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Mazlan - Satellite

EIGHT MALAYSIAN ENGINEERS WILL HELP BUILD MICRO SATELLITE

SHAH ALAM, Jan 21 (Bernama) -- Eight Malaysian engineers will help build the country's micro satellite costing RM25 million, Space Science Studies Division (BAKSA) Director-General Prof Dr Mazlan Othman said today.

She said they would be working full time for two years together with foreign engineers to build the 50kg satellite.

"We will be involved in the actual building of the micro satellite and will not be just onlookers," she said after the closing ceremony of the Sumur City Aerospace Adventure exhibition here by Science, Technology and Environment Minister, Datuk Law Hieng Ding.

"Parts of the micro satellite would be built in Malaysia," she said.

On when the micro satellite would be launched, she said it would be next year as Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said but there might be a change.

She explained that the micro satellite was very small which meant that it would have to ride piggy back on another rocket and the slot for that was difficult to find.

Differentiating the sizes of satellites, she said a micro satellite was around 50kg in weight, a mini-satellite about 100 to 200kg, a small satellite slightly less than 1,000kg and a full fledged satellite like MEASAT-1 around 1,500kg while the Russian satellite which was on display at Sumur City here was about 5,000kg.

Mazlan said Malaysia was supposed to get a free ride from Arianespace, the launcher of MEASAT-1, however, whether or not Malaysia could get the free launch was still uncertain because Arianespace had so many clients and could not accommodate an immediate free ride which was always given low priority.

Thus, she said, Malaysia might have to get some other company may be from India or Russia, to launch the satellite "because we want to do it quickly."

On the capabilities of the micro satellite, she said it could do some rough remote sensing such as spotting large scale forest fires.

Mazlan said the micro satellite project under the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment, was meant more for "capacity building" to develop Malaysia's human resources in the field of aerospace science and technology and not so much for telecommunications or remote sensing.

"We have to train Malaysians...so this micro satellite's main purpose is not so much for communication but for capacity building to build up our human resource and also to make sure that we know the important things to do in space," she said.

Mazlan said after having trained the core engineers and scientists, BAKSA intended to have some post graduate programmes for masters dan Ph.D and exchange of scientists and engineers with overseas partners.

"We hope this will snowball our human resource in this field including in design and material technology," she said, adding that the next logical step for Malaysia then was to graduate into the building of large scale satellites.

However, she said it would depend on how well Malaysian engineers and scientists could acquire technology from overseas including in the area of satellite designing.

"The interest in space had come up with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's vision to make Malaysia a developed country," she said.

"And can a country stand up and claim to be a developed country if it does not take part in this very important industry -- the space industry?" she asked. -- BERNAKA