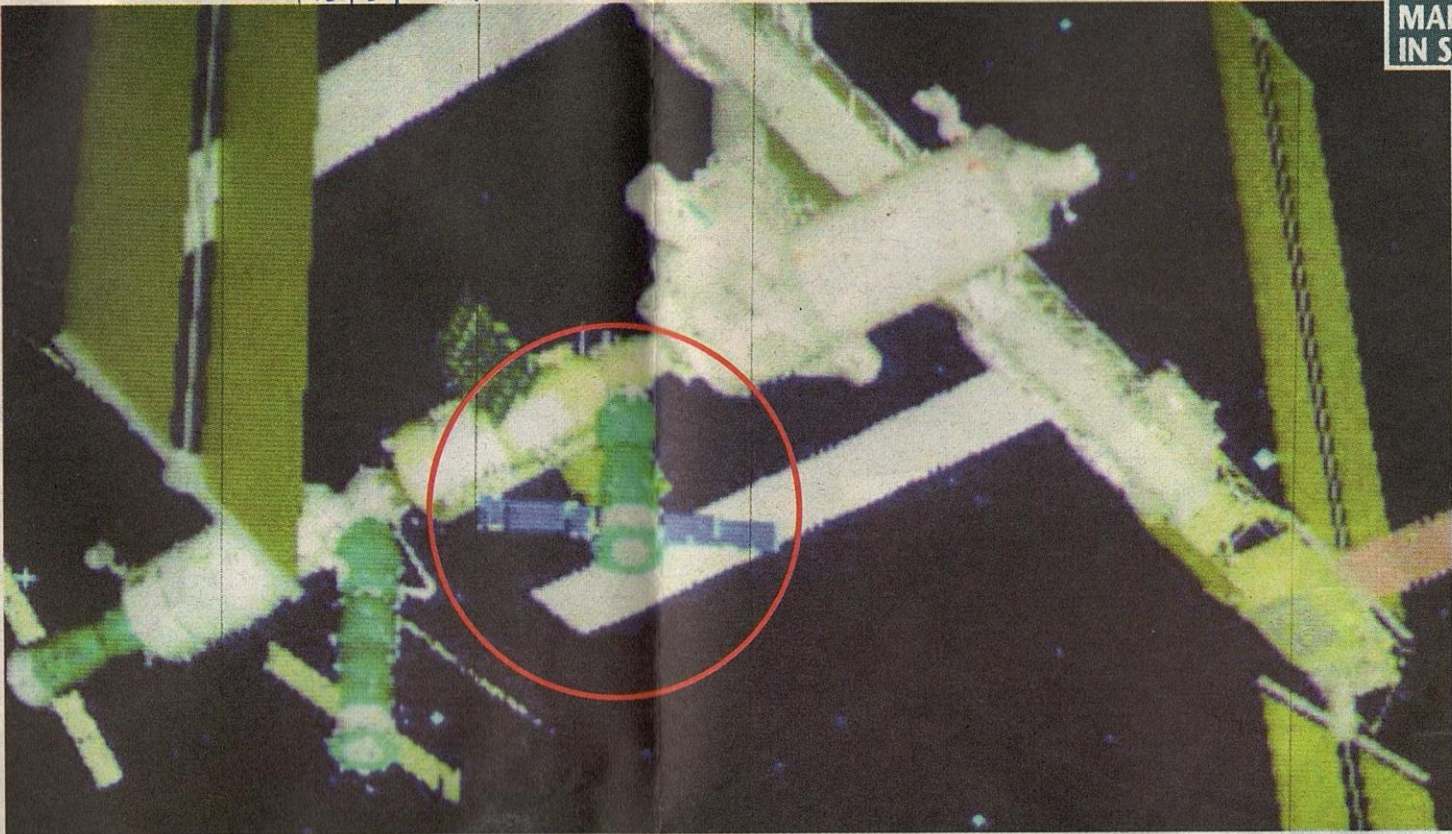


Muszaphar steps aboard ISS



N.S.T 13/10/07 M/S 8



The Soyuz TMA-11 (circled) docking at the International Space Station last night. — NST picture by Rosli Rahmat

MALAYSIA'S first astronaut Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor boarded the International Space Station last night, signalling the country's membership in the space community.

The Soyuz TMA-11, carrying Muszaphar and two others, docked on schedule with the International Space Station (ISS) at 6.52pm Moscow time (10.52pm Malaysian time).

