

Helping Malaysia to play key role in Asian communications

PM: Satellite will enhance ties with other nations

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By Manan Osman

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — The Malaysia East Asia Satellite (Measat) will help foster closer relations between Malaysia and its neighbours as well as enhance co-operation with other Asian countries, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said that as a regional satellite system, Measat would play a prominent role in Malaysia's contribution towards the development of communications in Asia.

The first satellite will be launched next year. Dr Mahathir has called for the participation of other regional groups for the launch of the second satellite in 1996.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at the signing ceremony of an agreement for the award of the contract for Measat and satellite control equipment between Binarang Sdn Bhd and Hughes Communications International Inc at Istana Hotel.

The signatories for Binarang were executive directors Nordin Baharuddin and

Khoo Teng Bin while Hughes Communications International was represented by its chairman Stephan Dorfman and Hughes Asia-Pacific vice-president Ted McFarland.

Also present were Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu and Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat.

Under the agreement, Binarang will commission the manufacture of two satellites by Hughes.

It will involve an investment of RM3.5 billion — comprising the satellites and earth station in Langkawi (RM1 billion) and the installation of the Global System for Mobile Communications for Binarang's cellular telephone system using digital services.

Dr Mahathir said the Government would encourage a consortium to invest in other satellite programmes which would be launched by other Asian countries.

"It is the Government's wish to see close communi-

cations links in the region to ensure that our traditional values are properly protected."

He said more importantly, Measat would bring Malaysia into a new era in broadcasting services where Malaysians would be able to use the "direct to user" (DTU) service through the KU-band where only the authorised receivers would be able to receive the programmes.

The satellite system will improve the quality of broadcast and its technology has enabled the Government to license Measat under the Broadcasting Act.

Dr Mahathir said that besides news and entertainment programmes, the DTU service could also be used for educational purposes.

"The broadcast of educational programmes to schools and higher educational institutions throughout the country and in countries covered by Measat can help overcome the shortage

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Business sector will also benefit

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of educational resources."

He said the DTU service could also improve the quality of education in the rural areas.

For the business sector, he said, the service could provide up-to-date news of the region, video conferencing and fast transmission of financial data.

He said the entry of any new system similar to the KU-band into the country would be subject to the nation's policies.

Dr Mahathir described as "peculiar" an idea being propagated by some quarters that individual countries do not have the right to control satellite broadcast to the people.

He said these quarters claimed that it was undemocratic to control such broadcast.

He said that since the invention of radio, its frequencies had always been controlled by the respective Governments and they also had the right to collect revenue from those who tuned in to their programmes.

He said the Malaysian Government had always been cautious about licensing communications technologies because it wanted to ensure that the nation's cultural and social integrity was protected.