

Shuttle launch draws little notice; critics question NASA's direction

NASA's shuttle program is under scrutiny as critics question costs and benefits.

BY VICKY ECKENRODE
STAFF WRITER

While NASA successfully launched the space shuttle Columbia on Tuesday for its seventh mission this year, experts said the entire space program was threatened by numerous problems.

Alex Roland, a professor at Duke University and former NASA historian, called the shuttle missions a waste of money. NASA should instead develop a new and more efficient launch vehicle, he said. "The space shuttle is old and expensive to send up."

Dela, a senior who asked that her last name not be used, watched the launch on CNN at Union Station in the Student Union. She questioned the amount of

government funds that NASA receives. "I can think of better uses for the money that they're using on the space shuttle program," she said.

The space program is an important tool for research and technological development, argued Michael Brachus, public affairs director for NASA.

"The space program is what put us in the forefront of technology in the world," he said. "Columbia is holding two payloads that will deploy satellites."

Brachus also said the space program was a major employer and without it the economy would be worse off.

The shuttle launches are not as actively watched as they used to be because of a general decline in public interest, Roland said. "The shuttle mission is the same thing month after month and year after year," he said. "Nothing's happening."

Kristen Sipe, a freshman from Mayden, said Columbia's launch was not a remarkable event for her. "Watch-

ing the space shuttle go up just isn't something that's new and exciting to me anymore," she said.

Shuttle missions like Columbia's 16-day orbit are the ones affected by congressional budget cuts, Roland said. "They're being pinched pretty severely," he said.

However, NASA's funds earmarked for building a space station are not threatened by the budget cuts, Roland said.

"Congress made a commitment to fund the space station," he said. "So the plans for the space station are preserved."

Brachus said focusing on the space station was the new direction for the space program. "The goal for human-manned space flights will be to begin building of the international space station," he said.

Columbia's launch proved to be a record-breaker. One of Columbia's astronauts was 61-year-old Story Musgrave, who became the oldest person ever in space.



IN THE NEWS

Top stories from the state, nation and world

Commuter planes collide; 13 total die in explosion

QUINCY, Ill. — Two commuter planes collided on a runway and exploded into a fireball Tuesday, killing all 13 people aboard both aircraft.

A United Express plane with nine passengers and two crew members collided with a smaller commuter plane carrying two people at Baldwin Municipal Airport, officials said. There were no survivors.

Witnesses told WGEM radio in Quincy that both planes were enveloped in a ball of fire after colliding shortly after 5 p.m.

Mike Coultas, a private pilot who was arriving at the airport when the crash occurred, told CNN the larger plane was landing on one runway as the other was preparing to takeoff from another runway.

"I kept thinking to myself 'I can't believe this aircraft on Runway 4 does not see the other aircraft,'" which was landing, Coultas said.

"Just about the time I got to the fence to park my car the two aircraft impacted at the intersections of the two runways and then exploded into a ball of flames," Coultas added.

Don Zochert, a spokesman for the Federal Aviation Administration, said the United Express plane was a Beech 1900 aircraft. Police said the plane was coming in from Burlington, Iowa.

Adams County Sheriff Bob Noll said the other plane was a King Aire 200, and was believed to be from the St. Louis area.

Chunnel fire injures 8, train service shut down

CALAIS, France — It was the Chunnel builders' nightmare — intense flames and deadly fumes choking the 31-mile tunnel used to whisk passengers and freight beneath the English Channel.

Eight people, including a pregnant woman, were overcome by smoke when fire broke out Monday night on a truck being hauled to Britain on a freight train.

It was the first serious accident since the tunnel linking Britain and France opened two years ago. Service was halted and could take three weeks to be fully restored.

None of the injuries were life-threatening.

LOTS

FROM PAGE 1

of the time," Turner said. "I lock my doors, but I look around and see a lot of nicer cars than mine so I'm really not worried."

Council member Joe Capowski said Park & Ride was not constructed to be used as an overnight place to store a car. Capowski said only after spaces became available did the town start renting spaces.

"Park & Ride lots were not designed for overnight use, and the primary reason to build the lots was for commuters who are driving far and need a place to park for the day," he said. "We do rent to UNC students to store their cars, but it is definitely not the primary use of Park & Ride."

Cousins said people can take many precautions to protect their car from a break-in.

"Never leave anything valuable in your car, that's number one," Cousins said. "Always lock your car and try to park in a lighted area."

Goff said she advised women to take particular care about the safety of their cars.

"No space after dark is really safe for a woman, especially parking lots," Goff said. "For women, parking lots at night are always a safety issue."

ening. But the fire was a terrifying example of what can happen — despite elaborate safety precautions and frequent security drills — in this man-made engineering wonder beneath the sea.

"Another five or 10 minutes longer, we'd have all been carried out in bags," said truck driver Brian Shilton, one of 34 people evacuated from the tunnel.

"It just filled up with smoke so quick it was just unbelievable. Everyone was vomiting and choking, and we all thought it was going to be the end," he said. "It was like being in a tomb."

The fire broke out at 9:45 p.m. 11 miles into the westbound tunnel — one of three tunnel corridors — and roughly a third of the way through the trip from Coquelles, France, to Folkestone, England.

