

Stars in its eyes, UAE celebrates its first astronaut in space

September 25 2019, by Shatha Yaish



A boy waves the Emirati flag in front of a picture of an astronaut outside Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre in Dubai ahead of the launch of a Soyuz MS-15 spacecraft in Kazakhstan carrying the first Arab astronaut to the ISS

A crowd in Dubai erupted in cheers and applause Wednesday as the first

astronaut from the United Arab Emirates launched towards the International Space Station, dubbing him a national hero.

Emiratis and school children gathered at the Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre as Hazzaa al-Mansoori, 35, blasted into space accompanied by Russia's Oleg Skripochka and NASA astronaut Jessica Meir onboard a Soyuz rocket from Baikonur in Kazakhstan.

A former pilot in the UAE [armed forces](#), he will be the first Emirati astronaut and the first Arab on the orbiting laboratory, but not the first Muslim.

Some people gathered at the Dubai centre carried UAE flags, while others were dressed in blue jumpsuits spelling out: "Future astronaut".

Badriya al-Hamadi, 38, said she was so proud of the historical moment, adding: "I feel like I am the one going to space."

According to Amer Al-Ghafri, of the Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre, Mansoori's launch is only just the beginning of the UAE's dreams of space exploration.

"There are a lot of ambitions and a lot more work," he said.

Mansoori received support from around the world before lifting off on what he described as his "dream" mission.

He will spend eight days on the ISS, where he plans to conduct experiments.



Cheers erupted as the crowd in Dubai watched the Soyuz MS-15 spacecraft lift off from Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan carrying 35-year-old Emirati astronaut Hazzaa al-Mansoori to spend eight days aboard the International Space Station

'Next stop Mars'

Writing on Twitter before the launch, Mansoori said he was "filled with this indescribable feeling of glory and awe".

"Today I carry the dreams and ambition of my country to a whole new dimension. May Allah grant me success in this mission," he said.

A Koran, a UAE flag, pictures of his family, and a book by Ruler of Dubai Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum were among the few

things he was allowed to pack for his space adventure.

Dubai's iconic Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest skyscraper, lit up the moment of blast-off at 5:57pm local time (1357 GMT).

Sheikh Mohammed, also the UAE's vice president and prime minister, vowed in 2017 to send four Emirati astronauts to the space station within five years.

"The arrival of Hazzaa al-Mansoori to space is a message to the Arab youth... that we can progress and move forward," Sheikh Mohammed said on Twitter on Wednesday.

"Our next stop is Mars."



The UAE aims to become the first Arab nation to send an unmanned probe to orbit Mars by 2021, naming it 'Hope'

Talent in the UAE

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 Soviet Union's Mir space station.

As part of its [space](#) plans, the UAE has also announced its aim to become the first Arab country to send an unmanned probe to orbit Mars by 2021, naming it "Hope".

In the long-term, it 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.

But already, Emiratis believe they have shown the world what they can do.

"We have talent here in the UAE, and now the world will see that," said Fatima Al-Ghurair at the Mohammed Bin Rashid Centre.

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