

Rice robots

■ The staple food of half the world, rice could also inspire a new generation of smart materials. Researchers at the University of Birmingham, UK, discovered that when compressed slowly, rice grains remain relatively strong. But when squeezed quickly, they become weaker. This surprising behaviour has allowed scientists to create a new material that could one day be used in soft robots that automatically adjust their stiffness and protective equipment to respond differently, depending on the force of an impact.

AGENCIES

