

IS SPACE EXPLORATION by nations a waste of resources?

By Norashikin Binte Mohamad



The date was 12 April 1961. The event: a space launch. One can only imagine how, on this historic day, the world was taken by surprise when Yuri Gagarin, an astronaut from the former Soviet Union, became the first human to be launched into space aboard the Vostok 1. Space exploration has been the subject of much attention and debate since the 1950s, when countries such as the United States of America (USA)

and the then Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) vied to make the first landing on the Moon. Since then, many other nations such as China and India, and more recently, Saudi Arabia, have jumped on the ¹bandwagon of space exploration, bringing to the fore the question – is space exploration by nations a waste of resources? My answer is a resounding yes.



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The world that we live in today has many pressing problems. Issues such as climate change and poverty dominate the agendas of many world summits, leaving heads of state with day-to-day challenges that require immediate attention. Against this backdrop of problems, a number of nations are setting aside budgets amounting to billions of dollars for space exploration. For example, in the USA, space exploration by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) consumed a whopping \$22.6 billion and this figure looks set to increase to \$25 billion in the year 2021, a request made by the Trump administration. At the same time as this is happening, the USA is experiencing the adverse consequences of climate change such as coast-

al flooding, heat waves and hurricanes. The impact of such natural disasters would be, to say the least, immediate and devastating, prompting the need for urgent action. This endeavour would require huge amounts of resources and given the ²gravity of the circumstances, it is only wise to channel the funds set aside for space exploration to manage these problems instead of wasting them on space exploration efforts.

Another example of a country in which space exploration is a waste of resources is India. It is estimated that two-thirds of the population in India live in poverty. This is evident in a multitude of ways, such as high infant mortality, malnutrition and the lack of access to education in certain areas. India depends heavily on charitable organisations to provide aid to its children while the government pumps a \$70 million budget into a space mission. It is indisputable that India would be better off investing its resources into breaking the poverty cycle that is afflicting its people rather than launching satellites into space that glean little or no immediate benefits to the nation.



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Moreover, space exploration is often a race among nations to show the world their technological power. The initial investments on space exploration were driven by a ‘space race’ between the USA and the then USSR. These giants put aside huge budgets into achieving many ‘firsts’ in space. The USSR launched the first human-made object to orbit Earth, Sputnik 1, on 4 October 1957, and the USA lost no time in catching up with the first Moon landing by the Apollo 11 mission on 20 July 1969. During the period in between these two landmark launches, the USSR’s space programme went on to achieve many of its first milestones, such as the first spacewalk by Man on 18 March 1965. Each successful space mission serves as yet another ³feather in the cap for the nation, a historical event that was much celebrated in its time. These achievements are but an ostentatious show of power, with leaders outdoing one another

in leaving their mark in the history of space travel. Given the lack of tangible benefits that space exploration has brought to the people of these nations, one cannot help but conclude that such expenditure serves more to fuel the ego of these leaders, rendering such missions a waste of resources.

One common justification for space exploration is the development of different technologies that support space travel, which can be advantageous to life on Earth. An example of this is the technology that supports unmanned travel craft. Such a technology may have its use on Earth, for example, in search and rescue missions or dangerous circumstances such as hostage situations. Similarly, other useful technologies that led to the invention of the camera phone and Nike Air Trainers may have its origins in space exploration. However, such technologies can be developed in laboratories without the need for such extravagant expenditure. It is not a substantial justification for spending ⁴copious amounts of resources on space exploration. Product innovations can well occur without research in space exploration. Thus, space exploration remains a waste of resources.



How Elon Musk is driving the future of space travel

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SpaceX

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Given the moral failure of ego-boosting trips in the face of more urgent issues in the world, it is only logical that we invest our precious resources - time, effort and money - in improving the lives of the people on Earth and the environment within which we live. Space exploration must take a backseat in a world where basic survival of mankind is not a given.



View the YouTube video above. Elon Musk articulates his dream of building a city for humans in Mars. Do you think his venture is an important step for the continued survival of humans or is it simply a waste of time, effort and money?

Word Bank:

1 bandwagon:

an activity or movement that is currently attracting increasing support

2 gravity:

seriousness (of a situation or matter)

3 feather in the cap:

an achievement to be proud of

4 copious:

abundant in quantity