

MILLIONS SEE THIRD U.S. ROCKET BLOW UP

By TONY ALLEN-MILLS in New York

THE LOSS of a Delta rocket and its \$57 million (£37,315,000) weather satellite 90 seconds after launch from Cape Canaveral on Saturday night was the American space programme's third consecutive disaster. Like the challenger shuttle tragedy before it, the explosion was witnessed by millions on television.

This time, mercifully, no human lives were lost, but it was a further failure for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration after the Challenger explosion of an Air Force Titan rocket with a secret spy satellite payload.

It all seemed so cruelly familiar — a sleek rocket hurtling into space, a sudden jitter in the gleaming vapour trails, then the unmistakable signal of disaster: An ugly white cloud spewing debris.

Early shutdown

The Delta rocket had been previously launched successfully 45 times in a row without a hint of a major problem, and at the first hiccup in the vapour trail, tracking cameras zoomed on to the 116ft rocket's nose.

Suddenly debris was spraying in Delta's wake as, almost lazily, the speeding missile flipped on its tail and vanished in that bone chilling cloud.

Yesterday Mr William Russell, Nasa project manager, said the rocket's main engines had inexplicably shut down about 70

seconds after launch, and about 2½ minutes before its fuel tank would have emptied.

The rocket was travelling at about 1,400 mph and was 30 miles down range when the shutdown occurred. The flight to that point had appeared strictly normal, with the first set of solid rockets correctly jettisoned at the 65-second mark.

But after the shutdown, the powerless rocket began to drift off trajectory, subjecting its nose to overwhelming aerodynamic pressures, as the nose lifted, its faring, or shield, began to break off, spraying the debris picket up by the cameras.

On the ground, stunned flight controllers stared at their monitors. Just over 90 seconds into the flight a Nasa safety officer sent the command to destroy what was left of the now cartwheeling rocket.

"They finished the job," said Mr Russell.

Shuttle grounded

The failure of Nasa's most reliable rocket leaves the space programme in what one scientist called "chaos."

The shuttle is grounded for at least a year; Titan missions are suspended pending an inquiry into the disaster over Vandenberg Air Force Base, California;

and now the Delta, too, must go back to the drawing board.

There appeared no early technical link in possible causes of the three accidents. The Delta rocket is a seamless structure that does not use the rubber seals suspected of failure in the Challenger mission.

Nasa officials speculated yesterday that electrical or computer failure may have caused the engine shutdown. There is so far no evidence that anything was amiss with the mechanical or propulsion systems.

The debris from the rocket landed in the Atlantic off Cape Canaveral. Scientists will first examine their computers to see if the cause can be detected without having to mount a second major recovery operation.

The Delta was carrying an 885lb geostationary operational environmental satellite, intended for use in tracking hurricanes along the eastern American seaboard. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration had paid Nasa \$42 million (£27,500,000) for the launch.

"We thought we had a good one going," said Mr Chuck Gay, director of the launch. "I don't have any idea as to what happened."

Series of space failures dazes

DT 6/5/86

Nasa's scientists

By TONY ALLEN-MILLS in New York

AS AMERICAN rocket scientists picked up the pieces of their latest rocket failure yesterday a dark mood of shock and bewilderment settled on the offices of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa). The agency was eating humble pie.

This was 25 years to the day after champagne corks popped to celebrate Alan Shepard's triumph as the first American in space.

The men who put golfers on the moon were wilting at the onslaught of Presidential commissions, boards of inquiry and investigating panels, all seeking answers to the questions raised by an unnerving sequence of failures.

Logic and reason seemed temporarily suspended as dazed scientists publicly wondered if their labours were suffering from some mystical curse.

'Crazy to say...'

"It's crazy for a scientist to say it's a jink. We're not supposed to talk that way," said Herman Krier, a rocket propulsion expert at the University of Illinois.

"But this is queer. If you had asked me as an engineer to calculate the probability of there being a major accident on any of these rockets, I would have put down \$1,000 against it.

