



TUESDAY
JULY 8, 2025
MUHARRAM 13, 1447

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Sharjah astronomers capture rare moment

A quaoar passed in front of a distant star, blocking its light for 45 seconds

SHARJAH
BY AGHADDIR ALI
Senior Reporter

The Sharjah Academy for Astronomy, Space Sciences, and Technology (SAASST) at the University of Sharjah (UoS), through the Sharjah Astronomical Observatory (SAO), has successfully observed one of the most significant and challenging stellar occultations of the year — marking a new milestone in the Academy's distinguished record of global astronomical achievements.

This rare event drew attention from astronomy experts around the world. What made it exceptional was the celestial object involved.

A quaoar, which is a large and icy asteroid-like body located far beyond Neptune, and estimated to be over 1,100km in diameter and orbiting the Sun from more than 6.5 billion km away, briefly passed in front of a distant star, blocking its light for approximately 45 seconds.

Why 45 seconds matter

Though 45 seconds may seem brief, in the world of stellar occultations, it's considered relatively long.

Adding to the complexity, the star in question was faint and located in a densely populated region near the centre of the Milky Way, making it

WHAT ARE STELLAR OCCULTATIONS?

Stellar occultations occur when an asteroid or other celestial object passes in front of a star, momentarily blocking its light.

These brief events allow scientists to gather information about the object's size, shape, and possible surface features.

Successfully recording an occultation requires precise timing, powerful telescopes and clear skies — a rare combination.

especially difficult to observe. But the Sharjah team was up to the task.

26 observatories tried to capture the quaoar's shadow in joint effort

In a coordinated global effort, 26 observatories attempted to capture the quaoar's shadow as it passed over Earth. Only a handful succeeded — and Sharjah was among them.

Thanks to its strategic location and the expertise of its observatory team, SAO managed to record the full event with remarkable precision.

This achievement underscores the dedication and technical excellence of the Sharjah Astronomical Observatory team.

It also strengthens the UAE's growing reputation in the field of space sciences, positioning Sharjah as a leading hub for international astronomical research and education.