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September launch for Malaysia's first microsatellite

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Malaysia is making final preparations for the launch of the country's first microsatellite - TiungSat-1 - into orbit this September.

Constructed at a cost of RM28 million, the microsatellite will be launched into a 1,000-kilometre orbit by the Russian Space Agency at the Baikonur cosmodrome in the former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan.

It will ride piggy-back on a METEOR-3M rocket.

Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding said the launch would usher in Malaysia's involvement in the space industry and propel Malaysians into a more advanced age of science and technology.

Weighing less than 50 kilogrammes, the development of TiungSat-1 involved the participation of eight Malaysian engineers.

"Although the entire development of the satellite was done in Surrey Space Centre in the United Kingdom, the direct involvement of the engineers had enabled the country to gain tremendous experience and confidence in the field."

Law told this to reporters after witnessing the signing of an agreement on science and technology co-operation between the company set up by the Government to operate TiungSat-1, Astronautic Technology Sdn Bhd and the Russian Space Agency at his office.

The co-operation will provide a perfect platform for a strategic partnership in space technology between Malaysia and Russia.

Astronautic Technology Sdn Bhd was represented by its chairman Datuk Seri Abdul Ghani Aziz and the ministry's space science studies research division director-general Professor Datuk Dr Mazlan Othman.

The Russian Space Agency was represented by its deputy director Leonid Makridenko and the Russian trade representative to Malaysia Anatoly Romanov.

Also present was Russian Ambassador to Malaysia Alexey Zhukov.

The launching of TiungSat-1 into an orbit closer to earth than geostationary orbit is important for telecommunications, development of aerospace technology and in remote sensing.

The microsatellite project was launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 1995.

By October 1997 the satellite was completed.

However, the launch date was delayed due to difficulty in getting a delivery vehicle.

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