

'Japan can boost our space programme'

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MALAYSIA could well intensify its space exploration programme with the assistance of Japan, which has already sent five astronauts into space.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said with 37 years of experience in developing its own space programme, Japan was in the position to collaborate with Malaysia.

"This is my first visit to the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) and it was an eye-opener to see what they have done in their space exploration programme," he said after touring the JAXA facility at Tsukuba Science Centre near Tokyo yesterday.

Malaysia's own space pro-



gramme was launched in 2005. Its two candidates for space, Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor, 34, and Captain Dr Faiz Khaleed, 26, are undergoing training at the Yuri Gagarin Space Training Centre in Moscow. One of them will be picked for the journey on Oct 6.

Next month, they will go to the United States National Space and Aeronautical Administration's training centre in Texas for three

weeks' training as part of a programme to familiarise themselves with the American section of the International Space Station (ISS).

Japan has eight astronauts, two of whom are women. Of the total, four of the male astronauts and one female had gone to space.

Early next year, Japanese astronaut mission specialist Akihiko Hoshide will fly aboard the space shuttle which will carry the Japanese Experiment Module Kibo to the ISS.

In the two-week mission, Hoshide, together with six American astronauts, will assemble and attach the pressurised module to the ISS, activate it and perform other activities.