UAE TO FINALISE SPACE LAWS SOON

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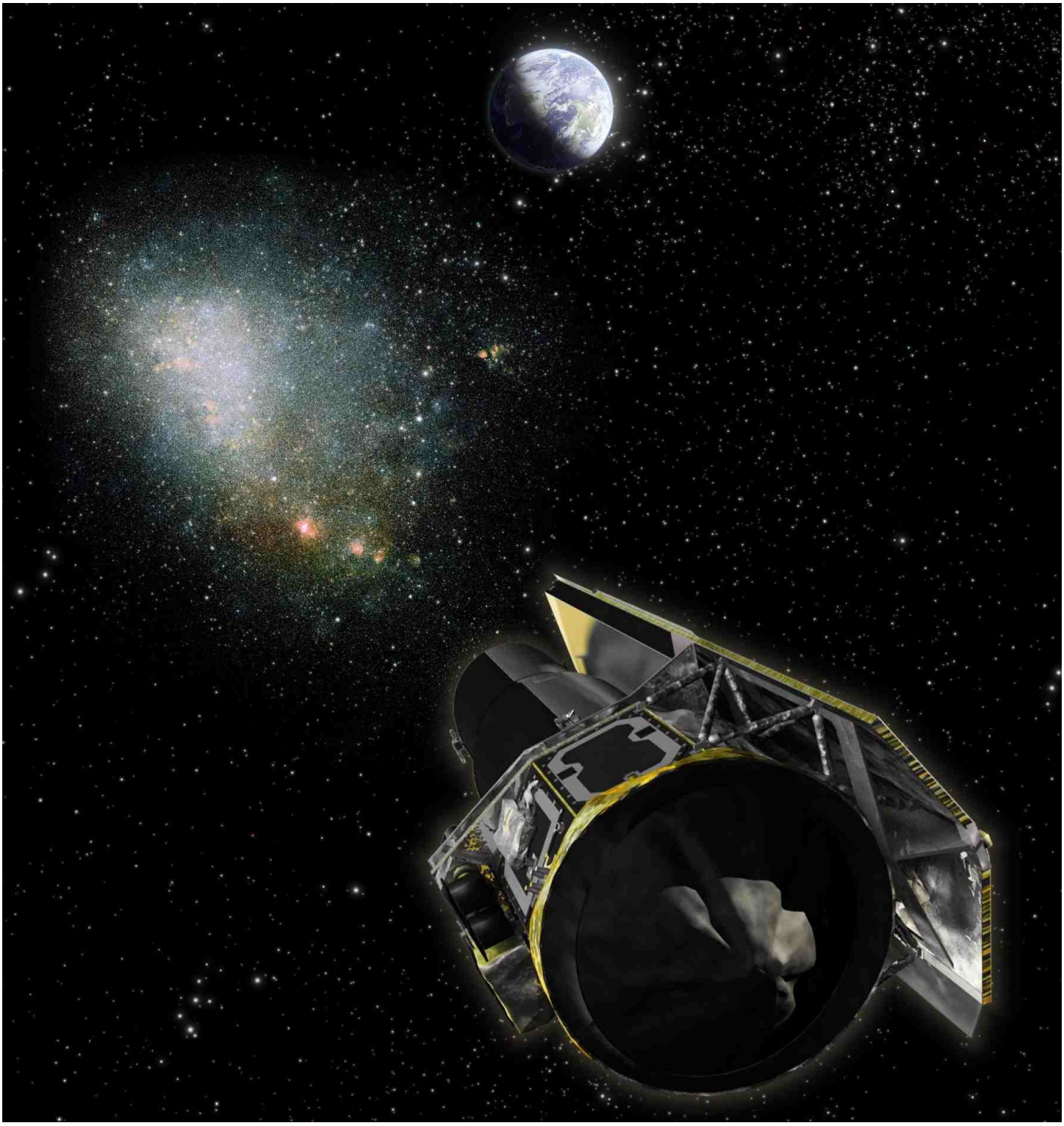

The UAE is finalising what is likely to become one of the world's first space laws, the head of the national Space Agency said.

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A space law covering both human space exploration and commercial activities such as mining is currently being drafted, said the UAE Space Agency director general Mohammed Al Ahbabi.

Speaking at the Global Aerospace Summit in Abu Dhabi, Mr Ahbabi said that the new law would be passed “soon”.

It would follow US legislation passed at the end of last year detailing how companies can profit from the commercial extraction of minerals and other materials as well as regulating how space missions from the UAE are organised.

The UAE Space Agency Working Group on Space Policy and Law was established last year to specify the procedures, mechanisms and organisational standards of the space sector.

“The year 2021 will be the 50th anniversary for the UAE, so it is an appropriate deadline that the first UAE space mission should happen by this time,” Mr Ahbabi said. “It sends the message that it is possible to do something like this at this time and in this region. Eight hundred years ago our brothers and sisters were leading the world in technology, and so our mission will send a message of hope and shine a light to young people in the region.”

In November the US president Barack Obama signed legislation that allows the commercial extraction of minerals and other materials, including water, from asteroids and the moon.

The US Commercial Space Launch Competitiveness Act of 2015 states that, rather than saying that materials in space should be shared by everyone on Earth for scientific research and exploration, any materials American individuals or companies find on an asteroid or the moon is theirs to keep and do with as they please.

Mr Ahbabi did not say whether the UAE would be taking a similar approach in its legislation.

Lawyers around the world are working to introduce new laws governing space exploration ahead of an anticipated space gold rush as mining companies consider the introduction of commercial flights and the exploitation of rich minerals.

Virgin Galactic, the space tourism company in which Abu Dhabi’s Aabar Investments has a 37.8 per cent stake, is already aiming to take customers to the edge of space, more than 100 kilometres above the planet with more than 600 potential customers including the Hollywood actors Leonardo DiCaprio and Ashton Kutcher signing up to pay a hefty $250,000 price tag to fly.

However, with costs exorbitant and risks still high, experts say that few space businesses are likely to be getting off the ground any time soon.

In October 2014 a Virgin Galactic space ship disintegrated within seconds during a test flight in the Mojave Desert after a premature repositioning of the vehicle’s twin tail wings.

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