

Four get morale boost from Mahathir

The Star 8/4/2006

By MAZWIN NIK ANIS
mazwin@thestar.com.my

PUTRAJAYA: An opportunity to meet former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad was just the boost astronaut candidate Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor needed to further lift his determination and spirits to make it as Malaysia's first man in space.

"I was excited to meet Tun (Dr Mahathir). He is a great leader. His words of encouragement really lifted my spirits and I am grateful for them," he said.

Dr Sheikh Muszaphar, a medical officer with Hospital Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, and three others who are vying for the opportunity to be the nation's first astronaut had a 30-minute meeting with Dr Mahathir at his office at the Perdana Leadership Foundation here yesterday.

The other candidates are Malaysia Airlines pilot Mohammed Faiz Kamaluddin, armed forces dental surgeon Dr Faiz Khaleed and senior quality engineer S. Vanajah, the only woman in the group.

Dr Sheikh Muszaphar said the meeting with Dr Mahathir had given the four of them inspiration and courage to undergo the intensive two-week training in Russia.

"I hope we will make everyone in Malaysia proud," he added.



ALL FOR ONE: Dr Mahathir and Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Md Ali coming together with (from left) Dr Sheikh Muszaphar, Mohammed Faiz, Vanajah and Dr Faiz to show their resolve at Putrajaya yesterday. — Bernamapic

The four are expected to leave by the end of the month for the Russian Space Agency in Star City, Moscow, where they will be put through a comprehensive medical test, before two candidates are selected to undergo an 18-month training

programme.

Dr Mahathir said he was proud of the sheer determination, commitment and dedication shown by the four candidates in their quest to be the first Malaysian in space.

"I hope our first astronaut will

return home and share the experience with our young. Hearing about the extraordinary journey will certainly lift the spirits of our youth," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the overwhelming response received

for the astronaut programme showed that many Malaysians were willing to go to great lengths to grab this rare experience.

"This is a testimony that Malaysians can do what others can do," he added.