"That all three should fail like this I would have said the odds on were in the millions."

At Cape Canaveral a veteran Nasa spokesman told the Washington Post: "I just sat there and said to myself, 'I can't believe I'm seeing this. We were so confident about this I would have bet you my month's salary we were going to have a successful (Delta) launch'."

Four vehicles

Philip Culbertson, Nasa's general manager, was equally perplexed "We basically have four launch delivery vehicles in this country, and three of them have had successive failures. That seems to defy insurmountable odds," he said. "This has been a very uncanny, strange series of events."

The notion that the gods are somehow displeased with American trespassing in the heavens was the least scientific of various explanations offered for Nasa's mishaps yesterday.

A more technical hypothesis for the Delta explosion was put

forward by John Yardley, of McDonnell Douglas, who said his company's engineers were speculating that the Delta's main engine suffered an electrical short, causing it to shut down.

As yet another official investigation opened into possible causes of the Delta failure, space agency officials stressed that unprecedented precautions were taken before Saturday's launch of the Delta rocket and its \$57,500,000 (£37,600,000) satellite.

Mindful of the need to restore their reputation for reliability, engineers lavished thousands of hours of additional tests on the 116ft tall rocket.

The flight was delayed 48 hours to check out a minor fuel leak. Project managers were all required to sign formal documents that the rocket was ready to fly.

As the countdown proceeded flawlessly through Saturday, launch officials were fully confident. The delta's last 43 launches had gone off without a hitch.

But disaster occurred, leading John Pike, of the Federation of American Scientists, to offer a summary of possible causes.

Three views

"You can look at it three ways," he told the Washington Post. "One is to say complicated technologies are inherently unreliable.

"The second is to say we've got the worst infestation of gremlins anybody's ever heard of. The third is to say we have a problem with quality control and reliability in the aerospace industry."

In the minds of some critics of Nasa management rocket missions have for many years been "accidents waiting to happen". If quality control turns out to be the problem, scientists predict that the space programme could be set back for years.

U.S. FACES SPACE SHUTDOWN

DT 7/5/86

By TONY ALLEN-MILLS in New York

AMERICAN space officials said yesterday they expected to postpone the launch later this month of an Atlas Centaur rocket due to place a military satellite in orbit.

The move would bring the United States' space programme to a complete halt with all four of its major launch vehicles declared temporarily unusable. The Atlas Centaur shares common engine parts with the Delta rocket destroyed 90 seconds after lift-off on Saturday.

"Unless we stumble over a quick answer to whatever's going wrong, they'll definitely be postponing" the launch planned for May 22, said a spokesman for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

With the Shuttle and Titan systems already out of commission, the prospect of a total shutdown of America's space missions appalled rocket scientists and engineers.

"This puts us right out of the space business," said Mr Gary Flandro, a space specialist at Georgia Tech University. "It's a terrible disaster. We can't do any military payloads, we can't do any Space Defence—no Initiative experiments. We can't do anything."

Demoralised NASA experts yesterday continued their search for the cause of the Delta failure, which came after 43 consecutive problem-free launches.

SPACE SUCCESS

Two Soviet cosmonauts completed the first transfer between space stations yesterday, docking their Soyuz T-15 transport module with Salyut-7 station.—Reuter.

D.T. 8/5/1986

High-tech hooligans aim at space

SO BEWILDERED were U.S. space scientists by last week's failure of a Delta rocket launch that they began to think the unthinkable: somehow, a saboteur must have obtained the necessary secret codes to jam Nasa transmissions and send a message of his own—destroy.

A few years ago such a doom-laden scenario would swiftly have been consigned to the realm of science fiction, but this is the age of the high-tech hooligan. Officials don't believe that sabotage was responsible for the Delta disaster—but they gloomily acknowledged they dared not rule it out.

