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Satellite offer to Africa (HL)

Saiful Azhar Abdullah in Kampala, Uganda

MALAYSIA last night offered African countries the use of its third satellite to be launched in 2004, a move aimed at further enhancing smart partnership among participating members.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, making the offer just before the close of the Global 2001 Smart Partnership International Dialogue here, also offered the African nations a stake in it.

He said Binariang Satellite Systems Sdn Bhd, the owner and operator of the Malaysia East Asia Satellite System (Measat), had established a consortium with Astronautic Technology Sdn Bhd to launch a new satellite into the Malaysian orbit slot of 5.7 degrees east longitude.

Dr Mahathir, in his last intervention before leaving for home, said the offer was made because satellite ownership and control could be a very expensive venture.

"Therefore, it's better to play it smart by sharing in its cost," he told delegates.

At a pre-departure Press conference, Dr Mahathir said members of the Global 2001 Smart Partnership would be given preference ahead of others.

"But, of course, we are always willing to share with others in Africa as well."

Dr Mahathir said Africa's involvement could be through sharing the cost or renting of one of the transponders.

"The cost is prohibitive... perhaps we can share it. I hope countries in Africa will consider coming in," he said.

At a total cost of US\$200 million (RM760 million), the new satellite, according to Dr Mahathir, would be named Africa Meas Sat (A-M Sat).

A-M Sat will employ a payload of 24 C-Band and 12 Ku-Band transponders, each providing 36Mhz of bandwidth over its 15-year operational life.

Dr Mahathir said A-M Sat had been designed to interconnect with the existing Measat Satellite Network through Measat-3.

The Measat-3 C-Band payload will cover Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Asia and Australia.

The Measat-3 Ku Band payload has been designed to provide high-powered flexible service options for the development of direct-to-home applications in China and India and supplement Measat-1 and Measat-2 Ku band capacity over Malaysia, Indonesia, India, the Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan and Australia.

Measat-2 will provide further connectivity to the US via Hawaii.

Once operational, A-M Sat will be part of a US\$900 million fully-integrated platform offering advanced direct-to-home, digital video, data and Internet services covering more than 85 per cent of the world population.