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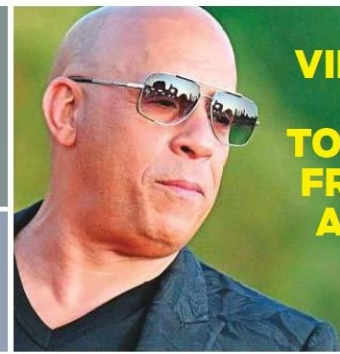


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Courtesy: Nasa

■ Saudi citizens Rayyanah Barnawi, centre last row, and Ali Al Qarni, extreme left last row, with Emirati astronaut Al Neyadi, second from left, and other astronauts on ISS yesterday.

## Saudi citizen becomes first Arab woman aboard ISS

SpaceX flight docks at orbiting lab less than 16 hours after lift-off from Florida

### CAPE CANAVERAL

The International Space Station rolled out the welcome mat yesterday for two Saudi visitors, including the kingdom's first female astronaut. Rayyanah Barnawi, a scientist who became the first Saudi woman to go into space, and Ali Al Qarni, a trained fighter pilot, are the first two people from their country to go to the orbital outpost.

SpaceX's chartered flight arrived at the orbiting lab less than 16 hours after blast-

ing off from Florida. The four guests will spend just over a week there, before returning to Earth in their capsule.

### 14 experiments

The astronauts plan to spend eight days aboard the orbiting laboratory, carrying out a full mission comprised of science, outreach and commercial activities.

**The astronauts plan to spend eight days aboard the orbiting laboratory, carrying out a full mission comprised of science, outreach and commercial activities.**

The team will carry out 14 experiments focused on "human research, cell sciences, and cloud seeding experiments in the microgravity environment". One of them involves studying the behaviour of stem cells in zero gravity.

They joined seven others already on board the ISS: three Russians, three Americans and Emirati astronaut Sultan Al Neyadi, who was the first Arab national to go on a spacewalk last month.

The mission to the ISS will be the second in partnership with ISS-key holder Nasa by Axiom Space, a private space company, which offers the rare voyages for sums that run into the millions of dollars.

—Agencies

**SEE ALSO P10**





■ The SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket lifts off in Cape Canaveral with the Axiom-2 team of two Saudi and two US astronauts.



■ Saudi Arabian astronaut Rayyanah Barnawi waves to family and friends as she arrives at the Kennedy Space Centre.

# Al Neyadi welcomes Saudi astronauts to space station

SULTAN OF SPACE CAPTURES MOMENT OF ARAB COLLEAGUES ENTERING ISS

## ARAB MILESTONE

**DUBAI**  
BY SAJILA SASEENDRAN  
Senior Reporter

It was a 'celestial' display of Emirati hospitality when UAE astronaut Sultan Al Neyadi welcomed his Saudi Arabian counterparts to the International Space Station (ISS) last evening.

The Sultan of Space, who is on the longest Arab space mission aboard the ISS, played a perfect host as he received Rayyanah Barnawi, the first female Arab astronaut, and her colleague Ali Al Qarni to the orbital laboratory.

The first two Saudi astronauts floated into the orbital laboratory along with their Axiom-2 colleagues Peggy Whitson and John Shoffner after their SpaceX Dragon Freedom successfully docked into the ISS, marking yet another milestone in the history of Arab space exploration.

### Excitement

Hours before they docked in, Al Neyadi took to the cupola to shoot a video to show his excitement about welcoming the Saudi colleagues.

He posted it on the social media with the caption: "Excited to welcome Ax-2 crew members Peggy Whitson, John Shoffner, Ali Alqarni and Rayyanah Barnawi. The long



■ UAE astronaut Sultan Al Neyadi offers Saudi astronauts Rayyanah Barnawi and Ali Al Qarni water and dates as they arrive at the International Space Station yesterday.

awaited moment is almost here. In a matter of hours, the Emirati and Saudi flags will fly together on the ISS. Wishing you all the best of luck."

While the hatch of the Freedom spacecraft opened after the successful docking, Al Neyadi captured the historic moment of his Arab colleagues entering the weightless atmosphere of the ISS.

The Emirati astronaut literally held the hand of Al Qarni as he guided him into

the space station's Harmony module where his other Expedition 69 colleagues were present. Al Neyadi welcomed the rookie space travellers with water and dates.

Whitson declared Al Qarni as the 599th astronaut to receive a pin for flying into space. Barnawi highlighted how the gathering of the 11 astronauts on the ISS demonstrated how space brings together people from different cultures and academic backgrounds.

Meanwhile, Salem Humaid AlMarri, director-general of the Mohammad Bin Rashid Space Centre, said: "We congratulate the Saudi Space Commission, and the entire nation, on the successful docking of their astronauts at the ISS. This achievement serves as a milestone for Saudi Arabia and marks a pivotal moment in history as it unites three Arab astronauts in space. It is an inspiration for the global space community."