

11 OCT 2001

Mahathir-LIMA (Aerospace)

MALAYSIA TO LAUNCH EIGHT SMALL SATELLITES IN ORBIT

LANGKAWI, Oct 11 (Bernama) -- Malaysia will soon launch eight small satellites in orbit under its "NeqO" space programme, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"To ensure that these satellites benefit us fully, we will place them in orbit near the equator," he said at a ceremony to mark the first anniversary in orbit of the country's first micro-satellite, TiungSAT-1 at the Langkawi International Martime and Aerospace Exhibition (LIMA '01) here today.

The text of his speech was read out by Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain.

Dr Mahathir said all remote sensing satellites launched in orbit so far had been of more benefit to countries located away from the equator.

For the success of the "NeqO" space programme, he said two programmes -- Medium Aperture Program and SPORT (small payload orbit transfer) Space Vehicle programme -- were being developed.

The Medium Aperture programme, jointly undertaken by Astronautic Technology Sdn Bhd (ATSB) and SaTReCi Co Ltd of South Korea, is to develop a 2.5m x 5m resolution satellite camera.

ATSB in collaboration with AeroAstro of the U.S. is also involved in the SPORT Space Vehicle programme to design and build a mechanism that will place the satellite in suitable orbit.

Dr Mahathir said both programmes involved the participation of local and foreign engineers.

He said the new space programme followed Malaysia's success last year in the TiungSAT-1 programme.

Malaysia should continue to scout for joint ventures with other countries to maximise its resources, he said.

"Our preparations to become a developed country must include acquisition of critical technology, among them information technology, quantity science and biological engineering," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the development in space technology created spin-offs that could benefit these fields and in fact had the potential to produce new products and processes as well as new industries.

"The role of the space technology in improving the quality of life of Malaysians is already clear. So we have to move forward with greater determination, supported by strategies that will allow us not to be fully dependent on others.

"Malaysia should not just be a user or spectator to technological development," he said.

-- BERNAMA

JM ABG