

13 JAN 1996

LEAD Measat-Launch

HISTORY MADE WITH SUCCESSFUL MEASAT-1 LAUNCH IN KOUROU

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 13 (Bernama) -- Malaysia today took a giant step towards becoming a regional and global telecommunications player with the successful launch of its Measat-1 satellite from the European Space Centre in Kourou, French Guiana.

Arianespace's Ariane 44L rocket carrying the Malaysia East Asia Satellite lit up the equatorial night sky after lifting off at 7.10am Malaysian time (8.10pm in French Guiana). It was Arianespace's 82nd rocket launch and its first for the year 1996.

The launching of the nation's first telecommunications satellite was witnessed by millions of Malaysians in the comfort of their homes as the historic event was telecast "live" on TV1 by Radio Televisyen Malaysia beginning at 6.30am.

It was also witnessed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at a launch celebration at the Putra World Trade Centre where giant television screens were installed.

Measat is owned and operated by Binariang Sdn.Bhd. whose chairman Tun Hanif Omar is now in Kourou for the launch.

With him were business tycoon, Tan Sri T. Ananda Krishnan, the man responsible for putting Measat into orbit, and Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Minister Datuk Leo Moggie.

Measat-1 could be used for, among other things, to increase Malaysia's telephone penetration rate, in broadcasting applications, distance learning and data transmission services.

Its launch was re-scheduled from Jan 9 to today due to defects in the electronic boxes on the rocket.

Along with Measat, the Ariane rocket also launched the PAS-3 satellite for American satellite operator PanAmSat.

The Ariane Ariane 44L, with four liquid strap-on boosters, is the most powerful in the Ariane rocket series.

French Guiana, located five degrees north of the Equator on the northeast coast of South America, is the site from which all Ariane launches are made.

Dr Mahathir, who was accompanied by his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali and several Cabinet ministers at PWTC, said the launching of Measat-1 was proof that Malaysians had achieved a high capability.

He expressed deep confidence in the ability of the Malaysian people to adapt themselves to the rapid pace of modernisation.

"This is 'Malaysia Boleh,' if we desire it, we can," he told reporters.

Asked how he felt about the successful launch, Dr Mahathir said he was happy because it marked another step forward towards making Malaysia a developed country by the year 2020.

"By comparison, 38 years ago we were backward and unable to do anything for ourselves," he added.

Commenting on the involvement of the private sector in the space industry, Dr Mahathir said they were in a better position to go into high technology compared with the government whose spending on development was dictated by priorities.

"The private sector is able because they consider it as a commercial effort and certainly they will be smart at seeking the income to pay for such a project," he added.

On the question of control over television programmes that would be

beamed from the satellite, he said it would be difficult to impose any direct controls.

"More important is control over ourselves... and we must strengthen our moral defence through religion by not watching programmes that are unhealthy," he added.

Dr Mahathir said this was in line with Vision 2020 which wanted the people to progress not only in the material sense but also morally.

He said Measat-1 could play a big role for the country in the field of telecommunications, long-distance learning, dissemination of information and entertainment.

"If we use it wisely, we will be safe and we will be able to advance at par with other developed races of the world," he added.

Dr Mahathir and the gathering broke out in applause when the Ariane 44L rocket with Measat-1 and PAS-3 aloft streaked into space; they clapped again 30 minutes later when they saw members of the mission control centre in Kourou congratulating themselves on a successful launch.

A technical hitch forced the cancellation of a scheduled televideo conference between Dr Mahathir and Hanif. Binariang owns and operates the satellite.

Speaking in Kourou after the successful launch, Hanif said Malaysia's 19 million population had reason to be euphoric with a satellite to call their own.

The occasion was also marked with the launching, by Dr Mahathir, of Pos Malaysia's First Day cover depicting the historic launch of Measat-1.

Measat will be controlled by Malaysian engineers and space technologists from the Measat Space Control Centre in Gunung Raya, Langkawi. -- BERNAMA