

Cyberspace filled with excitement over historic flight

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PETALING JAYA: As Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor headed for outer space yesterday, Malaysian cyberspace was abuzz with excitement over the historic event.

Many local blogs and websites posted news of the event as well as messages of congratulations and good wishes for the first Malaysian to go into space.

"I hope it will inspire our children and youth, especially the younger generation of Kedayans to achieve similar things," A. S. Kasah, a Kedayan from Sabah living in Subang Jaya, wrote in *itsaturday.blogspot.com*

Bloggers among the colleagues of Dr Sheikh Muszaphar from Hospital UKM also took the opportunity to write about the space-bound orthopaedic surgeon.

"We are praying hard for (his) safety ... and I am so proud and glad that he is from the medical profession," said Dr Ezura, who works at the hospital.

The mother of a two-year-old said in her blog, *A Mother's Discovery (ezzuramd.blogspot.com)*, that her daughter has just learned the word "angkasawan" and expressed her hope that she would become the first Malaysian

woman astronaut.

Faridah Ariffin, who blogs at *anuarfamily.blogspot.com*, wrote of her nine-year-old eldest son who was "very interested in science, especially space exploration."

"He's always wanted to be an astronaut, but I asked him 'what for?', *macam tak logik pula* (it doesn't make sense). But I would never have expected that Malaysia would send an explorer into space today," she said.

The gushing pride and enthusiasm in the space mission is a relatively recent phenomenon in Malaysian cyberspace, which in the weeks and months leading to the launch was dominated by questions on the rationale of spending money on a space programme, as well as on Dr Sheikh Muszaphar's designation as a real astronaut.

But explanations on the important scientific experiments that Dr Sheikh Muszaphar will conduct has helped to win over many sceptics and generate excitement in the programme.

Many readers of *The Star* also took the opportunity to congratulate Dr Sheikh Muszaphar online via a special website *thestar.com.my/angkasawan* set up by the newspaper.