Addressing the issue at a Press conference this week, a spokesman at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration offered a blue-print for would-be saboteurs. To inter-

fere with a Nasa launch, he said, a communications expert would need more than a transmitter powerful enough to drown signals from mission control. He would also need the codes the rocket's computers could understand, and the "look angle," or target coordinates of the fast-moving missile.

In the Delta case, scientists have not detected any "stray or spurious" signals seeking to over-ride mission control.

But Nasa officials and other federal agencies reluctantly admit that a brilliant and determined computer genius with a knowledge of radio transmitters might throw the space age equivalent of a spanner in the works.

That such a beast exists is no longer in any doubt. The

T FOREIGN FILE

Tony Allen-Mills reports from New York

so-called computer "hacker" who threatens national security is not a Hollywood fantasy, but alive and well and in at least one case last year tapping his computer into the vaults of the Pentagon.

What bothers federal officials most is not the teenaged computer whizz out to have some fun, but the growing trend toward professional computer crime. "It's one of the fastest growing areas of crime...It makes smash and grab look a little passé," said Congressman William Hughes, who has drafted the Computer Fraud

and Abuse Act currently under study.

If computerised Nasa codes are, in theory at least, accessible to a renegade outsider, is the hardware really available that would enable a saboteur to interfere in the space programme?

Last month, in a well-publicised incident that left federal officials aghast, an unknown satellite pirate proved conclusively that the most sophisticated communications technology is desperately vulnerable to a creative maverick with silicon "nous".

For the first time in American

broadcasting history, a commercial signal beamed to millions of homes by a US cable television company was intercepted by a hostile source.

The bandit broadcaster identified himself only as "Captain Midnight." To the consternation of the networks and the Federal Communications Commission, he bumped a film off the air for five minutes while he flashed his own protest on cable TV.

Officials have clamped down on information about the incident for fear of giving others the same idea. But a New York satellite expert told me what happened: the video pirate, using a relatively modest transmitter of no more than two kilowatts, drowned out the cable channel's satellite signal with a broadcast of his own. Exactly

the scenario dreaded by Nasa in the case of rocket launches.

At Ken Schaffer's satellite technology firm on Manhattan's Upper East side, you can buy off-the-shelf a 10ft motorised dish antenna tuned by computer to track up to 30 satellites stationed above the earth.

The home satellite business is still in its infancy, but is expanding at a rate that recalls the early days of television.

Federal agencies are wearily assessing their chances of regulating the volcanic flow of technology to the masses, but Captain Midnight and his fellow high-tech hooligans are making it plain the threat of future disruption is real. And if America's own citizens can cause so much upheaval, some scientists can't help wondering: what about the Russians?

Rec'd from
A. Calvert
12/5/86

Lurid titles were once the norm for UFO books, such as "UFOs on the Attack", ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ "The UFO Menace", and even the UFOs from outer space theme was implicit of a threat. Today titles tend to be a little less evocative, possibly because with the passing of the years it has become to be realised that UFOs have much less of an interface with human kind than was previously envisaged. Thus the interface appears to be mainly psychological, but this does not mean that an actual physical interface does not exist for there is clearly evidence that it does.

The feeling once existed that the moment we arrived in space we would find it was populated, and that because of our barbaric ways we would be barred. If such has been the case then it has been kept a very close secret, however, from some of the acquired evidence it could be a real possibility, and that up until now our entry into space has been received with some tolerance. The question is today, has this "tolerance" come to an end? (Has the arrival of "Star Wars" changed this?)

Over recent months the American space efforts seem to have hit an unaccountable brick wall(1). And over the past two years aeronautical accidents have been breaking records. Mystery submarine incursions have been increasing(2). And now the Russians have had a chastening atomic power disaster(3), that follows many minor incidents experienced in this country. Has this all been a demonstration of the Aliens powers, and loss of tolerance?

(1). 4/5/86. The latest incident, a failure of an American Thor-Delta satellite launcher that was described officially as being "mysterious" because the rocket's motor shut down prematurely as if from "if it had been instructed to do so".....externally..... although "it is possible its own computer may have done this?"

