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Mahathir-Astronaut

M'SIANS CAN BECOME ASTRONAUTS, SAYS DR M

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 7 (Bernama) -- Malaysians have the capabilities to become astronauts and fly to the outer space, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said their ability and talents were on par with other countries but finance and experience were the main stumbling block.

"I observe that their talents are not inferior than others, the only constraint is that we started late and we need to acquire the experience, we also need to spend money...this is the problem," he told reporters after the naming of Malaysia's second national microsatellite as "RazakSAT" in honour of the late Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, Malaysia's second prime minister, at Technology Park Malaysia in Bukit Jalil.

Nevertheless, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia would launch a programme to send Malaysians to the outer space in 2005, which is part of the agreement signed with Russia for the purchase of 18 Sukhoi fighter jets.

The agreement was signed during the official visit by Russian President Vladimir Putin to Malaysia early this week.

Russia also pledged to help Malaysia launch satellites and realise the plan to send astronauts to the outer space.

Dr Mahathir said candidates for the outer space programme could be anybody provided they have minimum qualification and conformed to other criteria like health assessment, knowledge and efficiency.

"Anybody...he can be an academician, can be an ordinary person or military person...anybody, can be trained and must have minimum qualification," he said.

On the Astronautic Technology (M) Sdn Bhd, Dr Mahathir said it had achieved very good progress in satellite manufacturing to the extent that Malaysia no longer need to fully rely on foreign countries.

"I find that we have capable engineers and after being trained in South Korea, I see that they can make the components by themselves," he said.

RazakSAT, an earth observation microsatellite, which carries medium-aperture cameras, is jointly developed by Astronautic Technology (M) Sdn Bhd and Satreci Companies Ltd of South Korea.

It is capable of capturing digital images of 2.5-metre pancromatic and 5-metre multispectral resolutions.

Some of the components of the RazakSAT's sub-system were developed in Malaysia by Astronautic Technology engineers, including the important sub-system for the satellite.

This is the first time a satellite sub-system was developed in Malaysia by the country's engineers.

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