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# GULF NEWS



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## UAE astronauts start training in December

Mohammad and Nora were selected from 4,305 applicants

**DUBAI**

BY ANGEL TESORERO  
Senior Reporter



Ahmed Ramzan/Gulf News

■ Nora Al Matroushi and Mohammad Al Mulla

Two new UAE astronauts will move to Houston in December to join the 2021 Nasa Astronaut Candidate Class as part of an agreement between the UAE and the US to train them at Nasa's Johnson Space Centre.

Mohammad Al Mulla, 33, and Nora Al Matroushi, 27, made their first public appearance at a press conference organised by the Mohammad Bin Rashid Space Centre (MBRSC) in Dubai yesterday.

They will be trained to manage various missions on the International Space Station (ISS), including simulated spacewalks and robotics. They will also learn Russian.

Al Matroushi and Al Mulla were selected as the second

batch of the UAE Astronaut Programme from 4,305 applicants. Emirati astronauts Hazzaa Al Mansoori and Sultan Al Neyadi interviewed the final 14 candidates comprising nine men and five women.

"Hazzaa is a fighter pilot, Sultan is a scientist, Nora is an engineer and I'm a helicopter pilot," Al Mulla, who became Dubai Police's youngest helicopter pilot at the age of 19, told *Gulf News*.

Al Matroushi added: "I know a lot of girls look up to me. My message to them is: 'If I can do it — you can do it as well.'"

**FROM THE COVER — P2-3**



# FIRST LOOK AT SECOND BATCH OF ASTRONAUTS

*Emiratis Al Mulla and Al Matroushi to start training at Nasa in December*

**DUBAI**  
BY ANGEL TESORERO  
Senior Reporter

**A**he second batch of Emirati astronauts, Mohammad Al Mulla and Nora Al Matroushi, made their first public appearance during a press conference held by Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre (MBRSC) at The Address Dubai Mall yesterday.

According to the MBRSC, the astronauts are currently undergoing in-house training, which includes swimming, scuba diving, survival exercise, stamina improvement, aircraft flying classes and Russian language training.

The astronauts will then move to Houston in December this year to begin preparing for the “2021 Nasa (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) Astronaut Candidate Class”, as part of a joint strategic agreement between the UAE and the US to train them at Nasa’s Johnson Space Centre.

Saeed Karmostaji, manager of Astronauts Office at MBRSC, said Al Mulla and Al Matroushi will be trained to manage various missions on the International Space Station (ISS), including simulated spacewalks



Ahmed Ramzan/ Gulf News

■ Yousuf Hamad Al Shalbani, Director-General, MBRSC, during the press conference at The Address Dubai Mall, yesterday.

and long duration stay, along with training in major systems, robotics, extravehicular activity, T-38 jet courses, water and land survival, Russian language skills and theoretical training.

## No mean feat

It was no mean feat for Al Matroushi, 27, and Al Mulla, 33, to be selected for the second batch of the UAE Astronaut Programme. Aspiring Emirati astronauts have undergone comprehensive and stringent screening process.

There were 4,305 applicants who applied for the position. The list was initially cut to 2,099 applicants who underwent IQ,

personality and technical assessments before making a list of 1,000 candidates. Following the evaluation of 1,000 candidates, MBRSC selected the top 122 applicants, who were further evaluated, bringing down the shortlist to 61 applicants and then down to 30, who moved to the interview phase.

A total of 14 candidates — nine men and five women — qualified for the final phase. Pioneering Emirati astronauts Hazzaa Al Mansoori and Sultan Al Neyadi, along with Nasa astronauts Anne McClain and Jessica Meir conducted the final interviews.

Then on April 10, His Highness Shaikh Mohammad Bin Rashid



**4,305**  
applicants enlisted themselves for the position

**19 years**  
Al Mulla’s age when he became a helicopter pilot with Dubai Police

Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, tweeted: “Today we announce the first Arab female astronaut, among two new astronauts, selected from over 4,000 candidates to be trained with Nasa for future space exploration missions. Congratulations Nora Al Matroushi and Mohammad Al Mulla. We congratulate

them and count on them to raise the name of the UAE ever higher in space.”

Like their senior counterparts, Al Mulla and Al Matroushi are fully aware of the responsibilities on their shoulders as they train for future space explorations.

“A huge responsibility comes with becoming an Emirati as-

tronaut,” Al Mulla told Gulf News during a one-on-one interview after the media briefing.

Al Mulla, who became the youngest helicopter pilot in Dubai Police at the age of 19, added that diversity also had a big role in forming the corps of UAE astronauts. “Hazzaa is a pilot fighter; Sultan is a scientist; Nora is an Engineer and I’m a helicopter pilot.

## Different backgrounds

“Our different backgrounds form a formidable team. Nora and I work closely with the first batch of astronauts.”

