

RM142m RazakSAT faulty after just one year, says federal auditor
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KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 24 — Malfunctions barely a year after the RM142 million RazakSAT satellite was launched caused it to take 1,328 unusable mapping images that were inaccurate by up to 37km, the Auditor-General's report showed today.

The report made available today said state-owned Astronautic Technology Sdn Bhd (ATSB), which operates RazakSAT, lost RM10.89 million in 2009, of which RM7.7 million went towards insurance premiums for the faulty satellite.

"The operational lifespan of RazakSAT is three years. But the RazakSAT satellite failed to function fully on August 30, 2010, a year and sixteen days from launch date," Auditor-General Tan Sri Ambrin Buang wrote.

The Auditor General added that the remote sensing satellite was designed to "capture images within 1km accuracy" but "an image of an area in Sungai Buloh and Subang missed by 37km and captured Kuala Selangor."

As a result, 1,328 high-resolution images could not be used for the project's stated objective of providing remote information for land development, forestry and fish migration.

ATSB had promised to deliver images from the satellite, touted as the world's first remote sensing satellite launched into near equatorial orbit (NEqO), last year but have yet to release any pictures.

Its orbit allows RazakSAT to revisit some parts of Malaysia every 90 minutes, instead of once every two weeks as is normal with sun-synchronous optical satellites.

The Auditor-General said that ATSB, which built the satellite with a RM141.8 million government grant, had made corrections to the satellite but only reduced the level of error by between 2.4 and 22km.

The report said efforts to improve RazakSAT's accuracy were terminated in December 2010 and "the payment to ATSB was settled for a RM650,000 discount from the total project price of RM5.96 million."

"Based on the feedback from ATSB, the RazakSAT satellite is a research and development project and not a commercial project," the audit added.

ATSB's website calls the RazakSAT project a "cost-effective high resolution imaging system for Earth observation specifically for a small satellite (weighing) less than 200kg".

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