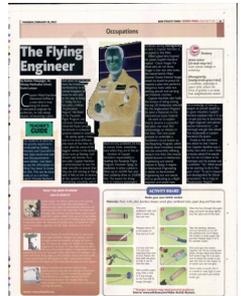


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The Flying Engineer

By Keshav Vinayagar, 16,
Wesley Methodist School,
Kuala Lumpur

Captain Mohd Harridon Mohamed Suffian is a man who is truly living his dream.

A mechanical engineer by profession, he had always dreamt of becoming a pilot.

And when he graduated from the University of Hertfordshire in the United Kingdom, he knew he was well on his way to living it. Today, he is a test pilot, a fellow "Angkasawan Negara", the Head of the Parabolic Flight Program and a lecturer attached to Universiti Kuala Lumpur. He lectures in computer systems related to aviation.

He carries quite a heavy load as he does different jobs most of the time. He is a test pilot for some of the biggest names in the aviation sector such as Boeing, Gulf Stream and Dornier. As a test pilot, Captain Harridon is commissioned to test the older aircrafts to ensure that they are still running or flying well. It falls to him to ensure

all the systems on board are functioning smoothly, and if there are any problems, he has to correct them, sometimes even when they are in the air.

Another of Captain Harridon's responsibility is heading the Parabolic Flight Program. Parabolic flying, he explained, is when a plane is flown up to 40,000 feet and then suddenly dives to 10,000 feet. The reason for doing so is to measure passengers' condition during **microgravity** or zero G. Captain Harridon is an expert in this field.

When asked who inspired his career, Captain Harridon replied - Chuck Yeager. For those who do not know, Yeager is the man who broke the sound barrier. Major General Charles Elwood Yeager would no doubt be proud he inspired a pilot who performs dangerous tasks while test-piloting aircraft and carrying out Parabolic routines.

Captain Harridon also holds the honour of being among the top 10 Malaysians selected for the Angkasawan Program (to send a Malaysian to the International Space Station).

He went on to explain that to become a successful test pilot, one must first

acknowledge an interest in this field. Then one could proceed to undertake a foundation course known as the Breaching Program, which should allow immediate intake into the universities offering study in this field. One should attend lectures in Mechanical Engineering and attend courses in flying. A degree in Mechanical Engineering is similar to Aeronautical Engineering but one would end up graduating as a flight engineer and would have

the knowledge of how to analyse an aircraft based on its given situation. Captain Harridon explains that it is not a simple journey to becoming a flight engineer and advises anyone interested to "... be thorough and get into details". This incidentally is Captain Harridon's life quote.

Finally as the interview was about to end, I learnt that Captain Harridon was a family man with a son. I then curiously asked if he would like his son to follow in his footsteps and his answer was a confident "Yes". What would he be wanting to do in five years time? "To aid in research and development for future generations." He is truly an "Angkasawan Negara".

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Get students to describe the gravity experiments conducted by Galileo, Newton, and Cavendish in their own words and state how the experiments were similar. Get them to use the information in What You Need To Know for this. This can be done orally or as a written report. Provide feedback.

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