

PM opens National Space Centre

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BANTING: Malaysia has set up the National Space Centre to further develop the country's space technology and boost its growth through space-related activities.

Located on 162ha in Sungai Lang here, the centre will also be used to monitor the RazakSat satellite.

Opening the centre yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said it is an additional step to propel the country towards a more developed and successful future based on knowledge and technology.

The centre's mission control facility has a receiving antenna and features of the tracking, telemetry and command antennas.

It also has the optical calibration laboratory which consists of the integrating sphere, a spectroradiometer and a satel-

lite turn-table.

The space centre's next phase of development will include antenna and RF design and GEO mission control. The equipment being planned includes a thermal vacuum chamber, mass property measurement system and a shaker.

"When completed, the centre could become a regional hub for satellite fabrication and testing.

"This is an additional step taken to propel the country to a future that is more advanced and to move forward by acquiring more knowledge and technology.

"In the last few decades, satellite images had been widely used for various reasons such as monitoring and predicting the weather, land development and, more importantly, to monitor natural disasters such as forest fires and haze as well as oil spills," said Abdullah.

The space centre mission control facility will also be used to establish con-

tacts with Malaysia's astronaut, who will blast off in a year on a Russian *Soyuz* spacecraft next year.

Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor and backup astronaut Faiz Khaleed had left for a one-year training stint in Moscow's Star City, beginning tomorrow.

"We want our astronaut to show to the world that Islam is not a hindrance to progress even while exploring space," Abdullah said.

After the launch, the prime minister had a live chat with Sheikh Muszaphar and Faiz via video conferencing.

"I hope both of you will work hard and study whatever is taught to you. Learn as much as you can while you are on your mission there. This is what I hope," he told them.

"We hope you can fly off to space safely and make the country proud. This is my hope and the hope of all Malaysians and it goes to show Malaysia Boleh..."