The freight train was carrying 29 trucks, 31 passengers and three crew members. The tunnel, called the Chunnel, shut down immediately. Eurotunnel said it hoped to reopen partial service sometime Wednesday, but full service could take three weeks to restore.

FDA orders more accurate milk nutrition labels, ads

WASHINGTON — The Food and Drug Administration ordered milk labels changed Tuesday to give Americans a better idea of how much fat is in that

morning glass.

Those jugs of 2-percent milk that now are labeled "low-fat" will be renamed "reduced fat." Only 1 percent milk can be called "low-fat," while skim milk, the healthiest choice, can be advertised as "fat-free" or "nonfat" milk.

The change comes after consumer advocates complained that Americans were misled into believing milk with 2-percent fat was healthier than it actually is.

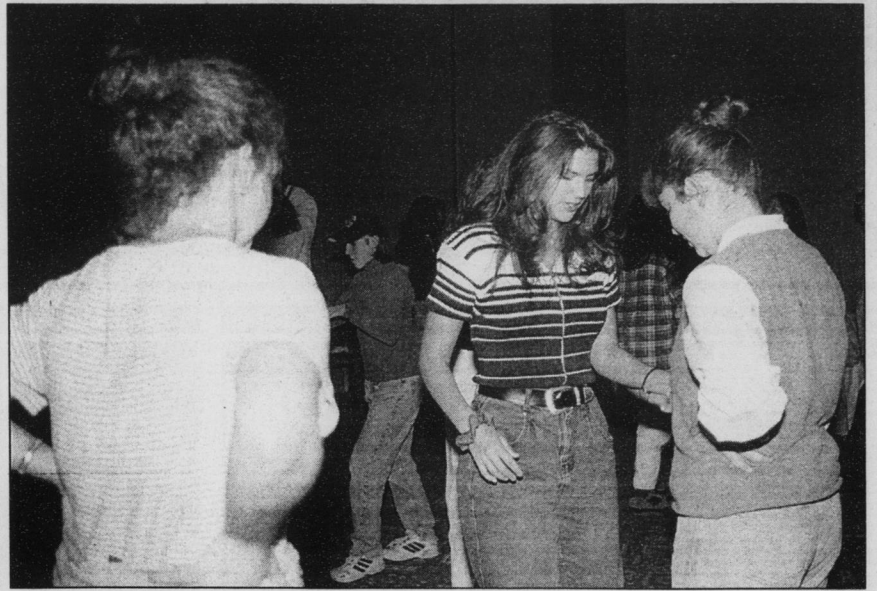
Two-percent milk certainly is better for adults cutting their fat intake than whole milk, which contains 3.3 percent fat. (Whole milk still is recommended as the best choice for young children.)

But the government in 1973 allowed 2-percent milk to be advertised as "low-fat," even though it contains 5 grams of fat in every 8-ounce glass. And Congress in 1990 allowed milk to keep that label even though the FDA defined a low-fat food as one with no more than 3 grams of fat per serving.

Yeltsin returning to duties as his health improves

MOSCOW — President Boris Yeltsin has been holding meetings, taking walks and even enjoyed a sauna, and he's likely to leave the Kremlin hospital this week for a nearby health resort, his spokesman said Tuesday.

SHAGGING THE NIGHT AWAY



Instructor Tracey Allman, finalist in the National Shag Championship, teaches Robin Grubbs some basic moves as Hadley Horne looks on at The Shag Workshop in the Alumni Center on Tuesday evening.

Yeltsin met for more than 90 minutes Tuesday with Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin at the Kremlin hospital where he's recuperating from Nov. 5 quintuple heart-bypass surgery.

Doctors have said it still will be several weeks before the president is likely to return to his Kremlin office full time.

Yeltsin's office has released photographs of the president, who appears to have lost weight during his illness.

He has not appeared publicly since the surgery, although he may make a radio or television address sometime this week, his spokesman, Sergei Yastrzhembsky, said at a news conference.

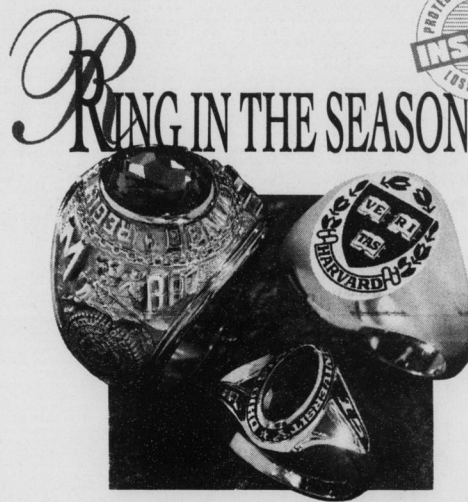
Yastrzhembsky said Yeltsin likely will move this week from the hospital to Barvikha resort, where he has spent much of his time since suffering a renewed bout of heart trouble at the end of June. "On Saturday, he spent half a day in

Barvikha and he even took a sauna there. ... He takes walks practically every day," he said.

Meanwhile, a newspaper reported Tuesday that Yeltsin's official plane, an Ilyushin-96-300, has been renovated on the inside to include intensive-care equipment.

Komsomolskaya Pravda did not say what devices will be on board. FROM WIRE REPORTS

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