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FRIDAY MAY 10, 2024, DHU AL QA'DA 2, 1445
WEEKEND EDITION

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UAE pilot to begin 45-day simulated Mars journey

DR AL ROMAITHI WILL STEP INTO HERA WITH UAE FLAG AND FAMILY PICTURES

DUBAI
BY SAJILA SASEENDRAN
Senior Reporter

Emirati pilot Dr Shareef Al Romaithi, selected as the first UAE crew member for Nasa's simulated Mars journey for 45 days, will begin his mission in Johnson Space Centre in Houston, US, today.

Dr Al Romaithi will step into the Human Exploration Research Analog (HERA) habitat carrying the UAE flag and family pictures, including those of his three little daughters whom he said he will miss the most.

The world's youngest and eighth graduate to attain a doctorate in aviation, Dr Al Romaithi is taking part in the second analog study of the UAE Analog Programme by the Mohammad Bin Rashid Space Centre (MBRSC).

Tackling challenges

Addressing a virtual media roundtable with select UAE journalists yesterday, Dr Al Romaithi said he was mentally and physically prepared.

Prior to the mission, he said he adhered to a strict diet and consistent exercise programme to make sure that he was physically and mentally ready.

Talking about the challenges, Dr Al Romaithi pointed out that there are numerous psychological issues associated with long-term isolation.

"To mitigate this, it's crucial to maintain positive relationships with the rest of the crew," he said, adding that "this will foster a supportive environment and enhance the overall resilience of the team".

7am to 11pm schedule

Dr Al Romaithi is joining the primary crew alongside Jason Lee, Stephanie Navarro, and Piyumi Wijesekara.

The team will live in the facility for 45 days, before exiting on June 24.

He explained that the daily



■ Dr Shareef Al Romaithi

WHAT IS HERA?

HERA is a 650-square-foot habitat split among two floors and a loft, designed to serve as an analog for isolation, confinement, and remote conditions in exploration scenarios.

It comprises four bunks and minimal privacy with the only door to the airlock. Different sections cater to specific activities like medical studies, virtual Mars walks, and exercise. During downtime, crew members engage in various activities such as exercising, reading, or playing board games.

schedule onboard HERA from 7am to 11pm includes medical studies, virtual walks on Mars, exercise, and group activities with no weekly day off.

"And of course, there will be unscheduled emergency events that we would have to deal with to ensure the success of the mission," he pointed out.

His favourite experiments during the mission include conducting virtual walks on Mars and utilising artificial intelligence (AI) for maintenance.

While Dr Al Romaithi and another crew member have been chosen for the virtual walks on Mars, the other two will operate drones.