

Angkasawan to inspire schoolkids

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysian angkasawan's journey will not end in space, instead it would continue on earth where he would visit schools to share his experience with the children.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi believed the outreach programme would stimulate interest in science and technology among schoolchildren.

"The programme will also emphasise the importance of science and technology to their (children's) future.

"Our angkasawan will go to schools and interact with students and answer their questions, all the while encouraging and motivating them to reach for much, much more.

"This is precisely what the government hopes to achieve by sending a Malaysian to space — to inspire Malaysians and give them a new confidence and strong belief in their own capabilities."

Abdullah said this at the launch of the first national angkasawan to the International Space Station last night.

Present were his wife Datin Seri Jeanne Abdullah, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Hassan and Deputy Science, Technology and Innovations Minister Datuk Kong Cho Ha.

More than 1,800 people, including 500 schoolchildren, witnessed the first angkasawan's flight to space, which was shown live on Astro on nine big screens in the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre here.

Abdullah added the advanced experimentation carried out by the angkasawan was aimed at stimulating the nation's scientific community, pushing it to surpass existing boundaries and seek out new frontiers.



Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor waving just before boarding at the Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan yesterday. — AFP picture

"This programme is a powerful symbol of the limitless possibilities of science and technology, building bridges that will bring these fields into imagination of young people here as it has done elsewhere.

"By venturing into space, we are, therefore, investing in our children's future. This great journey that we are all, in a way taking together with our angkasawan, will allow our children to think that dreams can be realised.

"In this regard, it is imperative that our younger generation is not only equipped with the requisite level of knowledge but also, importantly, with a boundless passion to innovate and explore."

The prime minister urged the people to realise the potential inherent in science as "a powerful tool" to improve people's lives in the broadest and most tangible sense.

Abdullah said a nation that ad-

vanced in science would also generate "robust economic value in the form of novel products as well as new innovative processes that effectively addressed 21st century challenges".

It was also significant that the launching of the angkasawan fell during the month of Ramadan.

"It is befitting that our angkasawan transcends boundaries and discovers new frontiers during the month that the Quran was revealed to mankind."

Bernama reports that Abdullah also expressed his thanks to former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad for having initiated the angkasawan programme.

"Thank you, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad," he said.

Dr Mahathir had conceived the programme to send a Malaysian to the International Space Station in 2003 with Russian collaboration.

Later at a press conference, Abdullah said Malaysia's space programme would continue.

He said should an offer be extended to send the nation's second astronaut, Malaysia would grab it.

"If Capt Dr Faiz Khaleed is still qualified to become an astronaut and there is a future Soyuz flight to the International Space Station, I will accept the offer on his behalf."

The prime minister added the government had allocated funds for space exploration, space research and space science.

Najib said the country had gone into a new dimension as Malaysia showed progress to be on par with other developed nations.

"This is an area which is usually explored by developed countries. I see this as a big success for the nation as there are Malaysians who are qualified to be astronauts."

Asked whether Malaysia would send a man to the moon, he said: "We should take this step by step. You must remember we are a small country and at present, we do not have the capability to send a man to the moon. But we have big ambitions."