

23 MAR 1999

Satellite

MALAYSIAN-BUILT SATELLITE TO BE LAUNCHED INTO ORBIT SEPTEMBER

KUALA LUMPUR, March 23 (Bernama) -- The first ever Malaysian-built satellite, "TiungSAT-1", will be launched into orbit this September, taking Malaysia another step forward into the aerospace industry.

The launching of the RM28 million microsatellite into the 1,000 kilometer orbit is scheduled to be made from the Russian Space Agency (RSA) launch pad in Baikonour in Kazakhstan.

Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding said the 50 kilogramme satellite was developed, built and completed by eight Malaysian engineers in Surrey Space Centre, Britain.

"For the launch it would ride piggy-back with a rocket METEOR-3M in September," he said at the signing of an agreement on Science and Technology cooperation between Astronautic Technology (M) Sdn Bhd, TiungSAT-1 owner, and the RSA here today.

The Malaysian microsatellite project was launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 1995 and its development began in 1996. By October 1997 the satellite was successfully completed.

Law said although Malaysia paid for the technology and the construction of TiungSAT-1 was done overseas it had nevertheless enabled Malaysia for the first time ever to gain tremendous experience and confidence in the field.

He said the TiungSAT-1 had been ready for launching two years back but negotiations for a confirmed piggy-back ride had not been fruitful until the signing of the agreement with the RSA.

"After all the experiences it is now obvious that launching a satellite is a bigger challenge than building one," he said, hoping the scheduled launch in September would be a success and usher a perfect entry of Malaysia's involvement in the space industry.

He was pleased that Astronautic Technology had carried out its corporate duty with utmost commitment not only in the successful completion of the TiungSAT-1 but also numerous other joint programmes, activities and international cooperation to firmly establish itself as a leader in satellite technology in the region.

On the cooperation with the RSA, he said, Malaysia always acknowledged Russia as a leading country in space technology and the cooperation would provide a perfect platform for a strategic partnership in space technology between the two countries.

Law said the TiungSAT-1 applications included meteorology, disaster mitigation and management, pollution monitoring, remote surveillance, private e-mail communication and education and research.

Astronautic Technology Chairman, Lt. Jen (R) Datuk Seri Abdul Ghani Aziz said the company viewed the satellite as an educational programme towards developing the capability to design, build, launch and operate Malaysia's own satellites to meet the country's needs.

"TiungSAT-1 has taught us many things, among which -- for a small country like Malaysia, getting into designing and building activities without being assured of a launch berth is not the way to go," he said, adding that a satellite programme involved a lot more than mere designing and building.

He said the difficulties faced had made Malaysia now wiser in various aspects and areas such as space insurance, transportation, integration of the satellite to the rocket and other minute details.

Earth stations for the TiungSAT-1 had been completed and ready for use, he said, adding that one was in Bangi and another one at the National Planetarium, here.

Abdul Ghani said all monitoring and control of the satellite which would have a lifespan of three to 15 years would be handled from Malaysia and by Malaysians.

Asked whether the company's next project would be a minisatellite or a midisatellite, he said it would depend on the successful launch of TiungSAT-1 and also on the needs of the government and the market.

Asked about the difference between TiungSAT-1 and MEASAT-1, another Malaysian-owned satellite already in orbit, he said, MEASAT weighing 1,400 kilogramme and in orbit at 36,000 kilometres was much bigger than TiungSAT-1.

"TiungSAT-1 will be orbitting the Earth and will be over Malaysia four times daily but MEASAT is geo-static and stationery above Malaysia all the time," he said.

Russian Ambassador in Malaysia Alexey Zhukov in his speech expressed the confidence that Malaysia and Russia, in collaboration, would be able to go a long way in the space industry.

"With Russian technology and Malaysian dynamism, I think we will go into space and stay there for a long time... we can really produce wonderful results," he said.

At the signing ceremony Abdul Ghani represented his company while RSA by its Deputy Director Leonid Makridenko. Both the minister and the ambassador witnessed the signing ceremony.

Later Law also presented a RM2,000 mock cheque to Zahari Ahmad, the winner of the TiungSAT-1 logo contest.

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