

UNIVERSITIES

UK fees review

UK Prime Minister Theresa May said on 19 February that her government would conduct a review of tuition fees for higher education. In 2012, a previous Conservative-led government controversially tripled annual university fees in England and Wales; they now stand at £9,250 (US\$12,960). The review will look at whether courses that cost less to run,

such as those in the arts and humanities, should be cheaper than science and engineering courses. Critics say that higher fees could discourage students from taking science degrees and that research departments could suffer. The review will run until early 2019.

PEOPLE

Astronaut selection

Suzanna Randall, an astronomer at the European Southern Observatory (ESO) in Garching, Germany, has been chosen as a finalist in a private initiative to train the first female German astronaut. She will step in to replace a candidate who left the project, called Die Astronautin. Randall will compete against Insa Thiele-Eich, a meteorologist at the University of Bonn and the

daughter of European Space Agency astronaut Gerhard Thiele, for a chance to fly on the International Space Station. The ESO announced the pick on 16 February.

EVENTS

Lassa outbreak

The World Health Organization (WHO) is escalating its response to an outbreak of Lassa fever in Nigeria, according to a 13 February announcement. The agency will ship protective and diagnostic equipment to the country and send people to help coordinate treatment and do community outreach. Since 1 January, there have been about 615 suspected cases of the viral haemorrhagic fever in the country, of which 193 have been confirmed. The tally

includes 57 deaths for which Lassa was confirmed as the cause. Although the illness is endemic in parts of West Africa, the current number of cases is unusually large.

Mugabe PhD

University of Zimbabwe vice-chancellor Levi Nyagura was arrested on 16 February for his suspected role in awarding an allegedly undeserved PhD to Zimbabwe's former first lady, Grace Mugabe. The wife of toppled leader Robert Mugabe received a doctorate in sociology from the institution in 2014. Staff questioned the degree's credibility at the time, because Mugabe had allegedly completed the work in just three months. The university published the thesis only in January this year after it emerged that Zimbabwe's anti-corruption watchdog was investigating the matter. Nyagura has been released on bail, but is expected to return to court on 5 March, according to local media, which added that Claude Mararike, Mugabe's supervisor, is also facing arrest.

Death campaign

Mathematician and member of the French parliament Cédric Villani has called on the French state to formally recognize the French military's role in the 1957 death of mathematician Maurice Audin (pictured, with his



wife) during the Algerian War of Independence. Audin, a French university lecturer who was a member of the Algerian Communist Party, disappeared during the war. The authorities claimed that he had escaped after being arrested in Algiers for harbouring Communist-Party members; he is now widely believed to have been tortured and killed by the French Army. Villani held a press conference with a member of the French Communist Party on 14 February, Audin's birth date, to publicize the case. He told *Nature* that he hopes more witnesses will come forward "to indicate there is hardly any doubt" about the military's role in Audin's death.

POLICY

Species lawsuit

Nine conservation organizations are suing the US government over changes to water regulations,

which they say could harm endangered species. On 14 February, the Center for Biological Diversity and other groups filed a formal intent to sue the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Army Corps of Engineers for suspending the implementation of a rule that redefines which bodies of water receive federal protection. On 6 February, the EPA and the Army Corps said that they would suspend the rule for two years while they review it. The Southern Environmental Law Center in Charlottesville, Virginia, and 11 states filed separate legal challenges to the suspension decision earlier this month.

Methane rule

On 12 February, the US Bureau of Land Management proposed to revise a rule requiring oil and gas producers to reduce the amount of methane that they burn off or vent to the atmosphere. Methane, a powerful greenhouse gas, is often treated as a waste product by drillers because it's less valuable than oil. The original rule, finalized by the administration of then-president Barack Obama in 2016, was intended to reduce waste and combat climate change. The proposed revisions, pushed for by the oil and gas industry, would

effectively eliminate the new waste-reduction requirements. The US government now claims that the 2016 rule imposed excessive costs on industry, and would inhibit US "energy dominance".

Water management

A landmark agreement in Australia for managing water in the Murray-Darling Basin — a major source of the nation's food crops — is on the verge of collapse. In a Senate vote on 14 February, the opposition Green and Labor parties blocked changes to the 2012 agreement that would have allowed farms upstream in the basin's north to use an additional 70 billion litres of water every year, reducing the amount returned to the environment from 390 billion to 320 billion litres. The water minister of the state of New South Wales, Niall Blair, said he would begin withdrawing the state from the plan. The state of Victoria also condemned the vote, with its water minister Lisa Neville saying the entire plan was at risk. An attempt by either state to withdraw from the plan could provoke a legal challenge from the downstream state of South Australia.

Brain-injury test

On 14 February, the US Food and Drug Administration approved the first blood test for concussion. The test, known as the Brain Trauma Indicator, measures the levels of two proteins that the brain releases after suffering an injury. Until now, physicians have had to rely on brain scans to diagnose concussion, but many people with head injuries show no visible signs of trauma. Test manufacturer Banyan Biomarkers in San Diego, California, says that the test is 97.5% accurate in predicting whether a person has brain lesions, which could help physicians decide whether a brain scan is necessary.

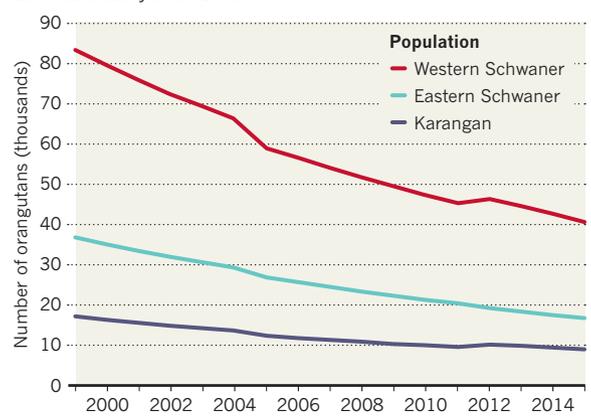
SOURCE: M. VOIGT ET AL., CURR BIOL. HTTP://DOI.ORG/GCX4P2 (2018)

TREND WATCH

The island of Borneo lost more than half of its orangutans (*Pongo pygmaeus*) between 1999 and 2015. Researchers estimate that about 148,500 animals died in that time, many as a result of deforestation driven by logging, palm-oil production and mining. Hunting was also a major factor in the animals' decline, say that the team, which compiled data on nest observations to extrapolate the size of the island's orangutan population during the study. The researchers estimate that 70,000–100,000 orangutans are left.

ORANGUTANS IN PERIL

The number of orangutans in Borneo's three largest populations has declined steadily since 1999.



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