

The Straits Times: Existing Businesses Could Benefit from Space Venture

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By Grace Chua, The Straits Times, 22 Feb 2013

SINGAPORE'S venture into space is not a long shot, but a move existing businesses can take advantage of, said firms and economists about news that the Republic aims to enter the satellite industry.

Yesterday, Second Minister for Trade and Industry S. Iswaran announced the setting up of an Economic Development Board programme office to oversee the push, while Singapore-listed firm ST Electronics announced plans to build a small, commercial remote-sensing satellite.

Mr Iswaran said the industry's growth would spill over to local businesses. For instance, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) like Loop Electronics and Wizlogix have already tapped their radio frequency and printed circuit board design expertise to build satellite components for other companies.

Mr Lim Guan Choon, managing director of radio frequency technology firm Loop Electronics, said the growth of the industry could benefit his firm and other SMEs in terms of "more business opportunities and contacts, especially from overseas satellite service providers and companies, and more collaborations with local institutions like A*Star, National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in space-grade components and subsystems development".

But space SMEs might need government help to build up their facilities and capabilities, he said, as the heavy upfront investment required is a barrier to entry.

While Singapore universities do not have dedicated satellite-engineering degrees, NTU and NUS have satellite-engineering programmes that train about 80 students a year between them.

In NTU's undergraduate satellite programme, students "have the chance to build satellites that are slated for actual launch", said NTU president Bertil Andersson.

Barclays Capital economist Leong Wai Ho cautioned: "We've got to quantify at the end of the day whether it will add value and can replace some of the (sunset) industries."

If satellite components and manpower are imported and the satellites merely assembled here, he said, little value is added to the economy.

Still, Singapore could help fill the Asean demand for satellite services, as the regional market is still relatively undeveloped, he said.

Source:

http://www3.ntu.edu.sg/corpcomms2/Documents/2013/02_feb/ST_130222_A6%20Existing%20Business%20could%20benefit%20from%20space%20venture.pdf