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Cabinet gives green light for SA space agency



Cabinet approved the establishment of South Africa's first space agency to act as an institutional vehicle for the coordination and implementation of national space science and technology programmes.

Government Communications (GCIS) said in a statement on Friday that the South African space agency, which would report directly to Science and Technology Minister Mosibudi Mangena, would conduct long-term planning and implementation of space-related activities in South Africa. Its activities would be coordinated closely with the South African Council for Space Affairs and other stakeholders, it stated.

Delivering the Department of Science and Technology's 2006/7 budget speech earlier this year, Mangena said that a space agency would unite the work of several institutions, through which it hoped to boost the South African economy by creating more jobs.

He said that this initiative followed a number of developments, such as the construction of the Southern Hemisphere's most powerful optical telescope, located at Sutherland, in the Northern Cape.

Mangena also highlighted the establishment of the high-energy stereoscopic-system observatory, the world's most powerful cosmic-ray instrument, in Namibia.

Meanwhile, South Africa was bidding to host the \$1,5-billion Square Kilometre Array radio telescope, the largest in the world, in the Northern Cape. "If successful, this will translate into foreign investment of R9-billion with a spin-off of major contracts for engineering companies in South Africa," he said.

The South African space industry signed bilateral agreements with the Russian Space Agency and earlier it also signed partnerships and cooperation agreements with the European Space Agency, the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Although the new agency was the first of its kind in South Africa, the country had been involved in space-related activities since the late 1950s. South Africa's first satellite tracking facility was built in Kempton Park, east of Johannesburg, in 1985 and was later it moved to Hartbeeshoek, west of Tswane, Pretoria.

The country also had a military space programme during the 1980s, which aimed at launching a spy satellite. This was, however, terminated in the 1990s.



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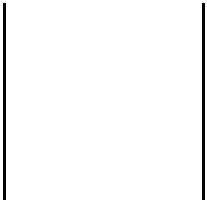
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