

Boost for nation's communications

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysia East Asia Satellite (Measat) system will play the lead role in Malaysia's contribution towards communications development in Asia, **Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad** said yesterday.

The Prime Minister said the country's own satellite system would meet part of its telecommunication and broadcasting needs.

With the existence of the Measat, communication links throughout Malaysia, including links with areas far in the interior, would become unhindered.

He said the satellite would bridge the gap in communications between Malaysia and neighbouring countries, and step up communications with India and other countries in Asia.

"As a regional satellite system, Measat will play the lead role in Malaysia's contribution towards communications develop-

ment in Asia," he said when witnessing the signing of the RM3.5 billion award of contract between Binariang Sdn Bhd and Hughes Communications International Inc here.

Binariang will commission the manufacture of two satellites from Hughes.

The first, called Measat-1, will be delivered next year.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia welcomed the participation of other parties in the region in the launching of the second satellite in 1996.

He said the Government would encourage Measat to invest in other satellites to be launched by other countries in Asia so that the regional communication links would be inter-related and inter-dependent.

Malaysians would be able to use the direct-to-user (DTU) services when the satellite was launched, including getting high quality reception of news and enter-

tainment programmes.

Besides the DTU services, Measat-1 will also offer general communication services in the Asia region, starting with Malaysia.

It can provide for distant learning, telephone, television and radio broadcast and data communication.

Dr Mahathir said broadcasting licences of the Measat Broadcast Network Systems Sdn Bhd would incorporate the customary conditions of the Information Ministry.

He said there was now a new but strange concept whereby no longer would any country have the right to control satellite broadcasts.

"It was said that it would be undemocratic to have such broadcasts under the jurisdiction of the local laws but in fact since the invention of the radio its broadcast has never once been not controlled by the Government," he said.

He added that Malaysia

had always been cautious in licensing communication technologies due to its concern about safeguarding the nation's cultural and social integrity.

He said the Measat consortium was committed to building a regional broadcasting centre in Malaysia for video and audio broadcasts.

"Utilising the rights negotiated by Measat with countries within its footprint, the group has given an undertaking to the Government of Malaysia and the other administrators in the region to build a truly Asian broadcasting network," he said.

He said Malaysia would lead the region in using the Measat design technology effectively to license satellite broadcasting, and deliver consumer-oriented DTU services.

Also present were Energy, Telecommunications and Post Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat and Binariang chairman Tun Haniff Omar.