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US SPACE BUDGET REQUESTS
President Nixon has recommended a budget of $3,015 million for Nasa's 1974 financial year, beginning on July 1. The recommendation is $120 million less than Nasa's estimated expenditure for the year of $3,135 million. Nasa's estimate is $74 million more than that of 1973 and represents a progression towards a 1975 target of $3,200 million. If the lower figure is approved, however, Nasa expects to compensate for some of this with $91 million of the savings achieved by cutbacks in the expenditure for the rest of 1973. Total spending for this year is now expected to be $3,061 million.
Under the Nasa estimate, manned space activities in 1974 will require $1,362 million, or 34 per cent of the total budget. Of this, shuttle development will require $475 million. Skylab will cost $234 million in the next year and 1974 work towards the Apollo-Soyuz Test Programme will cost about $90 million.
Budget cuts will delay the second Earth-resources satellite and development of a new series of meteorological satellites and indefinitely postpone the High Energy Astronomy Observatory programme. Two new projects, however, will be the start of the $1-5 million Lageos geodetic satellite, for launch in 1976, and of a Nimbus-G for environmental pollution detection and ocean measure-ment work.
The President's recommendation for sectors devoted to space research are considerably lower than the Nasa estimates for the year, but considerably higher for areas concerned with aeronautical research and the shuttle.

EUROPA II DECISION POSTPONED

The council of the European Launcher Development Organisation has deferred for two months the decision on the future of the Europa II vehicle. A decision, which was expected at a council meeting early this month, must now be taken at the meeting on April 1, on which occasion the Eldo budget for 1973 is to be approved.
The decision will be largely up to the main proponents of Europa II—France, West Germany and Belgium. The only operational missions scheduled for the vehicle are the launch of two Franco-German Symphonie communication satellites. Germany is reported to be gaining interest in US offers to launch Symphonie, provided that its coverage is confined to Europe. France is aiming for links with French-speaking communities in Canada, South America and North Africa.

NASA EFFORTS TO CUT SKYLAB DELAY

Nasa officials are considering compressing the Skylab programme slightly to compensate for the time lost by testing delays. These delays have already put off the launch from April 30 until mid-May and have been caused by a series of minor technical faults in the various Skylab components.
Programme officials maintain, however, that there have been no major faults. To minimise delays, test crews have been working round the clock and up to seven days a

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week. In addition to this, the launch dates of the second and third missions may be advanced a few days in an attempt to bring the programme back on schedule.
By last week, testing was still ten days behind schedule and the docking and airlock modules had yet to be fitted to the main workshop, already mated to the Saturn V launcher. Once complete, the entire system will undergo a four-day full check-out. This will be followed by a flight-readiness check-out which should be completed by mid-March. Nasa officials say that the new launch date will be set after this last test is complete. The first crew, com-prising Charles Conrad, Dr Joseph Kerwin and Paul Weitz, will be launched by a Saturn IB on the day following the Skylab launch.

CREW NAMED FOR US-USSR MISSION

Brig Gen Thomas P. Stafford has been named by Nasa as the commander of the Apollo spacecraft which will participate in the 1975 Apollo-Soyuz Test Programme. With him will be Donald K. Slayton and Vance D. Brand. The cosmonauts who will fly the Soviet Soyuz spacecraft have not yet been named but Stafford said recently that he expected that they would be "senior, experienced people." Stafford is a veteran of the Gemini 6 and 9 and Apollo 10 missions (the last two as commander). Slayton, who will be 51 by the flight time of the mission, was selected as one of the original seven Mercury astronauts but was grounded until last year by a minor heart condition. He will take responsibility for the new docking module, now being specially developed for the mission, while Brand, also making his first flight, will be command module pilot. Stafford recently visited the Soviet "Star City" cosmo-naut training centre where he practised Soyuz docking techniques in a simulator. The crewmen are expected to begin joint training with Soviet cosmonauts this summer at Houston Manned Spacecraft Centre.
Back-up crew for the mission are Skylab astronauts Alan Bean and Jack Lousma and Apollo 17 crewman Bonald Evans. The Apollo spacecraft is scheduled for launch on July 15, 1975, and will spend two days linked up with a Soyuz while crew exchanges and joint experiments take place. The mission is intended to prove a docking system to permit mutual rescue or other joint activities.

US-USSR MEETING ON MARS LANDING SITES

Soviet and American space engineers recently ended a week-long meeting in Moscow on possible future landing sites on Mars for unmanned spacecraft. In a statement on the meeting, the US delegation said that the main purpose of the session was to provide "a joint analysis of the available data on the physical characteristics of the surface and atmosphere of Mars in order to facilitate each side's selection of possible future landing sites for unmanned spacecraft."
The scientists also discussed new results from the exploration of Venus obtained by the Soviet Venus 8 probe and Earth-based optical and radio measurements.
The meeting involved a joint Soviet-American working group established under a 1971 agreement between Nasa and the Soviet Academy of Sciences. Nasa said that recommendations for co-operation developed at the meeting would be announced when they had been ratified by both sides, a process that usually takes several weeks.

ASTEROIDS THE NEXT TARGET?

In a report to Nasa on the results of lunar and Martian exploration to date, a panel of 11 scientists has recom-mended a vigorous programme of comet and asteroid exploration as soon as possible. The recommendation emerges from the conclusion that geological activity has erased all evidence of origin from both Mars and the Moon. , ! }•
The recently published report points out that the asteroids, being small* are probably very close to their original state. A step-by-step plan was recommended, starting with greatly improved observation from the Earth's surface and then from orbit, followed by a series of probes comprising fly-by, rendezvous, landing and sample-return missions.