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FIRST MALAYSIAN ASTRONAUT PROGRAM

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In the wake of the announcement made by the Malaysian Government to send a Malaysian astronaut to space, there have been mixed reactions from the public locally and internationally. But the implications of that announcement are far broader. Malaysia now has a chance to make a global geopolitical statement that would open doors to more international space based projects than before.

Why send a Malaysian Astronaut to space? And how can the Malaysian Astronaut Programme help the country?

Today, the Malaysian paradigm in international space ventures is to participate in programmes which have been laid down by other organisations. By doing so at this infant stage of our space industry, the success rate of the projects is maximised, therefore. However, the long term vision of the nation could be one of self reliant and creating opportunity for partnership with other international organisations. The astronaut programme is a product of the agreement made between the Russian Government and the Malaysian Government during the purchasing of the Sukhoi fighter jets. In the world, there are only three nations who have successfully built and launched manned spacecraft to Low Earth Orbit. They are the USA, Russia and recently, China. By participating in this space exploration programme, Malaysia is declaring to the world that she too is a member of the space exploration community. Other projects will follow, for example, we may consider new human missions that go well beyond Low Earth Orbit, to the Lagrange libration points, to the Moon, and certainly someday to Mars. These missions cry out for true international cooperation, planning and design. If we do it right, showing the world that Malaysia has the proper infrastructure for such mission, we could establish a positive global view of Malaysia as a true world leader in space science and exploration hub.

It is the trend among the key players in the aerospace industry in the world to adhere to long term, stable and sustainable development in the society. Through the astronaut programme we could begin research work to achieve industrialisation and marketisation of space technology and space applications, that are beyond satellite manufacturing. The exploration and utilisation of space resources shall meet a wide range of demands of economic construction, state security, science and technology development and social progress, and contribute to the strengthening of the comprehensive national strength. Through the same space program, we could establish a multi-function and multi orbit space infrastructure composed of various satellite systems and set up a satellite ground application system that harmonizes spacecraft and ground equipment to form an integrated ground space network system in full, constant and long term operation in accordance with the overall planning of the country. Also, we could establish Malaysia's own manned space flight system and carry out manned space flight scientific research and technological experiments on a certain scale. But most importantly perhaps is to obtain an important place in the world in the field of space science with more achievements and carry out explorations and studies of outer space.

There are some who believe Malaysia should not pursue the human space flight programme. They couldn't be more wrong. Malaysia shouldn't miss the chance to participate with the rest in the group in taking this most important next step in humanity's march to the stars. National pride cannot be more enhanced than to see the Malaysian flag being carried by the first Malaysian Astronaut in space, as it means a one giant leap for Malaysia as a whole.

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