

HOW MALAYSIA PICKED ITS FIRST ANGKASAWAN



■ **Aug 5, 2003:** Malaysia signed a contract to procure 18 Sukhoi Su-30MKM fighter jets from Russia under a package deal worth about US\$900 million. In return, Russia will purchase Malaysia's palm oil, provide transfer of space technology and train a Malaysian to become Malaysia's first angkasawan.

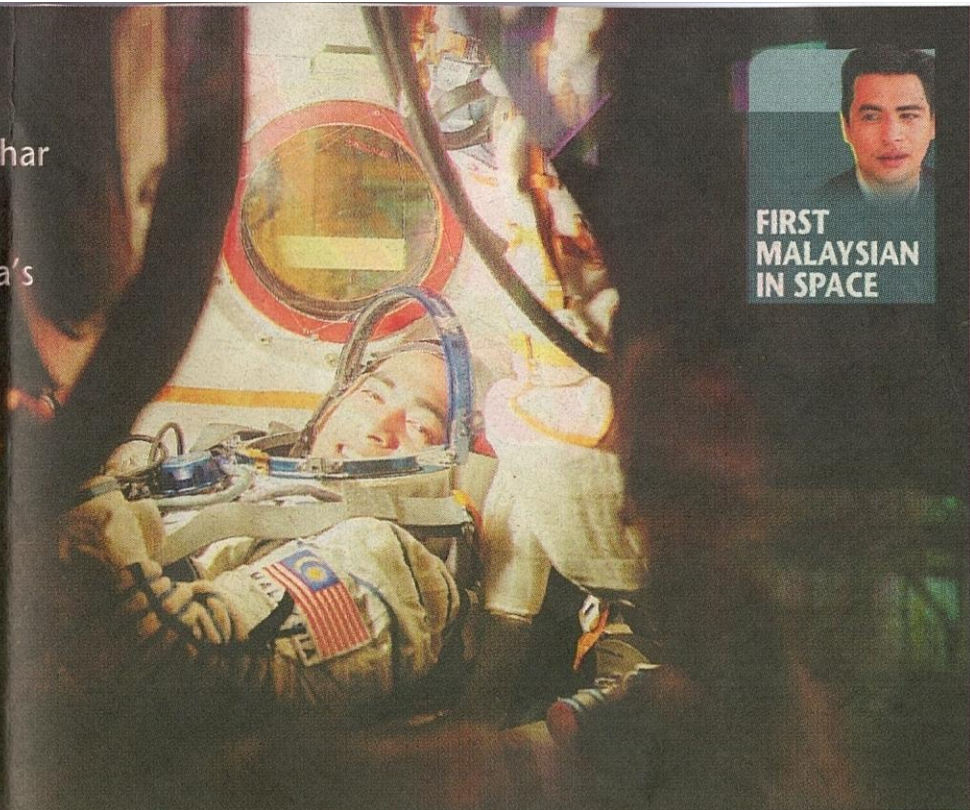
■ **Oct 2003:** Over 11,000 applicants registered online to become Malaysia's first angkasawan. Application requirements included being above 21, a degree holder or a professional pilot.

■ **Aug 27-Sept 3, 2005:** 894 candidates were shortlisted but only 435 took part in the fitness test. 199 made it of whom 194 underwent basic medical examination based on National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa) Programme criteria. 59 passed.

■ **Sept 25-30, 2005:** First aeromedical test. 59 were tested, 27 passed.

■ **Jan 16-21, 2006:** Second aeromedical test. 27 were tested, 18 passed.

Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor is not surprised at being chosen as Malaysia's first angkasawan. The man believes that his historic journey to space is part of destiny's grand plan for someone who has worked hard for it. ANIS IBRAHIM reports



FIRST MALAYSIAN IN SPACE

■ **Jan 16-24, 2006:** Overall assessment based on 3.5km run, second aeromedical test and psychiatric, psychology, land and sea survival and technical competence. 10 were tested, eight passed.

■ **Jan 25-26, 2006:** Medical examination (including CT Scan, endoscopy and blood analysis). 10 were tested, eight passed.

