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India boosts university places for lower castes

India has defied protestors and introduced legislation requiring universities and institutes of higher learning to reserve 49.5% of seats for students from lower castes. The change, to start in 2007, is a large increase from the current 22.5% quota.

Doctors have gone on strike against the move, and academics are critical. Students and researchers at the Indian Institutes of Technology and the Indian Institute of Science have appealed to President Abdul Kalam not to approve the legislation.

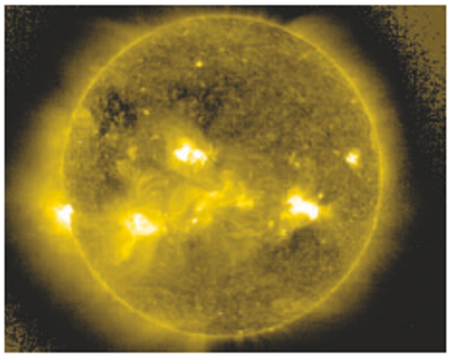
The government says it will spend US$2 billion to increase the total number of students so that the same number of seats would be reserved for students on merit. But critics say this would dilute the standards of teaching.

Solar satellite keeps on going and going...

It's been pronounced nearly dead, restored to health and temporarily blinded. Now the hardest-working satellite in solar physics, the Solar and Heliospheric Observatory (SOHO), has had its mission extended until December 2009.

Launched in 1995 for a two-year mission, SOHO, a joint project of NASA and the European Space Agency, has survived several crises, including technicians losing contact with it in 1998, and solar storms in 2000 that blinded its instruments. But each time the satellite has pulled through.

SOHO will support new spacecraft studying the Sun, including NASA's twin STEREO satellites, due to launch in July, and the European Proba-2, slated for 2007. Project officials estimate that SOHO data have figured in more than 2,400 scientific papers published in peer-reviewed journals.



Staring at the Sun: the SOHO satellite, launched in 1995, has had its mission extended to 2009.

ESA/NASA

French engineer chosen as next leader of Caltech

Jean-Lou Chameau, a French-born civil engineer, will be filling David Baltimore's shoes come 1 September. Chameau will take over from the Nobel-winning biologist as the next president of the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena.

Chameau's background is in geoengineering. Most recently he served as provost at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, another of the country's top engineering schools.

The choice is something of a surprise for the institute, whose past leaders include luminaries such as physicists Robert Millikan, also a Nobel laureate, and Harold Brown, the first scientist to serve as US defence secretary.

German society uses MP3 cash to build sound future

The MP3 digital audio format, developed in Germany ten years ago, has changed the music industry. Now it could also change the fortunes of innovative projects in applied research.

Germany's Fraunhofer Society, which

owns the patent on the MP3 technology, has announced that it will set up a foundation with the €100 million (US$130 million) it earned last year from licence agreements. The idea has yet to be approved by the German government, but if it gets the go-ahead it will fund projects with market potential, such as the development of materials that can adapt to their environment.

The money would be used by the 58 Fraunhofer institutes throughout Germany.

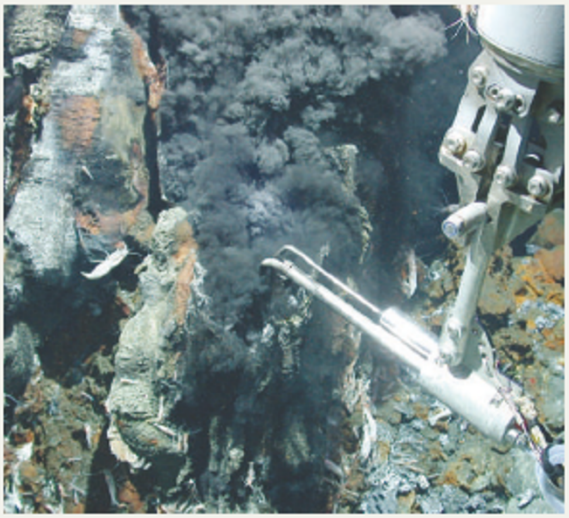
Pakistani–Indian meeting axed after security checks

A conference between Pakistani and Indian scientists has been cancelled after the Pakistani government apparently retracted security clearances given to Indian scientists.

"This is a bizarre turn of events," says conference organizer Saleem Ali of the University of Vermont. The meeting was set for 29–31 May in Islamabad and would have brought Indian and Pakistani geologists together to discuss climatic and seismic issues facing both countries. It would also have explored the idea of turning the contested Siachen glacier into a scientific peace park (see *Nature* 440, 1; 2006).

Ali says he is unsure why the clearances were revoked. "The Pakistani military seems to have got involved," he says, adding that military officials visited several local organizers. He doubts that the conference can now be rescheduled.

Robot delves deep to find the hottest water



MARUM, UNIV. BREMEN

German scientists have measured the hottest temperature ever found at a hydrothermal vent — a crack in the ocean floor where superheated water pours out. Using a temperature sensor on a robot submersible (pictured), the team measured a scorching 407 °C at a depth of 3,000 metres in the equatorial Atlantic.

That's just 5 °C more than the previous record, which was measured in the Pacific. But it's enough of a difference to be important, as the pressure and temperature are great enough to turn the water into a supercritical fluid — a sort of fluid-gas hybrid state. The researchers hope to learn more about the elements dissolved in the mixture.

The team, led by Andrea Koschinsky of the International University of Bremen, Germany, is continuing to probe southwards along the underwater Mid-Atlantic Ridge.

Correction

There was an editing error in our News story on scientific misconduct (*Nature* **441,** 392–393; 2006). We should have said that Jin Chen was at Shanghai Jiaotong University.