

NASA official lauds Taiwan's role in space project

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Taipei, July 3 (CNA) Taiwan plays "a very important role" in an international space project that seeks to gather data about the origin of the universe, a NASA official said in Taiwan Tuesday.

"All the electronics and

avionics in the AMS-02 (Alpha Magnetic Spectrometer-02) come from Taiwan and are working well," said William Gerstenmaier, an associate administrator for NASA's Human Exploration and Operations, on the sidelines of the inauguration of a ground control center in Taoyuan County.

Gerstenmaier attended the inauguration of the center, the first in Asia and the second in the world, for the AMS-02 project.

"The AMS would not have existed without the support of Taiwan," he said at the inauguration ceremony, which President Ma Ying-jeou also attended.

The project is an international effort that cannot be completed by just one country, Gerstenmaier said, adding that Taiwan will play a crucial role in analyzing the data.

The AMS-02 detects charged particles in cosmic rays to find anti-matter, dark matter and missing matter in the hope of answering questions about the formation of the universe.

The state-of-the-art detector, designed and built by scientists from 16 countries including Taiwan, was taken to the International Space Station in May 2011 aboard the U.S. space shuttle Endeavour on its final flight.

The Taiwan control center is located at the military-run Chungshan Institute of Science and Technology, while the project's main headquarters is located at the European Organization for Nuclear Research in Geneva, with the NASA Space Center in Houston providing backup support.

After data is compiled, said Gerstenmaier, it is up to the inventiveness and curiosity of individual researchers to make findings that could

change the way people think about physics and the universe.

The project's top leader in Taiwan, Samuel C.C. Ting, said the AMS-02 is the only large scientific experiment to study the issues of anti-matter, dark matter and cosmic rays directly in space.

Ting is a Nobel laureate in physics and an academician of Taiwan's top research institute, Academia Sinica.

(By Christie Chen)

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