Exploring nuclear matter at neutron star core densities

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Substantial experimental and theoretical efforts worldwide are devoted to explore the phase diagram of strongly interacting matter. At top RHIC and LHC energies, the QCD phase diagram is studied at very high temperatures and very low net-baryon densities. These conditions presumably existed in the early universe about a microsecond after the big bang. For larger net-baryon densities and lower temperatures, it is expected that the QCD phase diagram exhibits a rich structure such as a critical point, a first order phase transition between hadronic and partonic matter, or new phases like quarkyonic matter. The experimental discovery of these prominent landmarks of the QCD phase diagram would be a major breakthrough in our understanding of the properties of nuclear matter.

The Compressed Baryonic Matter (CBM) experiment will be one of the major scientific pillars of the future Facility for Antiproton and Ion Research (FAIR) in Darmstadt. The goal of the CBM research program is to explore the QCD phase diagram in the region of high baryon densities using high-energy nucleus-nucleus collisions. This includes the study of the equation-of-state of nuclear matter at neutron star core densities, and the search for the deconfinement and chiral phase transitions. The CBM detector is designed to measure rare diagnostic probes such as multi-strange hyperons, charmed particles and vector mesons decaying into lepton pairs with unprecedented precision and statistics. Most of these particles will be studied for the first time in the FAIR energy range. In order to achieve the required precision, the measurements will be performed at very high reaction rates of 1 to 10MHz. This requires very fast and radiation-hard detectors, and a novel data read-out and analysis concept based on free streaming front-end electronics and a high-performance computing cluster for online event selection. The layout, the physics performance, and the status of the proposed CBM experimental facility will be discussed.