

**Amazing offer to sell us cheap rockets for satellites**

# **RUSSIA JOINS SA SPACE BID**

Sun  
Times  
27/12  
92  
lead  
story.

By **BRIAN POTTINGER**  
and **CHARIS PERKINS**

**RUSSIA** has offered to put South African satellites into space using its redundant nuclear missiles — at a fraction of the cost of developing locally made missiles.

The extraordinary offer from Moscow's Scientific and Technological Centre will come as a shock to South Africa's high-tech industries, which are investigating a multi-billion investment in a home-grown space industry.

The Russians are offering to put as many as nine low-orbit satellites in space with the use of one missile at a cost of R25-million — negotiable.

Meanwhile, Denel, the commercialised arm of Armscor, is studying the feasibility of ploughing at least R5-billion into its own space development programme in the next few years.

Russia's bargain-basement offer is a major threat to the armaments industry, which is battling to find a new niche after the ending of the country's isolation and the winding down of the border war.

## **Fraction**

Details of the Russian offer have been made public by Dr Rudolf Gruber, the SA Foundation's Bonn representative, who discussed the possibilities with Professor Y Solomonov, chief designer of the SS-20 intercontinental missile, in July.

According to the proposal, the satellites could be launched from near the Russian city of Murmansk or could even be sent into space by use of SS-20s brought to South Africa.

The launching ramps could be erected on an area the size of a rugby field and then shipped back to Russia once the launch was completed.

The Russians are also offering to provide a complete multi-purpose space system which would provide satellites for communications and meteorological surveys — again at a fraction of the estimated cost of developing satellites in South Africa.

Dr Gruber said this week his sole interest in approaching the SA Government with the Russian proposal was to be of service to South Africa.

Mr Paul Holtzhausen, executive corporate communications spokesman for Denel, said this week that no formal offer had yet been received.

## **Delicate**

He said that feasibility studies for a South African space industry was pushing ahead, but he could not confirm that the cost would be R5-billion.

"We are busy looking into Denel's capabilities. We have also approached foreign and local businesses who may be interested in becoming involved, and are offering our satellites as a service to other African countries."

Somchem, a division of Denel, is developing locally made rocket motors and has already tested three motors this year. Houtech, also a division of Denel, has a well-advanced satellite programme.

The Russian offer comes at a delicate moment in negotiations between the SA and US governments.

## **Eager**

The US wants to limit the number of countries who acquire the technology to launch inter-continental missiles and has threatened South Africa with punitive steps if it proceeds.

Foreign Affairs spokesman Dieter Petzch said the government was eager to develop a commercially viable space programme without alienating the Americans.

An American source close to the negotiations said the cost of developing the missile and satellite system could be as much as R20-billion.