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(Second of a three-part series)

MEASAT 1 - OVER TO YOU, LANGKAWI

By: Salbiah Said who was recently in French Guiana

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 26 (Bernama) -- The idea of owning a satellite has never probably crossed our minds 10 or 15 years ago. Even Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad admitted that he was not so sure when the idea was first mooted several years ago.

Even the technology of sending a rocket into space, let alone a "satellite", was beyond our imagination. The word satellite was then generally understood to mean an orbiting astronomical body, such as the moon.

But that is all past now and an exciting era has begun for Malaysia. This was when it realised that scientific fictional dreams can turn into purposeful reality.

This has spawned the rise of Malaysia's first communication satellite, Measat-1. Measat, which stands for Malaysia East Asia Satellite, is owned and operated by Binariang Sdn Bhd, which was incorporated in 1993 with a paid up capital of RM100 million.

Measat will provide an ideal medium to link Malaysians to each other and with their East Asian neighbours.

This not only highlights Malaysia's role as Asia's regional communications hub but also forms an integral part in the country's communications and broadcasting needs.

To recap what Binariang chairman Tun Mohd Hanif Omar said after the successful blast off in Kourou about a fortnight ago, "Nineteen million Malaysians must be euphoric as they now have their own satellite -- the first time is always the sweetest. Our engineers will then monitor and see whether we have a perfect baby."

After a bumpy road to the countdown - delays in the launch - Measat 1 was finally blasted off from the French Guiana Space Centre in Kourou on the morning of Jan 13 (Malaysian time).

Binariang Satellite Systems Sdn Bhd's senior manager (Measat Commercial Operations) Abdul Halim Abdul Hamid, said the satellite will "reach" Langkawi by Jan 29, by which time, it is "all systems go" for the island, which has been identified as the nation's aerospace centre.

Abdul Halim said in Kourou recently that Measat 1 would be at an orbital slot of 91.5 degrees East at an altitude of 35,900 km.

After the successful lift off, Hughes Space Communications Centre and Binariang engineers had commenced various tests from Langkawi and California and had been using spacecraft telemetry data from the Measat Satellite Control Centre in Langkawi.

From today, Measat 1 will undergo an extensive series of communications payload tests to verify and optimise communications systems performances. These tests will be conducted exclusively from Langkawi and will include initial testing of the advanced digital broadcast payload.

Following this phase of testing, which is expected to be completed in about four weeks, Measat 1 will be certified to enter service and be able to provide the country and the region with high quality telecommunications and digital broadcast services.

Measat 1 will provide both C and Ku-band coverage of East Asia starting in mid-1996. Measat 2, which is expected to be launched in October this year, will eventually provide additional coverage to Northern Queensland, Indonesia and Vietnam. -- BERNAMA