

UAE announces first astronauts to go to space (Update)

September 3 2018



A photo released by NASA taken from the International Space Station on October 7, 2014

The United Arab Emirates has selected its first two astronauts to go on a mission to the International Space Station, Dubai's ruler said Monday.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashed al-Maktou named the new astronauts as Hazza al-Mansouri, 34, and 37-year-old Sultan al-Neyadi.

Writing on Twitter, he said the duo "raise the bar of ambitions for future Emirati generations".

Sheikh Mohammed, the UAE's vice president and prime minister, last year vowed to send four Emirati astronauts to the space station within five years.

The UAE has its sights set on space with a programme worth 20 billion dirham (\$5.4 billion), according to Sheikh Mohammed.

The oil-rich Gulf nation has already announced plans to become the first Arab country to send an unmanned probe to orbit Mars by 2021, naming it "Hope".

The astronaut programme would make the UAE one of only a handful of states in the Middle East to have sent a person into space, as it looks to make good on a pledge to become a global leader in space exploration.

The first Arab in outer space was Saudi Arabia's Sultan bin Salman Al-Saud, who flew on a US shuttle mission in 1985. Two years later, Syrian air force pilot Muhammed Faris spent a week aboard the ex-Soviet Union's Mir space station.

Mansouri and Neyadi, who were among more than 4,000 Emiratis to apply for the programme, were chosen after a rigorous six-stage vetting procedure.

In the long-term, the UAE says it is planning to build a "Science City" to replicate life on Mars and aims to create the first human settlement on the red planet by 2117.

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