

Moral support from PM

Russia-bound astronaut hopefuls inspired after meeting Abdullah

PUTRAJAYA: Malaysia's astronaut candidates Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor and Kapten Dr Faiz Khaleed left for Russia last night, but not before some words of encouragement from the Prime Minister.

In a half-hour meeting, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi presented the Jalur Gemilang to

the two candidates, who will train for a year in Russia before one will be selected to join a Russian mission to the International Space Station.

Abdullah told the two that they carried the weight of the nation's expectations, and urged them to do their best for the country.

"Bon voyage and carry out your duties well," he said.

Both candidates will undergo final training at the Star City, Moscow, which includes a three-month course in studying the Russian language, and scientific research in several fields such as biotechnology and medicine.

Only one candidate will be selected for the eight-day space mission scheduled to launch on Sept 2 next year.

Dr Sheikh Muszaphar, 34, said the meeting with the Prime Minister was an inspiration for him to carry out the national mission.

He said the premier's advice

also reminded the candidates of their duty to God.

When he returns, the medical officer said he hoped to inspire students and children to widen their knowledge in science.

Dr Faiz, 26, said he was confident that the two of them would do the nation proud. — Bernama