



South African space agency to be established this year

By: Creamer Media Reporter

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South African President Kgalema Motlanthe has signed a Bill into law, that will see the creation of South Africa's own space agency later this year.

The National Space Agency Act will pull together all space-related activities under one banner, and will provide for the establishment of a national space agency to implement a space programme in South Africa.

The Department of Science and Technology (DST) on Thursday said that the agency would promote the peaceful use of outer space, foster research in astronomy, earth observation, communications, navigation and space physics, foster international cooperation in space-related activities, and advance scientific, engineering, and technological competencies through human capital development.

The DST added that the agency must also facilitate the development of space missions, develop technology platforms, and acquire, assimilate, and disseminate space satellite data for any organ of state.

The agency would also implement the National Space Strategy, which was approved by Cabinet in December last year, to stimulate the capability to place South Africa among the leading nations in the innovative use of space science and technology.

The strategy was derived from the DST's Ten Year Innovation Plan, which included space science and technology as one of five grand challenges.

"The agency is also expected to bring together the work of several institutions and harness their capacities to leverage billions of rands to boost the economy and create more jobs. Some of the projects it will coordinate include the Square Kilometre Array bid, the Southern African Large Telescope, and the launch of South Africa's second indigenous satellite, Sumbandilasat."

The first step towards establishing the agency would be to appoint a board of 10 to 15 members, a CEO who will also act as an ex-officio member, and a chairperson who will be appointed by the Minister of Science and Technology.

The DST said that the enactment of the law is seen as a step in the right direction, given the country's rich heritage of involvement in modern astronomy, which dates back to 1685 when the first temporary observatory was established in Cape Town.

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