(2)Two American nuclear submarines ran aground during the past two months(Mar-Apr 1986)—one in the Irish Sea, and the other in the Straits of Gibraltar. No Courts Martial, but investigations 'are taking place'. It is claimed that the subs were only slightly damaged. The close timing between these incidents provokes thoughts that there is here something more than coincidence—were the subs USO hunting. And did they then become the hunted?

(3)Two hot spots were detected from American satellite photographs, one of which remained unidentified—was it ufological?

Last Wednesday(30/4/86) I heard the sad news that Dr Hynek had died. This can only be a sad loss, for while he worked the subject of ufology was in good hands for his touch was that of one with immense experience. He was from what I would call The Old Guard, who had felt the initial excitement(concern) for our subject, and this is undoubtedly why he had persisted(and possibly why we all persist). The nouveau-ufologist does not feel this, but feels that he is there to explain sightings no matter how dirisory these may be.

This peculiar state of affairs because the somehow acceptable "extraterrestrial" explanation has had to take second place to the fetid occult explanation that makes hackles rise and prejudices take pride of place. Thus I ask, is ufology to be in safe hands for very much longer now that The Old Guard are being eclipsed?

*Pushed partly from pride and partly by the anti "experts" who promise "scientific recognition" for such actions. Some hope! The only ufo experts as far as I know are the ufonauts themselves, and this should always be borne in mind.

Was Gagarin Russia's answer to Piltown Man?

DAILY TELEGRAPH 21/4/86 (Mon) (P9)

JOHN MILLER'S story in last Saturday's Daily Telegraph about the sudden belated obituary in Izvestia of one Valentin Bondarenko, died March 23, 1961, sharply revived my memories of a Great Unsolved Mystery.

In the spring of 1961, I was despatched by the Financial Times to prepare that newspaper's first major supplement on the Soviet Union. I spent six weeks touring, from Leningrad to Siberia, in the company of a singularly unappealing—but, as I was told by our embassy in Moscow—remarkably well-connected official guide and minder.

We arrived back in Moscow at the end of our tour on April 6, 1961. The town was seething with stories that the Russians were about to launch their first manned space flight. I paid a call on our ambassador, Sir Frank Roberts, who confirmed that there was indeed much speculation to that effect, although official confirmation was still lacking.

On the morning of April 11, I was due to fly out at the end of my visit. On our way to the airport that morning my minder informed me that the flight had taken place: he had, he told me, spoken to the chairman of Soviet Committee of Sciences, who confirmed that it had been successfully completed. Then why, I asked him, had there been no announcement? Oh, he explained, the spaceman was undergoing medical checks. But an announcement would follow very shortly.

For my return journey I had arranged to stay with some old friends stationed at the French embassy in Warsaw. On arrival in Warsaw I learned that there was still no news of any Russian space flight. I nevertheless thought it worth while to telephone the Financial Times to report that the flight had taken place, and my reasons for believing so. They were interested, but sceptical: there had been no announcement from Moscow.

The following day, April 12, I flew home to London. I had to change planes in East Berlin.

JOCK BRUCE-GARDYNE claims that the cosmonaut was an astronomic hoax

When I was doing so I heard the airport loudspeakers proudly announcing that Yuri Gagarin was, at that moment, circling the globe. I remained convinced that things were not as they appeared. On arriving home, I sought without success to persuade the Financial Times that Gagarin's flight was suspect.

Yet in the weeks that followed a number of apparently supportive pieces of evidence emerged. When the Russians first announced that Gagarin was in orbit, on the morning of April 12, NASA denied all knowledge. It was subsequently corrected by the White House, which announced that Gagarin's flight had indeed been tracked by US tracking stations.

Some weeks subsequently it was reported that one of the Czechoslovak correspondents in Moscow had been summarily removed, apparently because he had given credence to stories which cast doubt on the bonafides of the Gagarin space trip. His story did not involve a man called Bondarenko. It involved Ilyushin, son of the aircraft designer.

