

Royal congrats for first M'sian in space

KUALA LUMPUR: Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin and Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Nur Zahirah have congratulated Malaysia's first *angkasawan* (cosmonaut), Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor Sheikh Mustapha, who left for the International Space Station (ISS) last night.

"I'm happy and proud because Dr Sheikh Muszaphar will be the first Malaysian to go into space in line with the government's objective for the country to attain further progress in science, technology and innovation.

"This is a truly historic moment for all Malaysians, especially in view of the fact that we just celebrated our 50th anniversary of independence," the King said at a function marking the launch of the Malaysian *angkasawan* into space at the Istana Negara yesterday.

The royal couple expressed confidence Sheikh Muszaphar's space odyssey would pique the interest of young people in science and technology.

Tuanku Mizan said the Malaysian space expedition was a testament to the government's commitment to put Malaysia among the ranks of countries which had advanced in the field of space science.

The monarch also wished the *angkasawan* "Selamat Hari Raya Aidilfitri", saying that he would pray for the latter's safe journey. - Bernama

Pat on the back from Dr M

Angkasawan's journey

a defining moment: PM

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KUALA LUMPUR: The prime minister yesterday described Malaysia's first *angkasawan's* journey to space as a "defining moment" that should renew the nation's drive in the field of science over the next 50 years.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said this is precisely what the government is hoping for – that this event will inspire Malaysians and give them a new confidence and strong belief in their own capabilities.

"This defining moment when Malaysia's first *angkasawan* travelled into space – marking 50 years of our independence – should serve to renew our drive and inspire our efforts in building and advancing Malaysia, especially in the field of science over the next half century," he said.

Abdullah said 50 years of space exploration have engendered scientific breakthroughs in many fields.

"These same technologies have since found practical applications, spawning new industries and creating substantial economic values. In this regard, Malaysia's aspirations are like-minded," he said.

He said Malaysia's objective here is to build and innovate on the technological and scientific knowledge to further national interest.

He said the advanced experimentation carried out by our *angkasawan* is aimed at stimulating Malaysia's scientific community, pushing them to surpass existing boundaries and seek out new frontiers.

Ex-Nasa guy: Sheikh Muszaphar an astronaut

KUALA LUMPUR: Former National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa) astronaut Robert L. Gibson said yesterday that Malaysia's *angkasawan* (Malay for astronaut) Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor Sheikh Mustapha is a full-fledged astronaut.

The United States Navy captain said that although Nasa had categorised him as only a spaceflight participant, Sheikh Muszaphar is a fully qualified astronaut because he had undergone astronaut training in Russia and also at Nasa.

"Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor is eminently qualified to be an astronaut," he told reporters when met at the KLCC where

"This journey will allow our children to think that dreams can be realised," Abdullah said, in wishing *angkasawan* Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor a safe journey from Baikonur.

"We hope to welcome Dr Sheikh Muszaphar home with renewed confidence and with a greater national consciousness focused on developing a nation of distinction."

Abdullah said this during a *buka puasa* gathering at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre prior to the launch of the Russian Soyuz TMA-11 spacecraft.

Later when asked by the press if Malaysians can look forward to another such mission to space soon, he said: "If there is an offer (to go on future Soyuz and International Space Station missions) then we will consider."

Asked if the government is prepared to allocate funds for such missions if there is no offer, he said: "Money has already been put in for this mission and we already have set aside allocations specially for space research and development."

Speaking to reporters after the launching ceremony, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Sri Najib Abdul Razak said: "This is a great achievement and success for the country as it shows that we have citizens who are qualified and have the mental, physical and psychological capabilities (to be a part of a space mission)."

This success also shows that we are ready to face new challenges in the future as we head towards becoming a developed nation, he said.

Najib said most importantly this feat is a great morale booster to the younger generation as it will give them the confidence to succeed

the launch of the Soyuz rocket carrying Sheikh Muszaphar and two other crew – Peggy Whitson of the United States (who is also the mission commander) and Russian flight engineer Yury Malenchenko – was beamed live last night.

Gibson, who has been to space five times between 1984 and 1995, was here to witness and experience the historic moment with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and all Malaysians.

