

Pandor to elucidate SA'S space ambitions today

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Pandor to elucidate SA'S space ambitions today SCIENCE and Technology Minister Naledi Pandor is expected to announce today whether SA will put another satellite into space. Speaking yesterday, ahead of her budget vote in Parliament today, Ms Pandor said some of her department's budget would go towards the satellite industry.

The Department of Science and Technology's budget will increase by 27%, from R4,4bn in 2011-12 to R6bn in 2014-15, with the additional allocation expected to go towards the MEERKAT telescope and the National Space Programme.

"The National Space Programme definitely forms part of it. We need to create a clear work stream for the South African National Space Agency (Sansa)," Ms Pandor said.

Funding had come from an allocation earmarked by Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan to enhance SA'S economic competitiveness, "about R300m in total", she said, and some would go towards the space programme. Although SA'S space programme is yet to be finalised, Ms Pandor has said her department's aim is to capture a portion of the global market for small to medium-sized satellites.

Sumbandilasat was SA'S now defunct "pathfinder" and had an official price tag of R26m, which for a satellite was considered cheap. Its critics referred to it as "crippled" because it was plagued by problems during its two-year stint in space.

SA is part of the African Resource Management Constellation, a group of African countries that are putting satellites into space for earth observation. However, SA has not yet contributed a satellite to the constellation.

Sansa CEO Sandile Malinga said yesterday the final space programme would be submitted next month. However, he would not say whether more satellites were planned.

Ms Pandor is also expected to mention some of the outcomes of the ministerial review of science councils and institutions to Parliament today.

The aim of the review was to gauge whether they should fall under the department or under their line ministries. The review would be published for comment next week. "It urges the system to work hard to do more to achieve coherence and co-ordination," she said.

Ms Pandor said last year that science councils - such as the Agricultural Research Council and the Medical Research Council - should be brought under the control of her department. "The Department of Science and Technology must ensure that research is done.

At the moment, the level of coherence - or rather the absence of coherence - and the informal nature of co-ordination is not doing our country or our systems any good," she said.

Deputy Science and Technology Minister Derek Hanekom said yesterday that it was necessary to ensure SA was extracting the maximum value from its system. "Is our system constructed in the best possible way to extract maximum value and avoid unnecessary duplication?" he asked.