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Singer to headline 'Salaam Dubai 2022' concert this Saturday

THURSDAY OCTOBER 20, 2022 RABI AL AWWAL 24, 1444

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# Star gazing shaped Hazza's space dream

FIRST EMIRATI IN SPACE ENCOURAGES YOUTH DURING TALK

DUBAI

BY ANGEL TESORERO  
Senior Reporter

**H**azza Al Mansoori, the UAE's first astronaut, and Susan Kilrain, American aerospace engineer and former Nasa astronaut, shared their experiences as space explorers in front of a rapt audience of mainly of youngsters, during the 'Future Talks' series at Dubai's Museum of the Future yesterday.

Al Mansoori began his inspirational speech recalling how the UAE first aspired to reach the stars and his personal journey going to space. He said: "Before talking about the future, we must first go back in time."

He then showed a photo of the UAE's Founding Father, the late Shaikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, during a historic meeting with Apollo 17 astronauts — Gene Cernan, Ronald Evans and Harrison Schmitt — that was arranged by Egyptian-American Nasa scientist Dr Farouk 'King' Al Baz in Abu Dhabi in 1976, when the UAE was barely five years old and Al Mansoori was seven years away from being born.

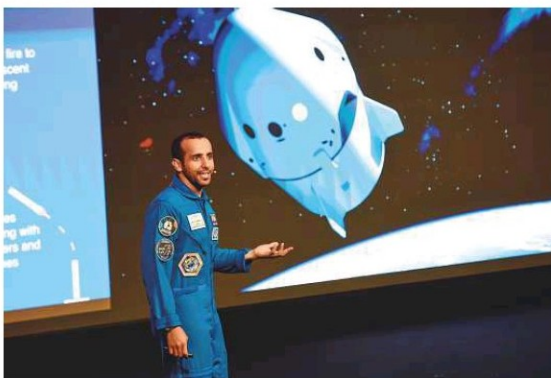
The UAE was just beginning to build roads to connect the vast desert but Shaikh Zayed's dream to reach the stars — on the back of science and technology — was already there, Al Mansoori noted.

"A few decades later, Shaikh Zayed's ambition was realised," Al Mansoori added, showing a picture of him sitting with Shaikh Zayed's son and now UAE President His Highness Shaikh Mohammad Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, following his successful eight-day scientific mission to the International Space Station (ISS) that started on September 25, 2019.

**'Looking at the stars'**

Recalling that fateful day, Al Mansoori said it was the "most dangerous but curious part of his life", noting that blasting to space was really scary but he was prepared. Years of training came into fruition and his childhood dream of going to space became a reality.

"Growing up in the UAE in the 1980s and 1990s and saying that you wanted to become an astronaut, everyone would just



Virendra Saklani/Gulf News

■ Hazza Al Mansoori, UAE's first astronaut, delivers a talk on the future of space exploration at Dubai's Museum of the Future.

**Always believe in yourself, you can do it. Have the passion, plan and vision. And with proper support, you can achieve your dream."**

**Hazza Al Mansoori**  
| UAE's first astronaut

laugh at you because we didn't have any space programme to begin with. But now, it is achievable," Al Mansoori added with pride, addressing his message directly to the young ones in the crowd and reminiscing how his dream started during his childhood by looking at the bright stars from his hometown in Al Dhafra, in the western region of Abu Dhabi.

Al Mansoori added: "Always believe in yourself, you can do it. Have the passion, plan and vision. And with proper support, you can achieve your dream."

He also shared how people around him, especially his parents, teachers, siblings, family and even adversaries, have helped shape his being. He added he never wavered with his dream to go to space, even after already achieving the feat of becoming the youngest Emirati military pilot to fly a supersonic F-16.

"That is why without hesitation I immediately applied when

the UAE Astronaut Programme was first announced in 2017."

A year later, he and Sultan Al Neyadi were announced as the pioneering batch of the nascent space programme from over 4,000 Emirati applicants.

**Intensive training**

Al Mansoori also shared the intensive training that he and Al Neyadi underwent that started in September 2018 at the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre at Star City in Moscow, where they learnt all the sections and units of the ISS and how to use its devices and equipment, emergency fire drills, etc. They even learnt how to speak and read in basic Russian, noting that language sounded tricky to their ears.

As he held the young audience mesmerised during his speech, Al Mansoori also showed pictures of him inside the Soyuz capsule and during his eight-day stay at the ISS, where he held several experiments in micro gravity, communicated with the ground station at the Mohammad Bin Rashid Centre in Dubai, and his day-to-day tasks during the mission.

He also shared his conversation with His Highness Shaikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, while he was aboard the ISS. Shaikh Mohammad told him: "From desert to space, we have reached the stars. You [Al Mansoori] are the first [Emirati to go to space] but the young generation will follow your footsteps."