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'Green cloud' stirs Soviet UFO dispute

By NIGEL WADE in Moscow

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AN encounter between Russian airline pilots and a fast-moving green cloud over Minsk was reported by the Soviet newspaper TRUD yesterday.

Tass, the official news agency, gave international circulation to the report.

It is likely to deepen a rift between Russian scientists over the treatment of reported sightings of unidentified flying objects.

The rift is between sceptical scientists within the Soviet Academy of Sciences and a mixed group of scientists, former Cosmonauts, and laymen, newly set up as the Public Commission on Anomalous Phenomena.

The commission was announced last July and said it would study all UFO reports. It published a box number to which people could send reported sightings, and it says there has been a big response.

According to TRUD, the four-man crew of a TU-134 airliner, with 27,500 flying hours between them, were approaching Minsk on a night flight from Tbilisi, Georgia, to Tallin, Estonia, when they saw what appeared to be a large, unblinking star.

It seemed to shine three beams of light on to the earth from a height of about 40 miles. The brightest of the three formed a "radiantly luminous cone" which lit up houses

A ray of light from the object suddenly lit up the plane and the object "flared up, leaving a green cloud in its stead." The cloud seemed to flash towards the plane. It dropped below, then came up level at 39,000 ft, accompanying the plane in this way "until the end of the flight."

Ground control registered "splashes" on radar, the paper

Russians in UFO probe

RUSSIAN air force bosses are carrying out a secret top-level inquiry into UFO sightings.

At least 300 UFOs have been reported by Soviet military and civilian pilots, it was revealed yesterday.

None of the sightings can be dismissed as hoaxes or genuine mistakes, according to a Russian newspaper report quoted by the New York Times.

The latest incident involved an Aeroflot airliner near Minsk.

The crew and passengers reported seeing a bright yellow light from which a thin, white ray shot to the ground.

The ray of light turned into a green cloud which crossed their flight path and began to take on the shape of a plane.

The crew, all experienced fliers, were convinced they had been buzzed by a UFO.

Ground controllers claimed to have seen the plane being followed by unexplained blips on their radar screens.

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said. Passengers also spotted the strange object accompanying the aircraft; and the cloud, which by then had "assumed the shape of a plane," was seen by the crew of another airliner flying in the opposite direction.

A vice-chairman of the Commission on Anomalous Phenomena and associate member of the Academy of Sciences, Dr Nikolai Zheltukhin, told TRUD the only conclusion that could be drawn was that the aircrew encountered an "unidentified flying object."

Possible explanations

Scientists in the sceptical camp have previously suggested as possible explanations of unusual sightings high solar activity, polar lights, a reaction between atmospheric

gases, satellite launchings, and even collective hallucination.

Dr Vladimir Migulin, director of the Soviet Institute of Earth's Magnetism, has said the Academy of Sciences is doing all the research needed into UFOs. He is critical of "certain amateur groups" which, he says, are interested only in biased search for proofs of non-earthly origins.