

Invest in space industry, firms urged

KUALA LUMPUR: Local companies and institutions should get involved in selected overseas space programmes to exploit the vast potential in the industry, the Prime Minister said last night.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said steps should be taken to fully utilise space technology for economic and social gains.

"The setting up of the Space Science Studies Division and the National Planetarium is a step towards this," he said when opening the RM45 million planetarium at Jalan Perdana here.

Dr Mahathir said a comprehensive space programme was necessary to facilitate the development of space science.

The demand for services using space technology was expected to increase, he added.

Such services included monitoring of the environment, exploration of raw materials, defence, surveying and mapping, research, education, search and rescue operations and telecommunications.

"If we want a successful future, we have no choice but to venture into the space industry.

"If in the past the cost of placing an object in orbit was a few hundred thousand ringgit for each kilogram, now there is a technology being researched to reduce the cost to a few hundred ringgit a kilogram," Dr Mahathir said.

He added that the Energy, Telecommunications and Post Ministry planned to launch three communication satellites, each costing RM600 million, in three years.

In addition, the Science, Technology and Environment Ministry might launch a satellite for remote sensing and weather

forecast, he added.

In the private sector, Technology Resources Industry launched a communication satellite *Rimsat 1* jointly with an American company, Rimsat Ltd.

Dr Mahathir said more ties should be created with space agencies in Europe, Asia and the United States to encourage Malaysian participation in scientific and industrial projects.

Closer government-to-government relationship should also be cultivated in the region for mutual benefit in developing scientific activities, he said.