
SHEIKH MUSZAPHAR SHUKOR

Orthopaedic Surgeon and The First Malaysian Astronaut

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Topics

- Asia
- Astronaut
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Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor, (born July 27, 1972, Kuala Lumpur, Malay.), Malaysian orthopedic surgeon who became the first Malaysian to go into space. Dr. Sheikh was selected from 11,435 candidates at the beginning of 2006 for the Malaysian Angkasawan spaceflight program. He came on-board the International Space Station via a Russian Soyuz vehicle with the international Expedition 16 crew.

Sheikh earned a degree in medicine and surgery at Kasturba Medical College in Manipal, India. He also earned an advanced degree in orthopedic surgery at University Kebangsaan, Kuala Lumpur, Malay., and became an orthopedist at University Kebangsaan Malaysia Hospital. He was selected in 2006 from among 11,000 applicants to enter the Malaysian spaceflight program, Angkasawan. Angkasawan was the product of a Malaysian-Russian agreement in which Malaysia purchased 18 Russian fighter jets and Russia arranged to train and fly a Malaysian cosmonaut on a mission to the International Space Station (ISS).

Sheikh became a national celebrity as the Malaysian press followed the preparations for his 10-day journey. On Oct. 10, 2007, Sheikh was launched from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan to the ISS on Soyuz TMA-11 with commander Yury Malenchenko of Russia and flight engineer Peggy Whitson of the United States. He faced the challenge of becoming the first Muslim to observe Ramadan in space.

To assist him with the difficulty of performing daily rites on a ship that orbited Earth 16 times every 24 hours, the Malaysian government assembled 150 clerics and scientists who produced a booklet titled Guidelines for Performing Islamic Rites at the International Space Station. While aboard the space station, Sheikh performed experiments on-board the International Space Station (ISS) relating to the characteristics and growth of liver cancer and leukemia cells, studying the crystallization of various proteins and microbes in the weightlessness of space. He recorded video and addresses it to schoolchildren. He returned to Earth on board Soyuz TMA-10 on October 21.

On an international front, Sheikh Muszaphar's motivational talks have recently been heard in California, USA, Jakarta and Bandung, Indonesia, Brunei, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Holland. He is an Ambassador to the Make-A-Wish Foundation, U.N. Ambassador for Global Peace, and recipient of the Shurah Islamic Council, California Peace Award among many other distinctions.