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Space experiment a commercial hit

PUTRAJAYA: An experiment in space by Malaysia's first astronaut is a success with findings being patented overseas.

The Protein Crystallisation in Space experiment, which saw the successful testing of the effects of microgravity on protein enzymes, has been termed a breakthrough in the field.

The experiment by Datuk Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor on behalf of Universiti Putra Malaysia's Prof Dr Raja Noor Zaliha Raja Abd Rahman was aimed at comparing the crystallisation of proteins in space with those crystallised on Earth.

The proteins were found to be crystallising on a larger scale in space, making it more accurate for Raja Noor to study the structure of protein enzymes.

"When we know how it acts, we can use the protein fully to benefit the oleochemical, food supplement and pharmaceutical industries.

"By producing our own enzymes, we can sell them to generate income for the country or even improve the job market in the industries," Raja Noor Zaliha said after the opening of a workshop on microgravity sciences at the Putrajaya International Convention Centre here yesterday.

The patent has been filed here, in Europe, the United States and Japan, with the protein crystallisation technology already in use.

Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Dr Maximus Ongkili said the research component of the space programme would continue for the next five years and was likely to be included in the 10th Malaysia Plan. The cabinet will decide on the programme scale and funding.