

Malaysian astronauts in quarantine

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's two astronaut candidates are currently under quarantine in Baikonur, Kazakhstan.

Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Seri Dr Jamaludin Jarjis said this was to ensure their health would not be jeopardised before the launch on Oct 10.

Only medical and training officials are allowed any physical contact with 35-year-old Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor and 27-year-old Dr Faiz Khaled.

"They commute between the Cosmonaut Hotel and the launch area at the Cosmodrome. Their activities and movements are strictly controlled to safeguard their safety and health," he said before leaving for Russia last night.

Dr Sheikh Muszaphar is a member of the first crew with Russian Yuri Malechenko and American Peggy Whitson while Dr Faiz is part of the second crew with Russian Sharizan Sharipov and American Michael Fincke.

Jamaludin said the astronauts were required to undergo last-minute training like

carrying out repeats of the take-off procedures.

"They are also taught how to handle emergencies. They have been trained to adapt themselves to the conditions at the International Space Station (ISS), including the eating and sleeping times," he said.

Jamaludin said the time at the ISS would be based on Greenwich Mean Time (GMT).

"If the astronauts sleep at 8pm GMT, it will be 4am Malaysian time," he said.

Jamaludin said the launch activities would begin two days before the Oct 10 take-off.

"From 24 hours before the launch, there will be no communication with both candidates. Communication will only be allowed to navigate the launcher," he said.

Jamaludin said he would convey personal messages from Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak to the astronauts once their rocket had docked at the ISS.



Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor being fitted with the astronaut suit yesterday to familiarise him with it. With him is the mission director Colonel Dr Zulkefli Mat Jusoh (left).