The spacecraft, which was launched from the Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan on Wednesday at 9.21pm, docked with the ISS on automatic pilot after two days in orbit.

Russian mission control spokesman Valery Lyndin said, apart from Muszaphar, it carried the station's new American commander, Peggy Whitso and Russian Yuri Ma-

Whitson and Russian Yuri Malenchenko.

"Everything is great," Malenchenko told Mission Control shortly after the docking, which took place about 350km over Central Asia.

A commentator with US space agency Nasa called it "flawless".

Lydin said after checking the seals between the Soyuz and the station's Zarya module, a crew member on the station opened a hatch about 90 minutes after the docking and the trio stepped aboard the station.

Muszaphar will later carry out several experiments.

He will return to Earth on Oct 21.

Earlier, Muszaphar and the crew members communicated with Mission Control. He greeted Malaysians by wishing his parents and family Selamat Hari Raya.

"Selamat Hari Raya to all Malaysians on this historic occasion.

"Everything is all right up here," he added.

Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Seri Dr Jamaludin Jarjis, watching from Moscow, expressed Malaysia's gratitude to the Russian government and other agencies for making it possible for Malaysia to enter the space club.

"Without your contribution and support, we will not have been able to see a Malaysian in space. We are committed to remaining a permanent member of your (space programme) committee."

Jamaludin added the government was ready to send its



A TV grab showing Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor (foreground, left) and other crew members onboard the International Space Station.

second astronaut (Capt Dr Faiz Khaleed) to space, subject to negotiations and conditions set by the Russians.

He said he was made to understand there was a possibility that the second Malaysian astronaut might be sent to space earlier than 2009 in an upgraded Soyuz spacecraft.

"Our astronauts carry the burden and pride of the nation on their shoulder.

"It is the beginning of a new era and our astronauts know the burden on their journey."

He said Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak would make an official request to the Russian government to send the second Malaysian in-space when he arrives here on Oct 21.

However, a Russian official said it might be difficult to ac-

commodate Malaysia's request in view of the large number of people from various countries waiting to fly to space.

He said Russia was working to upgrade its spacecraft and it welcomed Malaysia's contribution to this purpose.

Dr Muszaphar will remain on the International Space Station for nine days and will conduct experiments on protein crystallisation and microbes.

There are three crew members onboard the ISS.

They are Russians Feodor Yuchikin (ISS commander and engineer) and Oleg Kotov (medical doctor) and American Clay Anderson (mission specialist).

Whitson and Malechenko will replace Yuchikin and Ko-

tov, who will be returning with Dr Muszaphar.

The crew will depart from the ISS on Oct 21 to land on Earth within two-and-a-half hours of un-docking.

For the landing procedure, the crew will stay in the descent module.

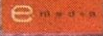
The orbital and instrumentation modules will separate from the descent module and burn up in the atmosphere before re-entry.

The descent module will land in the Kazakhstan desert, where the crew will be received by a recovery team in helicopters.

After a brief health screening, the crew will be flown to Star City, Moscow, for quarantine. They are expected to remain in Star City for two weeks.



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Next mission will be 'more challenging'

SUBSEQUENT missions in Malaysia's space programme will be better, Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Seri Dr Jamaludin Jarjis said.

"Capt Dr Faiz Khaleed will be the primary angkasan and the next mission, probably in 2008 or 2009, should have him doing more challenging tasks.

"This could involve him doing a space walk or conducting repairs to the spacecraft," he said yesterday.

Speaking in Moscow, Jamaludin said: "I hope to submit a proposal to Nasa (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) by this year that in addition to his training with the Russian Space Agency, Dr Faiz also be able to undergo training with them."

He was speaking to Malaysian journalists at the home of Malaysian Ambassador to Russia Datuk Khalis Ali Hassan.

"A second selection process

will be made to select the secondary candidate for the next mission, but those who were shortlisted in the final eight in the earlier process will be admitted into the final round.

"While we will include them, we are eager to have new talent prove themselves.

"I hope we can see more women candidates, for example.

"If America's Peggy Whitson can be the commander of Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor's crew, I don't see why our own women can't excel in space missions."

He also said he would be restructuring the National Space Agency (Angkasa).

"I intend to open up a special department under Angkasa to deal with manned space missions."

Earlier, Khalis hosted Jamaludin, Malaysian students and journalists to a Hari Raya celebration (Russia celebrated the first day of Hari Raya yesterday).