

A GREAT STEP FORWARD, SAYS PM

# -Satellite MOU with **France**, US

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By **AHIRUDINATTAN**

MALAYSIA signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with France and the US yesterday for the design, manufacture, launching and maintenance of its first satellite.

The project, estimated to cost US\$250 million (US\$1 = M\$2.75), will be launched from Kourou in France in 1994.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said after witnessing the signing of the MOU in Langkawi that the event is "a great step forward" for Malaysia as well as for the East Asia telecommunications industry.

Local telecommunications company Binariang represented Malaysia while Arianespace signed for France, and Hughes, which will manufacture the satellite, signed for the US.

Binariang director Noordin Baharuddin said an agreement is expected to be finalised and signed in two months.

Signatories were Binariang director Tunku Datuk Seri Mahmud Burhanuddin, Arianespace deputy director general (international affairs) Dr Klaus Iserland, and Hughes vice president and

group president Steven D. Dorfman.

The US and French ambassadors to Malaysia, Mr Paul M. Cleveland and Mr Frederic Grasset, respectively, also witnessed the signing. Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu was also present.

Under the MOU, the design and manufacture of the satellite will be based on Hughes' technology while the launching of the satellite will be handled by Arianespace. Binariang will send local staff to the two firms for training in the operational aspects.

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Encik Noordin said the satellite will change the course and scope of the telecommunications industry not only in Malaysia but also in the neighbouring countries.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir, also making the same point, said he is happy to see the Philippines involved as a user of the satellite.

The signing of the MOU was preceded by the signing of an agreement among the user group comprising Time Engineering; Philippines Long-Distance Telephone Co; Colorado-based Worldwide Sports and Entertainment; Uniphone Telecommunications; Communications and Satellite System Services; and Binariang.

Mr Dorfman said Hughes is negotiating for two satellites under the final agreement instead of one.

Datuk Seri Samy Vellu said the satellite (which he had previously said would cost M\$300 million), will enable Malaysia to launch the telecommunications value-added network.

This network, he said, will provide users access to data bases for information on "almost anything under the sun".

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir told a news conference later that the idea of a satellite was conceived years back but it was then thought to be "not worthwhile."

"Now that the private sector thinks it is viable and will benefit a lot of people, the Government says okay," he added.