It was said that Ilyushin was one of the Russian space pilots in training, and that he had used his powerful connections to jump the queue. Either because he had been inadequately prepared, or because of some malfunction in the flight, it was suggested that he had returned from space in a coma and was therefore unavailable for presentation to the waiting world.

When a message of congratulations to Gagarin was published in the Russian Press, some weeks after he was supposed to have made his trip, it was signed by all the other astronauts in training—except young Ilyushin. Some months later I heard a story that Ilyushin had been reported killed in a car crash in Siberia.

The response I had received to my own story on that April day, 25 years ago, was that the

official Russian version must be correct because the Americans had confirmed it. As indeed they had—belatedly. But consider the circumstances.

For years the Americans had poured cold water on stories of Russian advances in space technology. With the successful launch of the Russian's first unmanned spacecraft they had been forced hastily to change their tune. Moreover, if Gagarin had indeed been launched into space on April 12, and if the watching US tracking stations had failed to track his flight, they were left looking more than a little foolish.

Then consider the Russian position. They knew that a US manned space flight was imminent. Suppose they had indeed beaten the Americans to it, but were unable to produce their "first man in space" because he was in no condition to be produced.

Why not produce a highly presentable substitute (and Gagarin was nothing if not presentable) and gamble on the likelihood that the Americans would not care to admit they had not spotted him?

At any rate I have never been reconciled to the Gagarin version. Between Ilyushin and Bondarenko you can take your pick. I shall continue to believe that Gagarin was one of the great frauds perpetuated on history.



The personable Yuri Gagarin: pilot and

TITAN FAILURE HITS DEFENCE
 By Our Washington Staff
 The explosion of the £1.5 million Titan rocket carrying a secret spy satellite a few seconds after lift-off last Friday has dealt a crippling blow to America's national security interests.
 The second straight failure of a Titan rocket, has left the military with no means to getting heavy payloads into space.
 ST 21/4/86 (Mon) (P4)
Bodies to go home
 The remains of the astronauts who died aboard Challenger are expected to be released to their families in the next few days. Remains of all seven crew members have been found, crushed beyond recognition.

Century books have just published "Yeager", the autobiography of ~~GEN.~~ Chuck Yeager first man to fly faster than the speed of sound. From the book's index, with no mention of flying saucers(UFOs) they are not obviously discussed. (That of course does not mean that they are not mentioned.). Superficially, therefor, it might be surmised that the ~~GENERAL~~ has never encountered the UFO subject during his long career in the USAF as a fighter pilot, a test pilot, and an astronaut instructor, either first hand or second—a most unlikely surmise one would think.

This book's text will have been vetted by the USAF before its publication, and knowing the general attitude towards the UFO subject any mention of it would have been rapidly excised. But it is doubtful that the colonel ever alluded to then knowing full well what was expected of him. Some previous historical aeronautical books have made mention of the subject but usually in a dirisory way, but one would feel that even this would now be frowned upon. I am sure that it is felt that the best comment is no comment.

There has long been a minority opinion that says the Russians claimed space achievements are only about 90% true—and there is an abundance of evidence to support this view.

Despite this evidence of deception though, the West has shown a remarkable to say the least, uncritical, and some might say gullible, attitude towards the Russian 'achievements'. Even the Americans, as indicated in the Telegraph report have been willing dupes. The Moon Race as a consequence was a one horse race from the start, with the Americans using the Russians as an excuse. Has this ufological connotations?

If one shows the slightest tinge of Blue, I feel, one will never obtain a position at the BBC. Thus it comes as no surprise when this Corporation dispenses all of the marginally informative Russian space data uncritically. Probably this is because this is a backdoor route to criticise America—the BBC being if nothing critical of the Americans. For instance, at the time of the Shuttle disaster the BBC presenters seemed to give off an aura of satisfaction that there had been an American failure, whereas, the launch of the Russian multi-port space station was greeted with a certain amount of satisfaction. Perhaps the BBC has been taking its ufological directives from Russia all the time?