He said "Nasa astronauts jealously guard their titles and I know this for a fact because I was there".

"They need to lighten up a bit," he said.

in their endeavours.

About 1,200 people, from school and university students to corporate and public sector leaders, had gathered to witness the launch with Abdullah. Six giant screens were installed at the KLCC.

The Russian Space Agency (Roskosmos) picked the 35-year-old orthopaedic surgeon as the one to undertake the historic journey. He will spend 10 days in space, including eight on board the ISS.

Sheikh Muszaphar is part of the ISS Expedition 16 crew alongside Russian cosmonaut Yury Malenchenko and US astronaut Peggy Whitson.

The rocket, adorned with a Malaysian flag and coat of arms, and carrying the Soyuz TMA-11 spacecraft, was moved to the launch pad from its assembly site at the Baikonur Cosmodrome on Monday.

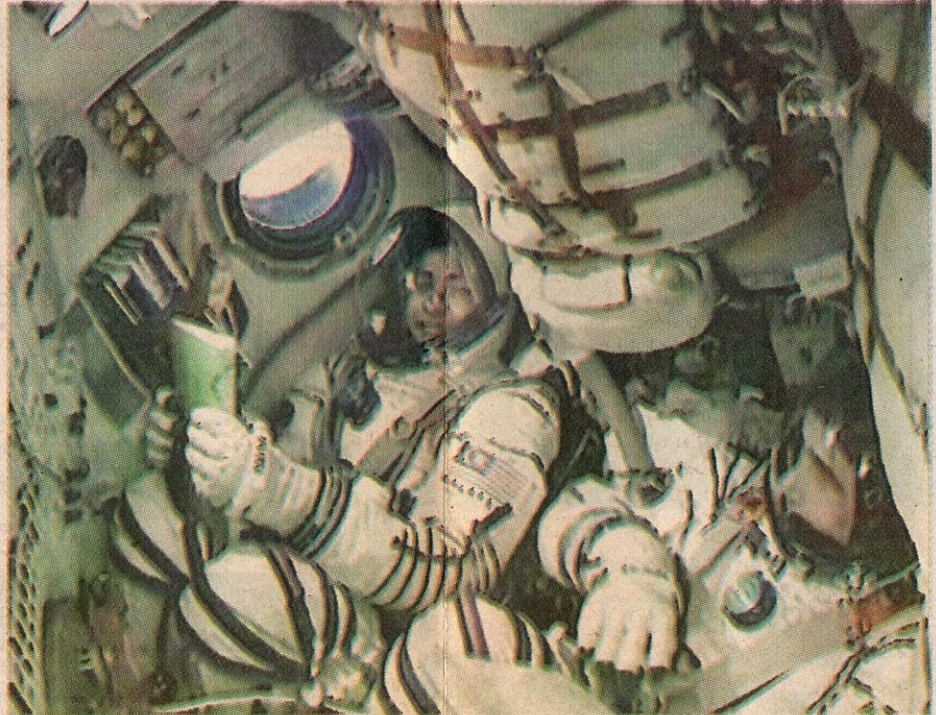
The TMA-11 craft is scheduled to dock at the ISS at 10.51pm (Malaysian time) on Friday.

KUALA LUMPUR: Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who mooted the Malaysian space programme, congratulated Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor Sheikh Mustapha for being selected as the country's first astronaut who blasted off for the International Space Station (ISS) from Kazakhstan last night.

The former prime minister, who is still receiving treatment at the National Heart Institute (IIN) after undergoing a coronary bypass operation last month, was confident Sheikh Muszaphar would carry out his responsibility successfully after undergoing the space training programme.

"As a citizen, I pray that the mission that will take Dr Sheikh Muszaphar to the International Space Station will go smoothly and safely," he said in a statement here yesterday.

Mahathir hoped all the knowledge and experience acquired from the mission would be shared together with all Malaysians and would act as an inspiration to the future generation. – Bernama



Sheikh Muszaphar and Malenchenko of Russia aboard Soyuz TMA-11 in this image from Nasa TV yesterday. More pix on www.sun2surf.com

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