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NATION | P4

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Emirati pilot part of crew for Nasa simulated Mars journey

Shareef Al Romaithi world's youngest graduate to earn a doctorate in aviation

DUBAI

BY SAJILA SASEENDRAN
Senior Reporter

An Emirati pilot, who is the world's youngest and eighth graduate to earn a doctorate in aviation, was on Monday selected to be part of a four-member crew for Nasa's simulated Mars journey.

The Mohammad Bin Rashid Space Centre (MBRSC) announced Dr Shareef Al Romaithi's selection for the second analog study of the UAE Analog Programme as part of Nasa's Human Exploration Research Analog (HERA) Campaign 7 Mission 2.

16 years of experience

Dr Al Romaithi is a pilot with more than 16 years of experience in the aviation sector.

Prior to being selected for the UAE Analog Programme, he commanded Boeing 777 and 787 aircrafts as a captain. He has more than 9,000 flight hours on Airbus and Boeing aircraft.

Dr Al Romaithi has a bachelor's degree in aerospace engineering and three master's degrees from the Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, focusing on aerospace and aviation management, safety systems, and space operations.

He earned a doctorate degree in aviation from the same university, specialising in safety systems and human factors.

Hailing from Abu Dhabi, he joins HERA through a partnership between Nasa and MBRSC.

Four primary crew

The second of the four-phase analog study on Earth will begin on May 10, with Dr Al Romaithi joining primary crew Jason Lee, Stephanie Navarro and Piyumi Wijesekera in the HERA habitat at Nasa's Johnson Space Centre in Houston.

The crew will live and work within the facility for 45 days, before exiting on June 24.

18 human health studies

The UAE is among a select group of countries conducting groundbreaking scientific research aimed towards future lunar and Martian exploration missions, MBRSC said.

The analog study, comprising four phases, includes 18 human



Courtesy: MBRSC

■ The Human Exploration Research Analog (HERA) at Nasa's Johnson Space Centre. (Inset) Dr Shareef Al Romaithi, who will spend over a month in the habitat with three crew members.

WHAT IS HERA?

Nasa's Human Exploration Research Analog (HERA) is a three-story habitat that replicates space-like conditions on Earth. It is designed to study how astronauts adapt to isolation, and remote conditions before they embark on deep space missions.

Crew members will carry out scientific research and operational tasks throughout their simulated mission to the Red Planet, including a 'walk' on Mars' surface using virtual reality. They will also experience increasing communication delays lasting up to five minutes each way with the Mission Control Centre as they 'near' Mars.

—S.S.



The insights gained from these Earth-based simulations will be instrumental in preparing humanity for the next giant leap – setting foot on Mars and beyond. The UAE will continue to push the boundaries of what is possible and inspire future generations to be part of the space sector."

Salem Humaid Al Marri | Director-General of MBRSC

health studies being conducted here on Earth, designed to understand the physiological, behavioural, and psychological responses of crew members in conditions akin to those they would encounter on long duration space missions.

UAE University, Mohammad Bin Rashid University of Medicine and Health Sciences and American University of Sharjah are leading six critical studies, in collaboration with MBRSC.

Pushing boundaries

Salem Humaid Al Marri, Director-General of MBRSC, said, "We are pleased to announce the selection of Shareef Al Romaithi for the second analog study of the UAE Analog Programme at the HERA habitat, marking another significant step towards the UAE's vision for space exploration.

"This mission, blending scientific research and international collaboration with Nasa,

is poised to deepen our understanding of the physiological and psychological challenges of long-duration space travel through experiments here on Earth.

"The insights gained from these Earth-based simulations will be instrumental in preparing humanity for the next giant leap – setting foot on Mars and beyond. The UAE will continue to push the boundaries of what is possible and inspire future generations to be part of the space sector."

Second group of volunteers

Dr Al Romaithi is part of the second group of volunteers to participate in an analog study in HERA this year.

The first phase of the second analog study of the UAE Analog Programme was completed on March 11, 2024. The third and fourth phases will begin on August 9 2024 and November 1, 2024, respectively.

45 days

time four-member crew will spend in the HERA habitat starting May 10