

# Astronaut to help change mindset

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**PUTRAJAYA:** Malaysia's first astronaut will be expected to do much more than fly into space.

Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad wants the person to help youth face the challenges of the day.

"That person will shoulder the responsibility of moulding the mindset of our youth.

"He or she will be a prime example of the 'Malaysia Boleh' spirit and proof that Malaysians are not a 'NATO' (No Action Talk Only) bunch," he said of the person to be chosen for the International Space Station (ISS) expedition.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysians needed to be stronger in order to face challenges coming their way.

"While my mindset is already frozen, that of the youth can still be moulded."

Dr Mahathir and his wife, Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, spent an hour yesterday with S. Vanajah, Mohammed Faiz



Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti Hasmah (centre) with (from left) Dr Sheikh Muszaphar, Faiz, Vanajah and Dr Faiz.

Kamaludin, Dr Faiz Khaled and Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor.

The four were short-listed from 10,000 applicants after rigorous mental and physical tests.

They will soon head to Moscow for training, after which two would be selected to undergo a further

18-month stint at Star City.

The candidate for the ISS expedition will be selected in October next year.

The astronaut programme is part of a package deal arising from Malaysia's purchase of 18 Sukhoi SU-30MKN fighter jets from Russia.

Dr Mahathir was happy that Malaysians were supportive of

the programme, as seen in the number of applicants.

Vanajah, the only woman short-listed, was happy to have had a chance to meet Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti Hasmah.

She hoped that by making it into the last four, she had inspired women to work harder to achieve their dreams.

"The ultimate achievement,

of course, will be making it to space," she added.

Dr Sheikh Muszaphar was confident of his chances as he had breezed through all the tests.

Mohammed Faiz said all four candidates had pledged to be supportive of each other.

"We have given our all and will support the chosen one."