

Vietnam Ready To Enter Space Age

Vietnam's first telecom satellite promises to create many information development opportunities

Vietnam Telecom Satellite, Vinasat, was planned for launch in 2005; however, due to difficulties involving frequency coordination, the launch was put off till this year. The satellite is due to go into orbit by early April.

Bui Quoc Viet, director of the postal information center of Vietnam Post and Telecommunications Group (VNPT), says with excitement: "Vinasat is an information, telecommunication satellite that offers businesses and organizations radio, TV, data and telephone services. It will also provide information about emergencies like disasters affecting remote areas."

In 2006, VNPT opened an international bid to look for a full-service contractor. Companies from the U.S., Russia, France and Japan took part. Lockheed Martin, a U.S. corporation, won the contract to construct the satellite. The contract was signed in December 2006. Lockheed Martin Commercial Space Systems will manage the project in its entirety, from satellite design and manufacturing to launch arrangements, followed by final extensive in-orbit testing before customer acceptance.

Ses Astra TechCom and Hitec Luxembourg are two subcontractors that will deliver two satellite antenna systems in Vietnam and training to the Vietnamese satellite operation personnel.

The two antenna systems, located in Ha Tay and Binh Duong provinces, were completed in September 2007. In parallel, training for the future Vinasat satellite engineers and technicians is being planned to take place in Hanoi and Luxembourg. The sessions are co-financed by the Luxembourg Development Cooperation and will ultimately enable independent control of the Vinasat satellites by local engineers in Vietnam.

Lockheed Martin will launch Vinasat from French Guiana in South America. Along with Lockheed Martin, Arianespace of France will provide the rocket to launch the satellite. Vietnam has had the orbital position registered with the International Telecommunication Union since 1999. Technologically speaking, the 132°E orbital slot is very convenient for Vinasat to optimize its coverage and explore its capacity.

The satellite system will be based on Lockheed Martin's

spacecraft platform and is designed for a minimum service life of 15 years. Telesat Canada will supervise the process of manufacturing and launching the satellite.

Big step

Besides providing radio, TV, data and telephone services to Vietnam, Vinasat is intended to play a vital role in fostering economic development. The satellite system is expected to improve telecommunications in Vietnam by transmitting to all corners of the country. "It will improve the nation's communication networks infrastructure by removing dependence on terrestrial networks and allowing 100% of Vietnam's rural and mountainous communities to be equipped with telephones and television," Hoang Minh Thong, director of the Vinasat project management unit of VNPT, told the local press.

The satellite is undergoing system testing to check out the solidity of mechanical components and the reliability of the satellite in the assumed environment. "The implemental process so far has been successful," Viet said.

Vietnamese companies and organizations have to borrow satellite services from foreign operators, such as Asiasat of Hong Kong, Thaicom of Thailand, Measat of Malaysia and JSAT of Japan. Annually, they have to pay an average

of US\$15 million. After the satellite is launched, these entities will be provided with information infrastructure and telecommunication services, and Vietnam can benefit from this fee. Vinasat will help these entities be more active in exploring their services, which in turn will assist them in developing markets. In addition, Vietnam will have more opportunities in carrying out long-term strategies in the satellite information field, Viet said.

The project's cost is estimated at over US\$200 million. The satellite has a dry weight of 2.7 tons. It will provide two main services: stable information services and broadcasting. It can offer over 200 cable channels, thousands of telephone channels and Internet database transformation. The satellite was insured by the Postal Telecom Insurance Company with an insurance package worth US\$170 million.

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