The Russian space efforts are still way behind the Americans, but American propaganda lags. Perhaps this is because the Americans are less secretive than are the Russians. The possibly minimal space program is hidden behind a facade of lies and hoaxes, which makes any UFOlogical statements/stories more than a little suspicious that come to us through the Iron Curtain. We should treat these stories with some care.

DAILY TELEGRAPH (USA)
6/5/86 P.10

Series of space failures dazes Nasa's scientists

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"But this is queer. If you had asked me as an engineer to calculate the probability of there being a major accident on any of these rockets, I would have put down \$1,000 against it.

"That all three should fail like this I would have said the odds on were in the millions."

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The notion that the gods are somehow displeased with American trespassing in the heavens was the least scientific of various explanations offered for Nasa's mishaps yesterday.

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Mindful of the need to restore their reputation for reliability, engineers lavished thousands of hours of additional tests on the 116ft tall rocket.

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Three views

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"The second is to say we've got the worst infestation of gremlins anybody's ever heard of. The third is to say we have a problem with quality control and reliability in the aerospace industry."

In the minds of some critics of Nasa management rocket missions have for many years been "accidents waiting to happen". If quality control turns out to be the problem, scientists predict that the space programme could be set back for years.

Theories about the cause of the recent "disaster" glut could include one that, it is all part of a Soviet political stratagem, or perhaps more rightly the continuance of an old one—the destruction of the West's atomic, aeronautical, and spatial capabilities. This by using one of their most effective methods—the hoax.

But would someone (or some faction) do such a potentially destructive thing like "scuttling" one of their own atomic reactors? Yes they would, for Communism (as now practised in the Soviet Union) is legalised crime (no wonder it is so popular) something akin to the Mafia. And all without fear from the populace. Hence, if the reward is considered ~~not~~ worth while—like for instance the possibility that "friendly" organisations as the CND could persuade governments to cut atomic projects and power plants etc—then any "sacrifices" would be considered amply rewarded.

To this project could be added some "sabotage" of American rockets via "sleepers" within NASA. And, this is not such a fanciful idea for the Americans themselves have not ruled out the possibility that sabotage has been done. However, if this is the case from previous observations the USA would pull out all the stops to protect the Soviets reputation. Why should this be? Is it to save the embarrassment of being shown to be leaky?

Thus I am sure there will be some effort at pulling the Russian coals out of the fire by the Americans, despite the protests over "secrecy" against the USSR. But how much sincerity can be attributed to these protests when for so many years now we have been subjected to an active repression of everything ufological. Could it not be the veritable; pot calling the kettle black?

(Does the Russian atomic test moratorium fit into all of this, for I'm sure that it was not done from purely altruistic reasons?)

Clearly science does not hold all of the answers to an understanding of our Universe—but I am sure some-thing will be rationalised by NASA before very long.

Seeming a new jargon phrase has emerged "high-tech hooligan", that is used to describe a communications, or computer "hacker" into others systems just for the heck of it. However, I would suggest although the term is new the practice is not, for I would suggest that the ufonauts have been doing it over for many years past. They have been cutting into communications systems, our power generating systems and various electrical systems for ages.

Now—reading between the lines—it appears as though the originating fault for the Chernebyl disaster was actually electrical more than mechanical.

And electrical faults seem to be heading the American lists of possible causes for their rocket's failures.

High-tech hooligans may be to ~~blame~~^{blame} but it seems highly unlikely, for the use against different rocket types and sytems seperated by considerable distances. Let alone a seperation across continents. But if these high-tech hooligans are ufonauts with their psychical amoury then on this score there are no problems.

The selectivity of picking out only American rockets must mean there is a reason; what might it be?