Meanwhile, Al Matroushi has





Nora Al Matroushi speaks as Mohammad Al Mulla looks on during their unveiling at The Address Dubai Mall yesterday.  
Ahmed Ramzan/ Gulf News

ON GULFNEWS.COM

*UAE astronauts training for future missions  
Emirati astronaut Hazzaa Al Mansoori and UAE astrophysicist among 100 global space leaders*



UAE's space journey: From desert dunes to Mars

Astronaut Programme. My life has changed and the sense of responsibility has become even bigger. I know a lot of people – especially young girls – look up at me and my message to them is: 'If I can do it – you can do it as well, if no one has done it before, you then just go ahead and be the first.'

**Continued commitment**

MBRSC director general You-suf Hamad Al Shaibani noted: "The new batch of the UAE Astronaut Programme translates to our continued commitment to human space flight and space exploration. Our efforts are also part of the mission to constantly improve the UAE's position in the space industry, and deliver an experienced batch of Emirati scientists, engineers and experts."

Salem Al Marri, MBRSC deputy director general and head of the UAE Astronaut Programme, added: "The second batch of the UAE Astronaut Programme will contribute to global space exploration by training and preparing for future manned missions, promote a culture of scientific research and encourage exploration and innovation among the youth of the UAE and Arab world."

already made history when she was announced as the first Arab woman astronaut. She said it was a dream that began when she was only five years old.

Speaking to Gulf News, she said: "We had this arts and crafts teacher who told us to make suits for space exploration. There were stars made of paper and our classroom was transformed to simulate the environment on the moon. It stirred my imagination – I was five years old back then – and I told myself one day I would like to go to the moon."

She continued: "A part of my dream came true as I was chosen to be part of the UAE

BEYOND BOUNDARIES

Meet the duo who dared to reach for the stars

FIRST ARAB WOMAN ASTRONAUT

Nora Al Matroushi was born in 1993. She obtained a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the United Arab Emirates University in 2015 and also received training from the Vaasa University of Applied Sciences in Finland.

Nora is a member of The American Society of Mechanical Engineers, with five years of practical experience in her field. Her career accomplishments include managing engineering projects for the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC). She was also the vice president of the Youth Council for three consecutive years at the National Petroleum Construction Company.

Outstanding in engineering and mathematics, Nora placed first in the UAE for the 2011 International Mathematical Olympiad. She was also selected for the 2013 UAE Youth Ambassadors Programme in South Korea. Her hobbies include reading, writing, drawing and horseback riding, in addition to stargazing. Aside from space exploits, Nora is also an advocate of sports. She was involved in organising the Special Olympics IX MENA Games 2018 held in Abu Dhabi and also volunteered for the Special Olympics World Games 2019. She has overseen the implementation of several projects aimed at empowering the youth and represented the UAE at the UN International Youth Conference in the summer 2018 and winter 2019 editions. She is also a member of The Emirates Foundation's Takatof since 2011, and was part of the team that represented the UAE at Expo Milano 2015. She has also volunteered for the F1 event in Abu Dhabi in 2015, 2016 and 2017. Nora's passion for space began at a young age. She enjoyed going to stargazing events and lessons about space were her favourite at school. Her motto is 'Do what makes you happy.' She also believes "impossible is possible and that one can always succeed through determination and persistence."



**Do what makes you happy. Impossible is possible and one can always succeed through determination and persistence.**

**Nora Al Matroushi**  
| 27-year-old Emirati woman astronaut

ACCOMPLISHED AVIATOR

Mohammad Al Mulla was born in Dubai in 1988. At the age of 19, he obtained a commercial pilot's license from the UAE General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) and became the youngest pilot at Dubai Police.

Mohammad is also decorated officer. He received the Bravery Medal from His Highness Shaikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai and the Commander in Chief Award for the Best Officer in a Specialised Field, in addition to the Dubai Police Global Excellence Award.

His passion for space exploration got a boost after meeting Emirati astronauts Hazzaa Al Mansoori and Sultan Al Neyadi at an air show in 2019. After several conversations and discussions with them, Mohammad realised that he was eligible to join the astronaut programme and immediately applied for the second batch.

His dream came true. Early this year, he tweeted a photo of him wearing a light brown-coloured pilot uniform with Hazzaa and Sultan in blue astro suit. He captioned it: "In 2019, I met astronauts Hazzaa Al Mansoori & Sultan Al Neyadi for the first time during the Dubai Airshow. It was an unforgettable moment that fostered my passion for space exploration. Soon, we will meet in the blue astronauts' suit."

On his selection, Al Mulla said: "The selection process was very tough and standards were high – we spent more than one year doing exams, interviews and medical tests. There were several stages before they chose the final candidates and I think they (selection committee) chose me because of my military and aviation background. We want to make sure we represent our country as best as possible and we are immensely proud to represent our country in the global pursuit of space exploration and I look forward to being part of the next mission to space."



**We want to make sure we represent our country as best as possible and we are immensely proud to represent our country.**

**Mohammad Al Mulla**  
| Youngest helicopter pilot in Dubai Police

— A.T.

— A.T.