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AL NEYADI STARTS COUNTDOWN FOR ISS MISSION

UAE astronaut joins SpaceX Crew-6 members in Florida ahead of February 27 launch

DUBAI

BY SAJILA SASEENDRAN
Senior Reporter

Emirati astronaut Sultan Al Neyadi is all set for a new launch date announced for the first long-duration Arab astronaut mission to the International Space Station (ISS).

Hours after the UAE's second astronaut and the other three crew members of the Crew-6 mission landed in Kennedy Space Centre in Florida on Tuesday, Nasa and SpaceX decided to delay launch by a day.

The SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket is now scheduled to launch Crew-6's Dragon capsule Endeavour on Monday, February 27.

The decision was taken after managers from Nasa and SpaceX, along with international partners, met throughout the day on Tuesday as part of the mission's Flight Readiness Review (FRR) in preparation for the sixth crew rotation mission to the microgravity laboratory.

Final checks

The FRR focused on the preparedness of SpaceX's crew transportation system, the space station, and its international partners to support the flight, as well as the certification of flight readiness.

Subsequently, the Mohammad Bin Rashid Space Centre (MBRSC) in Dubai also announced that the launch is scheduled on February 27 at 10.45am UAE time. The back-up launch dates are February 28, March 2, 3 and 4.



Emirati astronaut Sultan Al Neyadi (second from bottom) with the other three members of the SpaceX Crew-6 mission. They arrived at Kennedy Space Centre in Florida on Tuesday.

Our region is thirsty to learn more and I think we will be the ambassadors in these missions. Hopefully, we can come back with knowledge and share whatever we learn with everybody.

Sultan Al Neyadi | Emirati astronaut

Earlier on Tuesday night, Al Neyadi, 41, and his Crew-6 colleagues addressed the media after landing at KSC, standing several metres away from journalists and officials as they are still in a mandatory quarantine period ahead of the mission.

Emphasising on the readiness of the team, Al Neyadi said: "We are ready physically, mentally and technically for this mission, through which we aim to share knowledge and spread enthusiasm for space exploration."

He also expressed his excitement about the possibility of two Saudi astronauts joining him during the six-month mission.

Saudi connection

Earlier this month, the Saudi Space Commission announced that Rayyanah Barnawi, the first Saudi woman astronaut, and Ali Alqarni would be part of the Ax-2 mission to the ISS scheduled for launch in the second quarter of this year on a SpaceX Crew Dragon spacecraft.

"I think it's gonna be really exciting and really interesting," Al Neyadi said.

AL NEYADI TO SPEND RAMADAN IN SPACE

Sultan Al Neyadi, who will spend Ramadan aboard the International Space Station (ISS) will be carrying dates. He also plans to share some Emirati food with his crew. "I love dates. I'm going to take dates, and hopefully I will share them with everybody, especially in Ramadan. This is a request from the commander and I cannot say no to my commander [Stephen Bowen]," Al Neyadi said.

Another item that he will be carrying is a jiu-jitsu kimono. "I am jiu-jitsu practitioner. I train doing jiu-jitsu. So I have a kimono that I am gonna wear on board and probably do some moves," he said.



Video: Crew-6 members arrive at Kennedy Space Centre in Florida

who supported in preparing us for this mission, including our trainers, space agencies, my family as well as my colleagues and team."

Flight engineer role

Al Neyadi, who is set to become the flight engineer for Expedition 69 once aboard the ISS, also revealed some details about the scientific researches that he will be part of.

"One very interesting experiment that I'm looking really to see is seeing the heart tissue beating in space. So this is something like a cutting-edge technology that one day we can [use] when we start 3D-printing organs," Al Neyadi said.

"This is really important to see how the structure is built in microgravity. So this can give us a really good insight how these tissues are built."

He said the crew will also do research in materials science.

Boundaries of exploration

He pointed out that it was important not only for the leading countries to fly and push the boundaries of exploration.

Al Neyadi added, "Our region is thirsty to learn more and I think we will be the ambassadors in these missions. Hopefully, we can come back with knowledge and share whatever we learn with everybody."

He also thanked "all those