

# *Colombian City Set to Become Center of Latin America's Space Industry*

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Bogotá, October 17 (RHC-EFE) -- Medellín, Colombia's second largest city, is positioning itself as a hub for Latin America's space industry, an effort spearheaded by a public-private corporation known as Ruta N that is planning to launch its first aerostatic balloons in November.

As part of that initiative, known as "Medellin Space," new technology companies have sprung up to take advantage of this opportunity to develop low-cost satellites and place them in orbit, said Elkin Echeverri, manager of Ruta N's Science, Technology Innovation Plan.

Recent innovations that allow small satellites to be placed in the stratosphere using aerostatic balloons make it possible to carry out tasks - related, for example, to cadastral management and border and crop control - that previously had been prohibitively expensive for companies and governments, Echeverri said.

This new sub-sector of the aerospace industry also will make space tourism a possibility, he added, noting that the entrepreneur who enters this business in Medellín will be a pioneer in Latin America.

Ruta N, which has brought together several companies in Medellín in a "cluster" to achieve these

aerospace objectives, boasts a US\$2.4 billion venture-capital fund for companies or research groups that can generate innovative technological proposals in this field.

The first initiative will take place in early November when Ruta N will place its first two aerostatic balloons in the stratosphere in coordination with the Colombian Space Commission, a division of the Andean nation's air force.

Once in space, various experiments will be carried out inside the balloons by a three-person team.

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