Is a possible clue given in the article in FSR 31/3 A look at the search for ~~XXXXXXXX~~ Extraterrestrial intelligence. Here the idea was mooted that the detection alien life may be made by observations through large ~~XX~~ telescopes. Now if these telescopes are placed upon the Earth's surface their resolving powers would would be forever limited by atmospheric scintillation. However, place these same telescopes in space and their powers would be greatly enhanced, and the launching of a telescope from the shuttle was planned. Were then the ufonauts aware of this and consequently frightened of being detected, either on the Moon, or on the planets. The delay from the rocket failures could have given them time to get rid of the evidence.

It is also interesting to note that during the "Boomerang" festival, shades of Chernebyl, an object payed a close visit to an atomic power station(FSR 31/3. The wave of "Wing" reports: More on the "Boomerang": "As large as two footbal fields". Page 8).

S.E. 1/6/1986

Ariane disaster hits space plans

PARIS A

EUROPEAN Ariane-2 rocket, carrying a £60 million telecommunications satellite, was blown up by controllers shortly after blast-off in French Guiana yesterday, throwing Western space plans into confusion.

The failure of the French-built Ariane's third stage to fire on schedule forced officials to order the detonation of the rocket as it was 50 miles above the Atlantic.

This latest disaster is the latest chapter in what is the worst year experienced by Western space programmes, especially following the loss of the U.S. Shuttle Challenger and its seven astronauts in January and two disastrous launches of unmanned U.S. Titan and Delta rockets.

Officials at Arianespace headquarters in Paris said yesterday that an urgent investigation was being set up and that computer tapes would be analysed to try to establish the cause of the failure.

Since the grounding of the Shuttle programme, Arianespace has had a surge of orders with its order book swelling to 33 contracts, including yesterday's mission, worth a total of 10½ billion francs. In response

to that pressure, Arianespace had planned to make more launch slots available

Yesterday's accident is also a blow to Britain's hopes to put a Skynet military satellite in space later this year. The Skynet, vital to Britain's military communications, was to have gone up in the ill-fated Shuttle programme. When that failed, worried Service chiefs switched to the Ariane. Now that has hit snags.

Meanwhile the Russians were enjoying a minor space triumph yesterday as their two cosmonauts, Leonid Kizim and Vladimir Solovyov, made their second space walk in a week and erected a pylon for scientific instruments on the outside of their orbiting Salyut-7 space station.

Elephant asked for water

MOSCOW. IT is three years since Russia's talking elephant, Batyr, hit the headlines from Kazakhstan but interest in him is still high

Now 16-years old, Batyr has become more aggressive and less talkative. Mrs Yelena Belousova, in charge of Karaganda Zoo's large animal department, says: "I still remember the shock I had when I first heard Batyr's voice. He asked me to give him a drink. There was no doubt about it. It was pronounced very distinctly."

She explained the phenomenon by telling how Batyr, an Indian elephant rejected at birth, brought up entirely by zoo keepers. They spoke to him as they cared for him, especially at the best times of his day when he was fed or washed, caressed or played with.

When he talks, he puts the tip of his trunk into his mouth and flattens it out. The sound is like someone talking into a cup.

Batyr, whose voice has been put on tape, is popular with children. Recently, a nursery school group visited him and Batyr spoke to them. They, with their heads full of fairy tales, took it as a matter of course but the adults present were speechless.

Zoo keepers believe Batyr may need a mate but there is not enough space for newly-weds. Also Batyr needs a filling in a tusk but has to await an anaesthetist from 2,500 miles away in Moscow.

Perhaps Batyr's tusk treatment will be followed by some improvement in his housing situation and then the announcement of Batyr's wedding plans.

The killer cloud

GENOA A mysterious cloud has killed thousands of insects in a 20-mile square area outside Livorno, near Pisa. Local bee-keepers, famous for their honey, are desperate because 90 per cent of the bee population—about 600 million bees—have been destroyed. The cloud arrived about four days ago and suddenly, birds began dropping from the trees. Farmer Pisadoro Mantovani said: "My fields were covered in dead birds and millions of insects, including bees." Health officials, who analysed the dead birds, found they had been killed by some form of insecticide. Dr Giorgio De Disceglie said: "It is also dangerous to human beings"