

10 to be picked for space plan by December

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PEKAN: The 10 Malaysians selected for the national cosmonaut programme will undergo intensive medical checks in Russia by the end of the year, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said.

He said these 10 candidates would be selected from a pool of 200 who would be short-listed after successfully undertaking the second-level tests.

To date, 4,467 people have submitted their applications to the National Space Agency, he said after presenting donations to representatives of mosques and suraus at Sekolah Menengah Sultan Ahmad Shah here yesterday.

Najib said the 10 selected

candidates would have qualifications such as a university degree, experiences in aerospace sciences and have flown an aircraft.

"They should also be active in physical activities such as scuba-diving, mountain-climbing and other abilities such as public speaking," he added.

Najib said the 10 would compete among themselves and again be short-listed after undergoing further tests in Russia.

He said the final selection would narrow down the number of candidates to four - two of whom would stay on in Russia to undergo full cosmonaut training while the other two would act as sup-

port team members.

Najib, who is also chairman of the Malaysian Cosmonaut Programme Committee, said the number of applications received by the National Space Agency (NSA) was overwhelming and surprising; especially when over 40 applications were received from those aged above 50.

He said he expected over 6,000 applications before the Dec 13 closing date.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had announced in July that the Government would be calling for volunteers to train with the Russians to become the first Malaysian to go into space in 2005.