

## SCIENCE FOR PEACE

## Pakistan Gives Geology Conference The Cold Shoulder

**NEW DELHI**—Pakistan has pulled the plug on a high-profile conference next week that would have brought together scientists from India and Pakistan in a session designed to set aside hostilities and forge a research plan for the high Himalayas. The blow has left organizers of the science-for-peace event reeling. The cancellation “is completely unexpected and unwarranted,” says co-organizer Jack Shroder, a geologist at the University of Nebraska, Omaha.

The joint project was to focus on the Karakoram range of the Himalayan mountains of northern Kashmir, a high-altitude graveyard for soldiers from the Indian and Pakistani armies, who in reality are far more likely to die from exposure and accidents than enemy fire. Topping the agenda of the conference, funded in part by a \$70,000 grant from the U.S. National Science Foundation and scheduled for 29 to 31 May, was a discussion of how to turn one iconic battleground, the 6100-meter-high Siachen Glacier, into a science peace park. The first step would



**Glacial progress?** Pakistan has scuttled a meeting on turning Siachen Glacier into a research “peace park.”

require that the two countries strike an accord and withdraw their troops. More than 100 scientists from eight countries had registered for the conference, sponsored by Pakistan’s Higher Education Commission (HEC).

On 23 May, however, a geologist at the University of Peshawar e-mailed Shroder that the conference would be postponed “due to unavoidable circumstances.” The decision, he stated, was taken “in consultation” with HEC. A driving force for the cross-border initiative, environmental planner Saleem H. Ali of the University of Vermont in Burlington, told *Science* that Pakistan’s Interior Ministry had pressured HEC to bow out, citing “security reasons.” Ali says HEC did not elaborate on the reasons, although he says HEC officials told him they were keen to go ahead with the event but were overruled. The abrupt postponement came, however, on the opening day of the 10th round of talks between senior officials from the defense ministries of India and Pakistan on how to demilitarize Siachen. As *Science* went to press, the talks were not expected to yield a breakthrough.

The 11th-hour cancellation has caused a major headache for Shroder, who broke the news to participants on 23 May. Some scientists, he noted, were already in transit to Islamabad, where the conference was to be held. “We can only hope that the recovery from this blow to good science will be ultimately redeemed in either Pakistan or India, whichever country steps firmly into the breach and decides to at last do things right,” Shroder says. For now, however, the researchers, like the troops at Siachen, have been left out in the cold.

—PALLAVA BAGLA

## U.S. SCIENCE POLICY

## Senate Panel Backs Social Sciences at NSF

A U.S. senator has blunted her attack on the value of social science research, calming fears that the National Science Foundation (NSF) might be ordered to reduce its support for the discipline.

On 2 May, Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX), chair of the research panel within the Senate committee that oversees NSF and several other science agencies, used a hearing on NSF’s 2007 budget request to harshly criticize several grants funded by NSF’s social, behavioral, and economic sciences directorate (*Science*, 12 May, p. 829). She said such research should be excluded from the president’s proposed doubling of NSF’s budget as part of an initiative to strengthen U.S. competitiveness.

Last week, the full committee approved a

bill (S. 2802) that included NSF’s role in the initiative. But after drafting language that would have restricted NSF’s budget increase to the physical sciences, Hutchison instead introduced an amendment—passed unanimously—that preserves NSF’s mission to fund the breadth of nonmedical scientific research across its \$5.5 billion portfolio. The amendment highlights the importance of the “physical and natural sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics” and explains that “nothing in this section shall be construed to restrict or bias the grant selection process against funding other areas of research deemed by the foundation to be consistent with its mandate, nor to change the core mission of the foundation.”

NSF officials especially welcomed the last

phrase, which allows them to stay the course. Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ), who struck the compromise with Hutchison, says the words are intended to reflect “the importance of the social sciences to U.S. economic competitiveness” and their value in applying technology to societal needs.

Despite her softened stance, Hutchison made it clear that some grants still rankle. Speaking before the committee voted, Hutchison declared that “these projects should not be funded by NSF at a time when we are focusing on trying to increase the number of scientists and engineers,” improve U.S. math and science education, and stay ahead of global competitors. The bill awaits action by the full Senate. The House of Representatives has not yet acted on a similar measure.

—JEFFREY MERVIS

# Science

## Senate Panel Backs Social Sciences at NSF

Jeffrey Mervis

*Science* **312** (5777), 1117.

DOI: 10.1126/science.312.5777.1117b

### ARTICLE TOOLS

<http://science.sciencemag.org/content/312/5777/1117.2>

### RELATED CONTENT

<file:/content/sci/312/5777/news-summaries.full>

### PERMISSIONS

<http://www.sciencemag.org/help/reprints-and-permissions>

Use of this article is subject to the [Terms of Service](#)

---

*Science* (print ISSN 0036-8075; online ISSN 1095-9203) is published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1200 New York Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20005. 2017 © The Authors, some rights reserved; exclusive licensee American Association for the Advancement of Science. No claim to original U.S. Government Works. The title *Science* is a registered trademark of AAAS.