**Falling space debris**

On **Aug 30, 2022** [Usman Ali Awan](https://nation.com.pk/authorpost/columnist/usman-ali-awan/)

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On the 31st of July 2022, the booster from a 25-ton Long March 5B rocket crashed back to Earth.

The Long March 5B rocket carrying one of the heaviest payloads in recent years took off from China on July 24 expected to bring provisions and equipment for building Tiangong—China’s upcoming space station.

The debris from China’s launched rocket caught fire while entering earth’s airspace, and the movement of these burning pieces also crossed Malaysian airspaces. NASA administrator Bill Nelson criticised Beijing for being irresponsible and not sharing information about its descent during an earlier press conference.

When China launched its first Tiangong module in April 2021, there was an intense frenzy around the possibility that it might be damaged by unpredictable booster reentry.

Though we may never know for certain what happened to the booster after it skyrocketed into outer space, reports indicate that some parts of this rocket survived and crashed near populated areas in Borneo.

The Aerospace Corporation reports that up to 40 percent of the mass of an object fallen from orbit will reach the Earth’s surface. Every week, one ton or more space debris enters our atmosphere with relative ease; many fragments are burning up before they can do any damage.

With countries and private companies increasing their space exploration, orbital missions have unleashed thousands of pieces of debris into orbit. The junk consists primarily of rocket boosters but can also contain defunct satellites or shrapnel from objects that were launched up there in the first place because it is at risk of crashing down to Earth.

In recent months, we’ve seen an increase in the number of accidents that could have major consequences for space exploration. Experts warn these events will become more common with time and hope to learn how they can be avoided or repaired before it becomes too late.

In a world where space junk is becoming an increasing problem, Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak along with Alex Fielding and Dr Moriba Jah has created Privateer with the mission statement to tackle the increasingly urgent problem: space junk. This will be done by incorporating data from satellites and other sources in hopes that we can make better decisions about what orbitals should go into and avoid sending anything up there at all costs. Privateer is on a mission to map and catalogue all objects in Earth’s orbit, like an advanced version of Google Maps for space.

Steve Wozniak in a recent interview stated that, “You gotta know what’s in space before you deal with it.” He further added: “We want to be a good mapping organisation but we want more than that, we want to form standards and interoperate with other people who have satellites in space and therefore have good useful information for those of us on earth and we want to share it.”

The problem of cleaning up space junk isn’t just about one nation or company taking on this responsibility. Instead, it will require many nations to come together in order to establish norms and rules which aggressively target the removal/mitigation of debris from our planet’s surface permanently. This is a daunting task, but it is one that we must take on if we want to preserve our ability to use outer space for generations to come.

The writer is a Space Generation Advisory Council member and a space sustainability writer.

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