



Najib (centre) with Dr Sheikh Muszaphar (left) and Dr Faiz at the lunch at the Deputy Prime Minister's residence.

Space first, marriage later

NS1- 23/9/2006

PUTRAJAYA: Love will have to wait for the two men training to be Malaysia's first person in space.

Their contract with the Russian space agency says that they cannot marry until at least 2008 when their mission is over.

But Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukur, 34, and Capt Dr Faiz Khaleed don't have a problem with this.

"It's good. It will help us to stay focused," Dr Faiz said.

The 26-year-old army den-

tist smiled coyly and said "no comment" when asked if he was in a relationship.

The 36-year-old Dr Sheikh Muszaphar confessed he was "seeing someone".

"I will abide by the rules. My loved one is very understanding," he said.

The two had just had lunch with Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, his wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, and Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Seri Dr Jamaluddin Jarjis at

Sri Satria, the Deputy Prime Minister's official residence. National Space Agency director-general Prof Datuk Dr Mazlan Othman also attended.

Dr Faiz and Dr Sheikh Muszaphar will leave for Russia on Tuesday for a year's training and final selection before blast-off in a Soyuz 2 rocket to the International Space Station (ISS) on Sept 2. They were chosen earlier this month.

Dr Sheikh Muszaphar said he would take photos of his loved ones to Russia. Dr Faiz

said he would take a collection of his favourite songs, including Ronan Keating's *When You Say Nothing At All*.

Najib said the government was proud of both finalists and confident in their abilities.

"We wish them all the best. We are very proud of their strong spirit and perseverance," Najib said.

Jamaluddin said the ministry was finalising the areas of research to be conducted by the astronaut with the Russians.