

State says it is forging ahead with digital TV migration

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After several delays, the Department of Communications says SA is on track to complete the migration process from analogue to digital television by the end of next year.



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SA already lags much of Africa on migration and missed last year's June International Telecommunications Union deadline to switch its broadcast signal to digital. This means the union will no longer protect SA's analogue signal, with the immediate effect that people living in border areas will experience signal interruptions.

Communications Department spokesman Mish Molakeng, speaking before Minister Faith Muthambi's budget vote in Parliament tomorrow, said the department was hopeful the migration would be completed next year.

The Northern Cape would become the first province to successfully migrate by July, he said.

"We are continuing and we are on the ground every other week to educate people on the migration process. The deadlines are tight. There is a consensus among the Southern African Development Community ministers that the countries in the region should complete this process by the end of next year," Molakeng said.

The rollout of digital terrestrial television has been hampered by delays amid bickering over the inclusion of a conditional access or encryption system for set-top boxes required when the country moves to digital.

Late last year the high court in Pretoria ruled that broadcaster e.tv could appeal in the Supreme Court of Appeal against the government's digital terrestrial television policy.

This could further delay the migration process and the government may be forced to pay millions of rand to replace the set-

top boxes already made. E.tv had challenged the policy, in which Muthambi barred government-subsidised settop boxes from being programmed to allow for encryption.

The broadcaster argued that the minister had exceeded her powers, did not consult relevant stakeholders and that her decision was unreasonable. E.tv said that conditional access was also needed in free-to-air set-top boxes to allow broadcasters to compete more effectively with DStv.

Molakeng would not comment on the case, but said the department was forging ahead with its plans to complete the migration process.

Muthambi's views on encryption are similar to those of the SABC and MultiChoice, the owners of DStv. Both broadcasters contend that encryption would add extra costs to manufacturing settop boxes.

Source: Business Day

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