

Malaysia Needs To Send Astronaut to Be At Par with Developed Nations
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PUTRAJAYA, Jan 20 (Bernama) -- Malaysia needs to send its astronaut to space to be at par with developed nations though the cost for the mission is high, said former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamed.

"We need to continue to show interest in terms of space and the use of tools that can be used to improve communications in space worldwide. This could also help develop the nation's economy further," he said.

Referring to Malaysia's first astronaut Datuk Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor's historical journey to space in 2007, Dr Mahathir said : "I am very proud that a Malaysian astronaut has gone into space and this is a very proud moment for the nation."

Speaking to reporters after receiving a visit from Sheikh Muszaphar to showcase the SOKOL spacesuit he wore during his space journey, Dr Mahathir said he had been informed that the cost of sending an astronaut for 10 days to space had increased from US\$25 million to US\$55 million.

Dr Mahathir, who tried on the gloves, jokingly asked Sheikh Muszaphar on how he could scratch his nose or other parts of the body if he felt itchy.

Dr Mahathir said Sheikh Muszaphar's space travel to the International Space Station (ISS) in October 2007 was due to government-to-government offset agreement through the purchase of Russia's Sukhoi SU-30 fighter jets for the Royal Malaysian Air Force. Sheikh Muszaphar meanwhile said the objective of sending the second astronaut in 2030 under the Malaysian National Space Agency's blueprint should be different from the first mission.

"The first was sent to inspire and change the mindset of the younger generation. We want the world to know Malaysia Boleh and we are capable of sending an astronaut (into space) like the other nations," he said.

Sheikh Muszaphar said it was his personal mission to share as much as possible his experiences in space with the younger generation to inspire them to be future scientists, doctors and engineers in the next five to 10 years.

He said the 9.5 kilogram spacesuit, which was brought by a Russian Cosmonaut Salizhan Sharipov, together with Aladdinstreet.com, the Halal e-market company he had co-founded, would embark on a nationwide roadshow for students and members of the public from next month.

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