

Off to Moscow to make history

NST - 27/9/2006

SEPANG: Astronaut hopefuls Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor and Kapten Dr Faiz Khaleed left for Moscow last night to undergo their final round of training and selection to be the first Malaysian in space.

Each candidate had scores of relatives, friends and family members bidding them a bittersweet farewell, as they will miss the coming Hari Raya festivities.

The thought of spending Hari

Raya in ice-cold Russia, however, is no damper to Dr Sheikh Muszaphar, a medical doctor, and army dentist Dr Faiz.

"It's a sacrifice that has to be made. Sheikh and I will make it a good Raya, and I've brought along my *baju melayu* for the occasion," said Dr Faiz at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport last night.

"I love Malay food and will miss it this Raya, but I can adapt to other kinds of food. I'll miss my loved

ones, but it really doesn't matter where we celebrate Raya because my loved ones are always in my heart," Dr Sheikh Muszaphar said.

On the competition between them, Dr Faiz said they had discussed it and agreed to "let the best man win".

"Whoever wins will have won because of teamwork and all the Malaysians who are supporting us."

The chosen astronaut will board a Russian launcher next Sept 2 to the International Space Station where he will conduct research on behalf of Malaysian scientists.

Yesterday, in Putrajaya, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi gave them words of encouragement and presented the *Jalur Gemilang*.

■ SEE ALSO P24

PERDANA