

RazakSat to take off this year

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Satellite will monitor disasters, pollution

KUALA LUMPUR: The RazakSat earth observation satellite, which can monitor floods, landslides, open burning and river pollution, will be launched this year in conjunction with the country's 50th Independence Day celebrations.

Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Seri Dr Jamaluddin Jarjis said it was proposed that the launch of RazakSat, manufactured by Astronautics Technology Sdn Bhd (ATSB), be held at Kwajalein Island in the Pacific Ocean.

He said the Government had chosen the launcher manufactured by an American-based company, Space X.

"We are targeting to launch it this year in conjunction with the 50th Independence Day celebrations. We are at the final stage of commissioning our launcher," he told reporters after delivering a keynote address at the Malay-

sian Indian ICT Conference here yesterday.

Jamaluddin said he would see the launcher, which was manufactured in Los Angeles in Boston in May.

"We will check when it will be ready. We have told them that we want to reschedule the launch to this year. They have promised to complete it this year."

The launch of RazakSat, the country's second micro-satellite, has already been postponed several times from August 2004 to early 2005, and later to last year.

He said the American space launcher was cheaper and smaller than a Russian space launcher.

"That's why we want it. It is capable of carrying a load of 200kg. The Russian launcher, which can carry between 4,000 and 5,000kg, is too expensive for a remote sensing satellite."

Asked about the cost, he said:

"We are finalising the value."

At the Dewan Rakyat yesterday, the ministry's parliamentary secretary Datuk Prof Dr Mohd Ruddin Abdul Ghani said the lifespan of the satellite was three years.

Replying to a question by Datuk Ismail Sabri Yaacob, he said it was the normal life span for a satellite operating at low orbit.

Ismail then asked if the three-year lifespan had been shortened due to the delayed launch and Dr Mohd Ruddin replied that the lifespan began after launch and when the satellite was in orbit.

"The cost of the project is RM127mil," said Dr Mohd Ruddin.

On the country's first astronaut, who is scheduled to go into space aboard a Russian rocket in October, Jamaluddin said he would seek Cabinet approval to visit the site of the launch in Kazakhstan.

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DR JAMALUDDIN JARJIS

"If the Cabinet approves it, I will go to Kazakhstan to see the logistics and communication infrastructure," he said, adding that the ministry was talking to service providers on the logistics aspects.

On an unrelated matter, he said the Prime Minister was expected to launch the Multimedia Super Corridor Malaysia animation centre in Cyberjaya by the end of the year.

Jamaluddin said the ministry was also discussing with the Malacca State Government, which was also interested in setting up a similar centre.

He also said the relevant authority was negotiating with a television station in the Middle East to roll out Malaysia's animated series, *Saladin*, which won the Best Technology Award at the Seoul International Cartoon and Animation Festival 2006.