■ **Feb 9, 2006:** The eight faced a selection panel at Shangri-La Hotel, Putrajaya. They were assessed in all aspects in communication, character, forwardness and determination. Four were selected to be sent to Moscow for further medical examination: Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor Sheikh Mustapha, 34, orthopaedic surgeon; Vanajah Siva, 35, senior quality engineer; Dr Faiz Khaleed, 26, Armed Forces dental surgeon; and Mohammed Faiz Kamaludin, 34, Malaysia Airlines pilot.

■ **March 2006:** The four underwent medical examination in Russia, including neurology and body adaptation in microgravity environment.

■ **Sept 4, 2006:** Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahrnad Badawi named Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor and Dr Faiz as the final two candidates at the KL International Airport.

■ **Sept 2006-Sept 2007:** The two were sent to the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre in Star City, Moscow, and then to Nasa in Houston, Texas, for training. One will fly to the International Space Station (ISS) while the other is his back-up.

■ **Sept 24, 2007:** Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi announced that Dr Sheikh Muszaphar and Dr Faiz passed the test and were recognised as cosmonauts.

■ **Oct 9, 2007:** Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Seri Dr Jamaludin Jarjis announced in Baikonur that Dr Sheikh Muszaphar will be the first Malaysian angkasawan to blast off to the ISS from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan.

■ **Oct 10, 2007:** Dr Sheikh Muszaphar and two other cosmonauts, a Russian and an American, blast off to the ISS.



'I hope to bring back Russian technology'

N.S.T 11/10/07 M/S 12

“I WORKED very hard for this programme. I have let go and sacrificed everything in my line of work for this mission,” says Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor, on the eve of his historic journey to the International Space Centre.

“I sacrificed my profession, my business, being with my family and loved ones. So to be honest, I wasn't really surprised when the announcement was made.

“I've always believed in destiny. I'm very thankful to Allah and to those who gave me the mandate to become the first angkasawan.”

At the Cosmonaut Hotel in Baikonur on Tuesday, Dr Muszaphar said he was looking forward to the blast off because he would finally be able to fulfil a childhood dream.

“I can't wait to take the Jalur Gemilang into space. I feel like I'm living a dream, the dream of all Malaysians.”

Asked what he planned to do on his return, Dr Muszaphar said he hoped to share his experiences with others.

“To me, it's not just about going to space. What's more important is what I can do after returning.

“I hope to bring back the technology I learnt from Russia and share it with Malaysian scientists.”

He also wants to become a role model for Malaysian youth.

“I hope to inspire our schoolchildren and open up their minds so that they can believe in themselves. This way, there will be more angkasawan in the future.

“I think, once in space, my perception of life will change.”

Capt Dr Faiz Khaleed, the second Malaysian who underwent training for the space odyssey, may not be the first angkasawan but will still play an important role during the mission.



Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor can hardly wait to don his space suit. — Bernama picture

“After the *Soyuz* spacecraft docks at the International Space Station on Oct 12, I will be actively assisting the mission and helping Dr Muszaphar with the experiments from the Mission Control Centre in

Moscow,” said Dr Faiz, who was also at the Cosmonaut Hotel.

“Personally, it's very exciting and I hope the mission goes smoothly and that it will achieve its objectives.”

Like Dr Muszaphar, he was quarantined and the press could only submit questions through their contacts.

Asked about the recommendation by Roskosmos, the Russian Space Agency, that he remain with their training programme, Dr Faiz said he was grateful.

“Firstly, I feel flattered that Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Jamaluddin Jarjis is considering me for a second mission.

“I'm thankful for the opportunity, but I am also glad that there will be continuity in this programme. Like any other scientific project, space exploration and research needs to be sustained in order to allow Malaysians to benefit.”

On his interest in an expedition to Mars, Dr Faiz said: “If given the opportunity, I would definitely like to volunteer for the mission.

“Since we were trained at the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre and we are qualified cosmonauts, why not? I would be happy to participate in a Mars mission.

“After this (the Angkasawan programme, I will be doing my attachment at the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre. With the blessings of the government and people of Malaysia, I would be glad to go for the next ISS mission.”

Dr Faiz, who witnessed the blast off from the viewing point about 7km from the launch pad, added: “My message to Sheikh is, Good luck, I have no doubts you'll do fine.

“If you need my help, I'll be at the Mission Control Centre.”