

Comic books to spread Meerkat

The Department of Science and Technology and the National Research Foundation and SKA Africa have released a series of comic books called Mission MeerKAT to increase school children's interest in astronomy and promote South Africa's bid to host the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) telescope.



Minister of Science and Technology Naledi Pandor expressed confidence in South Africa's SKA bidding campaign, and has predicted that the project would bring \$3.5bn (R36bn) into the infrastructure of the country if it is selected to host it.

The SKA's MeerKAT, a project using more than 20 large satellite dishes to listen to space signals, was named MeerKAT in reference to the small mammal indigenous to Northern Cape.

It is being assembled in the Karoo region and is described as the largest radio telescope in the southern hemisphere.

Nearly 100 young people in the fields of science and engineering have been assigned to work on the MeerKAT project in its Cape Town engineering office.

Mission Meerkat, a printed comic book by Madam and Eve comic illustrators Stephen Francis and Rico Schacherl, tells the story of a young girl named Hannah, from the Karoo and her adventures while learning about astronomy and the MeerKAT Project.

"It's important to understand what the SKA project means to science. SKA is on the scale of the Hubble telescope, if not bigger. It is the world's biggest science project," said SKA SA Project Director Dr Bernie Fanaroff.

"The comic book series has been aimed at children to get them interested in astronomy and science," said Fanaroff.

Pandor said if South Africa were successful in its SKA bid it would see nearly 2000 dishes spread across the Karoo and another thousand in other African countries.

She discounted the possibility of SA and bidding opponent Australia hosting the SKA together.

"A joint site is not a good option. My Australian contemporary will agree with me on this. In fact, it's just about the only thing we agree on," Pandor said jokingly.

Source: Sowetan

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