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PM: We'll have more space missions

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IPOH: Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor's achievement as the first Malaysian in space is a success story for the nation and all Malaysians, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

He said the first Malaysian mission into space would not be the last, adding that the government would continue to encourage more of such endeavours to put Malaysia on the world map.

"Malaysia has not reached developed status yet. Our target is the year 2020, but we have managed to send a man into space, a feat that is usually synonymous with a developed nation.

"It shows that Malaysians have

the ability to be on par with their counterparts in developed countries. In order for Malaysia to obtain developed status, we must start now and strive forward forcefully, implementing projects, particularly in the field of science, technology and space exploration."

Abdullah said this at the launching of the Gugusan Manjoi administrative and commercial complex here yesterday.

He hoped other Malaysians would emulate Dr Muszaphar's feat and that there would be many more such efforts in the future.

Dr Muszaphar's research activities in space had triggered interest in Russia, among European

countries and Japan, he said.

While at the International Space Station, Dr Muszaphar had conducted experiments for the European Space Agency on the effects of microgravity on the human body.

"The foray into space was not a waste. Although the expense was great, the government has the money and we are able to finance undertakings of this nature.

"The government also hopes to work with space agencies in other countries, such as Kazakhstan and Japan."

It was reported that the Russian space agency, Roskosmos, had offered a place for another Malaysian angkasawan in the Interna-

tional Space Station in late 2010 or early 2011.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak had said the government had until the end of 2009 to accept the offer. This time around, it would not be an offset arrangement but directly financed.

He also said Roskosmos had agreed to be part of Malaysia's civil space expedition, which the government hoped to conclude under an agreement.

Angkasawan Dr Muszaphar returned to Earth safely with cosmonauts Fyodor Yurchikhin and Oleg Kotov aboard the Soyuz TMA-10 spacecraft on Sunday after spending 11 days in space.