

# Doctor, dentist last two in space race

SELANGOR: Medical officer Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor and dentist Rapt Dr Faiz Rhaleed have been picked to undergo a 12-month astronautics training stint in Russia.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi announced the successful candidates under Malaysia's first astronaut programme at RL International Airport's (RLIA) Bunga Raya Complex yesterday.

They were chosen from 11,000 applicants since the Malaysian National Space Agency (Angkasa) started the screening campaign for the programme in 2003.

Sheikh Muszaphar, 34, is with Hospital Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (HURM), while Faiz, 26, is with the Malaysian Defence Forces. The duo, both bachelors, were picked by the astronaut selection panel headed by former inspector-general of police Tun Mohammed Hanif Omar.

They will leave for the Yuri Gagarin Aerospace Training Centre in Moscow's Star City at the end of the month. Only one of them will get to join a programme into space organised by the United States or other European nations.

The successful candidate is scheduled to leave for the international space station (ISS)

on Sept 2 next year to undergo a research and development programme, including research on cancer and biotechnology

Malaysia's first astronaut will board Russia's space launcher Soyuz 2 before it is finally connected to the international space station.

At the station, he will spend six to eight days to carry out research in science and technology for the benefit of the Malaysian space science industry before returning to earth.

Last April 27, the two candidates, together with two others - Malaysia Airlines (MAS) pilot Mohamed Faiz Ramaluddin, 34, and an



One of these two - Sheikh Muszaphar (left) and Faiz - will be picked as Malaysia's first astronaut.

engineer, sole woman candidate S.Vanajah, 35, - left for Moscow for training at the Russian Space Agency (RSA).

The four candidates underwent training from the physical, physiological and psychological aspects.

The local astronaut

programme came about following the purchase of 18 Sukhoi Su-30MRN jet fighters from Russia worth US\$1 billion (RM3.7 billion) and in reciprocity, the Russian government offered one seat for a Malaysian astronaut to join their astronauts in an expedition to the ISS next year. - Bernama