



INTERNATIONAL

The Indian EXPRESS

Wednesday, September 14, 2005

Indian Express

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Gauntlet down on fight over new 'planet'

US, Spanish scientists claim find as their own in unprecedented dispute

DENNIS OVERBYE

Posted online: Wednesday, September 14, 2005 at 0201 hours IST

When a group of Spanish astronomers reported in July that they had discovered a spectacular addition to the solar system, a bright ball of ice almost as big as Pluto sailing out beyond Neptune, Michael Brown of the California Institute of Technology chalked it up to coincidence and bad luck. His own group had been tracking the object, now known as 2003 EL61, for months but had told no one.

Now Brown is asking for an investigation of the Andalusian Institute of Astrophysics' discovery, alleging a serious ethical breach. Archival records, he said, show that only a day before the discovery was reported, computers traced to group leader Jose-Luis Ortiz and his student Pablo Santos-Sanz visited a website containing data on where and when the Caltech group's telescope was pointed.

The information in these observing logs could have been used to help find the object, or simply to confirm that both groups discovered the same object. Depending on what the Spanish astronomers did, their failure to mention the Caltech observations could be considered scientific dishonesty or even fraud, Dr. Brown suggests.

The allegation has flummoxed the International Astronomical Union. Brian Marsden, director of IAU's Minor Planet Centre, the clearinghouse for such discoveries, admits that the IAU had no protocol for adjudicating such a dispute. —NYT

Most distant star exploding sighted

WASHINGTON: In the equivalent of spotting a bonfire at the dawn of time, NASA's orbiting Swift satellite has detected a cosmic conflagration that took place 500 million years after the formation of the universe. The explosion, 12.6 billion light years away, shows that giant stars formed earlier than previously thought. "This is the first direct evidence of very early stars," said Neil Gehrels of the Goddard Space Flight Centre in Maryland. " "It tells us when the dark ages of the early universe were coming to an end," after the Big Bang and before the formation of the earliest stars. "For the first time we can learn about individual stars from near the beginning of time," said Gehrels, the principal investigator on the Swift mission. LAT-WP

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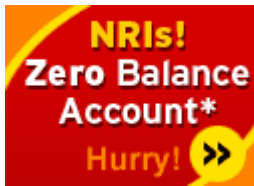
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