

THE 'SPACE CADETS' WHO MEAN BUSINESS



Chowdhury: venture capital

WHEN Dilip Chowdhury begins his new job in London today, he will be the first space cadet to be recruited by Investors in Industry, the world's largest supplier of venture capital.

As well as his Cambridge degree in chemical engineering and his LSE master's degree in business, he has just finished a postgraduate course at the International Space University. This is just the stuff for a man with his sights on exploiting the "greatest business opportunity of the 21st century".

He was one of six Britons among 120 students from 29 countries at the fledgling university's summer session — its second — in Strasbourg. It aims to train the new generation of space experts. Its chancellor is

the scientist-author Arthur C. Clarke and it has the support of all space agencies, plus the backing of Mikhail Gorbachev, who dropped in while visiting Strasbourg.

It was founded by three Americans in their mid-twenties, Peter Diamandis, Todd Hawley, and Bob Richards. They were irked that governments and their space agencies seemed unable to free themselves from national preoccupations, and set about creating an international postgraduate training ground.

For more than 20 years agencies such as Nasa and Esa had bemoaned the absence of such a body. Then the three set it up, raised millions of dollars from governments and private enterprise and persuaded every

major figure in the space community to support it — and many of them to lecture.

Until 1992 when it gets a permanent year-round home (perhaps Strasbourg), the ISU will float between countries as a postgraduate summer school, cramming the equivalent of a master's degree into two months. The list of subjects is boggling: space law, space architecture, biophysics, astrophysics, astronautics, medicine, orbital mechanics, communications, space business...

Private enterprise finds it valuable too. Marconi Space Systems, for example, sponsored two of this year's British students.

Robert Temple