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Mahathir-Measat

MAHATHIR UNLIKELY TO WITNESS MEASAT LAUNCH BECAUSE OF UNREST

By: Azman Ujang

PARIS, Nov 10 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is unlikely to witness next week's launch into orbit of Malaysia's second satellite, Measat-2, in French Guiana in South America following unrest reported in the territory, officials here said.

Dr Mahathir is scheduled to arrive in the French Guiana's capital of Cayenne on Tuesday from an overnight visit to Trinidad and Tobago in the West Indies.

The Malaysia East Asia Satellite, owned by Binaring Sdn Bhd, is scheduled for its lift-off into orbit from the Guiana Space Centre in Kourou, about 60km from Cayenne, at 7.40pm local time on Wednesday (6.40am in Malaysia on Thursday).

Binariang officials said here today they had been in close touch with their counterparts who were already in Kourou to assess the latest situation.

"It is unlikely that the French Guiana authorities will take chances to allow Dr Mahathir's plane to land in Cayenne," said a Binariang official.

Bernama understands that the French authorities who administer French Guiana are expected to advise the Prime Minister, who is now on a four-day visit to Ghana, to call off his visit.

Reports said the French government has despatched police reinforcements to Cayenne after student protests brought violence to the streets for the second night running.

Rioting and looting hit Cayenne on Thursday when a high school strike that has been going on since Oct 21 in protest at the lack of facilities spilled over into serious disorder.

Meanwhile, a Malaysian media group scheduled to fly to Kourou today from here to cover the event had postponed their flight while waiting for the latest development in French Guiana.

Instead, officials of Arianespace, the European company which is undertaking the launch, are expected to hold a news conference for the Malaysian journalists later today.

Dr Mahathir's assistant press secretary Zakaria Abdul Wahab, who was also scheduled to leave for Kourou with the journalists, said he believed the Prime Minister would be informed through diplomatic channels of the situation in French Guiana.

Measat-2, like Measat-1 which was launched from the same site last January, were built by Hughes Space and Communications Inc of the United States.

The broadcasting and communication satellite cost a total of RM600 million to build, launch and operate.

Measat-1 with a life span of 12 years and Measat-2, slightly shorter at 11 and a half years, form Binariang's regional satellite system to provide immediate and simultaneous point-to-point communications and broadcasting services for the Asean region as well as Myanmar, Hong Kong, south China, Cambodia, Laos, Australia, Guam and South Korea.

Binariang chairman Tun Haniff Omar told Bernama here that despite their lifespans, the satellite business is viable and vital because it will bring Binariang closer to fulfilling its vision of making the world a smaller place through the power of advanced telecommunications.

It will enable the mutual exchange of information, data, ideas and cultures between Malaysia and other Asian nations as well as with the wider

global community.

Binariang's integrated telecommunications network will also serve Malaysia and its business partners around the globe. -- BERNAMA

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