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AL NEYADI CHERISHES 'BIG FAMILY'

Historic photo of 11 astronauts gathering in ISS lab shows camaraderie

DUBAI

BY SAJILA SASEENDRAN
Senior Reporter

Nasa's SpaceX Crew-5 returned to Earth after a five-month stay on the International Space Station (ISS) where they spent over a week with UAE astronaut Sultan Al Neyadi, who is on the longest Arab space mission as part of the Crew-6 expedition.

The Mohammad Bin Rashid Space Centre (MBRSC) tweeted a group photo of the 11 ISS residents just hours before the four members of Crew-5 returned to Earth. The photo showed all 11 of them huddling inside the microgravity lab with a thumbs up sign.

According to Nasa, the photo was taken on March 6. Al Neyadi is seated in the centre in the bottom row and all 11 crew members sported black T-shirts with the Expedition-68's mission insignia for the historic picture.

'I can't be happier'

Al Neyadi had a great time working with the ISS family of 11. "I can't be happier than this...I mean, seeing all friends in space, gathering as a big family...This is the essence of space exploration," he had said in his first speech after floating into the orbital laboratory.

He had also ensured the presence of Suhail, the mascot of MBRSC, in his first ever group photo on board the ISS.

During his first interaction with school kids in Dubai's Jumeirah College on March 7, Al Neyadi had once again spo-



Courtesy: MBRSC

■ MBRSC tweeted a group photo of Sultan Al Neyadi with his ISS 'family'. All 11 crew members sported black T-shirts with the Expedition-68's mission insignia for the historic picture.

ken about the friendly environment aboard the ISS "with a very nice crew".

Special bond

The first Najmonaut (Arab astronaut) on the longest Arab space mission seems to have struck a special bond with his Japanese colleague, Koichi Wakata of JAXA (Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency) of Crew-5.

Wakata was seen in Al Neyadi's

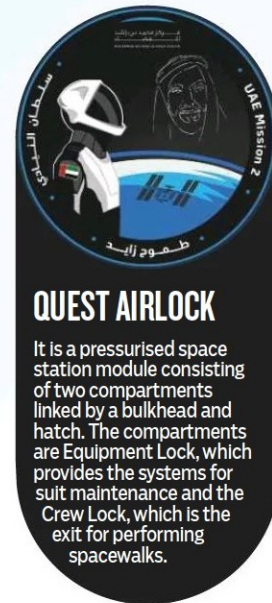
first ever video of the Earth from the cupola of the ISS on March 9. That very night, Wakata tweeted two images showing the stunning night views of the UAE from the ISS.

Wakata added: "It is a great pleasure to work with @Astro_Alneyadi onboard the ISS!"

On Friday evening, MBRSC tweeted another image of Al Neyadi and Wakata inside the Quest Airlock of the ISS.

The airlock is the primary path for spacewalk entry and departure for astronauts wearing US spacesuits. Quest can also support the Russian Orlan spacesuit for spacewalks, according to NASA.

So far, only 259 spacewalks have been conducted on the ISS since December 1998. Of these, 194 were conducted in US spacesuits and 65 in Russian spacesuits.



QUEST AIRLOCK

It is a pressurised space station module consisting of two compartments linked by a bulkhead and hatch. The compartments are Equipment Lock, which provides the systems for suit maintenance and the Crew Lock, which is the exit for performing spacewalks.



Historic photos of Al Neyadi and UAE released from ISS

If Al Neyadi gets a chance to do it, he will be the first Arab astronaut (Najmonaut) to achieve the feat.

In the special photo from Quest, Al Neyadi can be seen in an upside-down position while Wakata sits straight facing the camera, smiling. According to NASA, the portrait was taken on March 4.