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For them, sky is the limit

It was no mean feat for Noura and Mohammad Al Mulla



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NOURA AL MATROOSHI AND MOHAMMAD AL MULLA

Sky is the limit

Emirati woman and accomplished aviator join UAE Astronaut Programme

DUBAI
BY ANGEL TESORERO
Senior Reporter

The UAE recently made history when it announced the first Arab woman astronaut. A highly-experienced aviator was also selected to join pioneers Hazzaa Al Mansoori and Sultan Al Neyadi to form a team of four under the UAE Astronaut Programme that will raise the flag of the UAE higher in the field of space exploration.

It was no mean feat for Noura Al Matrooshi, 27, and Mohammad Al Mulla, 33, to be selected for the second batch of the UAE Astronaut Programme. Aspiring Emirati astronauts have undergone comprehensive and stringent screening process. There were 4,305 applicants, according to the Mohammad Bin Rashid Space Centre (MBRSC), who have applied for the position. The list was initially trimmed to 2,099 applicants based on their age, educational background, and scientific research experience. The applicants then underwent IQ, personality and technical assessments before choosing an initial list of 1,000 candidates.

Following the evaluation of 1,000 candidates, MBRSC selected the top 122 applicants, who were then interviewed virtually. The shortlisted 122 candidates were further evaluated, bringing down the shortlist to 61 applicants. After thorough medical examinations, the 61 shortlisted candidates were pared down to 30, who moved to the interview phase.

A total of 14 candidates – nine men and five women – qualified for the final phase. Al Mansoori, Al Neyadi, along with Nasa (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) astronauts Anne McClain and Jessica Meir were part of the panel that conducted the final interviews.

On April 10, His Highness Shaikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum tweeted: "Today we announce the first Arab female astronaut, among two new astronauts, selected from over 4,000 candidates to be trained with Nasa for future space exploration missions. Congratulations Noura Al Matrooshi and Mohammad Al Mulla. We congratulate them and count on them to raise the name of the UAE ever higher in space."

Noura Al Matrooshi was born in 1993. She obtained a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the United Arab Emirates University in 2015 and also received training from the Vaasa University of Applied Sciences in Finland.

Practical experience

Noura is a member of The American Society of Mechanical Engineers and is currently working as an engineer at the National Petroleum Construction Company, with five years of practical experience in her field. Her career accomplishments include managing engineering projects for the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC). She was also the vice-president of the Youth Council for three consecutive years at the National Petroleum Construction Company.

Excelling in engineering and mathematics, Noura placed first in the UAE for the 2011 International Mathematical Olympiad. She was also selected for the 2013 UAE Youth Ambassadors Programme in South Korea, organised under the aegis of the Court of the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi.

Noura is an advocate of sports. She was involved in organising the Special Olympics IX Mena Games 2018 held in Abu Dhabi and also volunteered for the Special Olympics World Games 2019. She has overseen the implementation of several projects aimed at empowering the youth and represented the UAE at the UN International Youth Conference in the summer 2018 and winter 2019 editions. She is also a member of The Emirates Foundation's Takatof since 2011, and was part of the team that represented the UAE at Expo Milano 2015. She has also volunteered for the F1 event in Abu Dhabi in 2015, 2016 and 2017.

'Impossible is possible'

Noura said Shaikh Mohammad is her role model. She believes "impossible is possible and that one can always succeed through determination and persistence." In the field of space exploration, her role model is Neil Armstrong, the first human to walk on the moon.

Her passion for space began at a young age, as she enjoyed going to stargazing events and lessons about space were her favourite at school. She carried this passion forward and dreamt of becoming the first Emirati astronaut. Her motto is 'Do what makes you happy.' Her hobbies include reading, writing, drawing and horseback riding, in addition to stargazing.

Noura said her goal is "to elevate the country's name in the global space sector and continue fulfilling the vision of the late founding father Shaikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan to raise the flag of the UAE ever higher in the field of space exploration."

She also dreams of ultimately landing on the moon on board an Emirati spacecraft. On April 11, a day after she was announced as the first Arab astronaut, she replied to Sultan's tweet congratulating her: "Thank you @Astro_Alneyadi, I'm also waiting to start working together as one team with the common aim of raising UAE's flag higher in space."

Accomplished aviator

At the age of 19, Mohammad Al Mulla obtained a commercial pilot's license from the UAE General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) to become the youngest pilot at Dubai Police. He then set another record, becoming the youngest trainer in the same organisation at 28 years old, after getting his pilot trainer license from GCAA.

Mohammad was born in Dubai in 1988. With a career spanning over 15 years, he is currently the Head of Training Department of the Air Wing Centre at Dubai Police. A decorated officer, he has received the Bravery Medal from Shaikh Mohammad and the Commander in Chief Award for the Best Officer in a Specialised Field, in addition to the Dubai Police Global Excellence Award.

At Dubai Police, he dedicated his efforts to serving the nation. He was a member of the Dubai Police Youth Council until the age of 30 and a member of the Dubai Police Job Happiness and Satisfaction Council.

Mohammad's passion for space was borne out of his love for aviation. He got further interested in the field after the announcement of the first batch of the UAE Astronaut Programme and particularly after meeting the Hazzaa and Sultan Al Neyadi at an air show in 2019. After several conversations and discussions with them, Mohammad realised that he was eligible to join the programme and applied for the second batch.

His dream came true. On Thursday, April 15, he tweeted a photo of him wearing a light brown-coloured pilot uniform with Hazzaa and Sultan in blue astro suit. He said: "In 2019, I met astronauts Hazzaa Al Mansoori & Sultan Al Neyadi for the first time during the Dubai Airshow. It was an unforgettable moment that fostered my passion for space exploration. Soon, we will meet in the blue astronauts' suit."

Mohammad considers Shaikh Hamdan Bin Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai, as his role model because of his "unique work ethic, management skills and achievements." His motto in life is "The person who pursues their goal in life will achieve it, no matter how long it takes."

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