

Astronaut hopes more will take up space technology

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KUALA LUMPUR: The country's first man in space wants to see more Malaysians sharing a similar experience beyond the stars.

A beaming Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor told Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi that he hoped that Malaysia would have the capability to one day build its own rocket. "This is a new era for Malaysians. I also hope my experience will encourage more Malaysian students to take up space technology."

Dr Muszaphar was speaking with Abdullah via videoconferencing at Astro last night.

"I want to wish you Selamat Hari Raya and also on behalf of my wife and the people of Malaysia as I couldn't do it the other day due to transmission problems," said Abdullah.

The 15-minute videoconferencing saw Abdullah posing a number of questions to Dr Muszaphar with regard to his health, conditions on space and his experiments.

"Now that you are in the space

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (inset) videoconferencing with Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor at the International Space Station.



station, do you feel that the training received in Russia was adequate or would you have wished for additional training?" asked Abdullah.

Dr Muszaphar said it was his seventh day in space and that the training in Russia was a big help in

making his mission a success.

Abdullah wanted to know the progress of his experiments and Dr Muszaphar said the experiments he was conducting at the International Space Station were on schedule, and that scientists in Moscow would also be helping him.

Among the experiments is to grow liver cancer and leukaemia cells in microgravity. He will also perform two experiments on microbes and protein crystallisation in space, from which the results could be used to develop industrial applications.

To Abdullah's question on his working relationship with the other astronauts, Dr Muszaphar said that the Russian and American

crew members were helpful.

"They believe Malaysians can become professional angkasa-sawan," he said during the 15-minute chat with Abdullah.

Dr Muszaphar also thanked Malaysians and read the Rukun Negara.

He also spun a Merdeka anniversary trinket bearing the Malaysian flag in mid air, much to Abdullah's amusement.

"Thank you-lah for bringing those things with you to remind you of being a Malaysian," Abdullah said, laughing.

Abdullah's wife, Datin Seri Jeanne Abdullah, was also present, and asked after the spaceman's diet and he said he was eating well and was healthy.