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UAE TAKES GIANT STRIDES IN SPACE EXPLORATION

Historic collaboration with Nasa will contribute an airlock module to Gateway, humanity's first space station in lunar orbit

BY SADIQ SHABAN | *Opinion Editor*

In a groundbreaking announcement on Sunday, Nasa and the Mohammad Bin Rashid Space Centre (MBRSC) unveiled a collaborative effort to integrate an airlock into Gateway, humanity's inaugural space station positioned in lunar orbit. This move signals a significant stride in advancing space exploration and fostering global partnerships for the benefit of all.

The lunar space station, a cornerstone of Nasa's extended lunar exploration missions under the Artemis programme, promises far-reaching benefits for humanity. US Vice-President Kamala Harris, also chair of the National Space Council, underscored the importance of international collaboration in space, applauding the synergy between the United States and the UAE.

As part of an expanded collaboration with Nasa, MBRSC will contribute the Crew and Science Airlock module to Gateway, accompanied by an Emirati astronaut slated for a future Artemis mission to the lunar space station. Nasa Administrator Bill Nelson hailed this collaboration as a historic milestone, emphasising that the UAE's provision of the airlock would enable groundbreaking scientific endeavours in deep space, laying the groundwork for eventual human missions to Mars.

MBRSC's role goes beyond airlock operation, extending to engineering support throughout the lunar space station's lifespan. The airlock will facilitate seamless transfers of crew and scientific research between Gateway's pressurised crew modules and the vacuum of space, enabling extensive scientific exploration and maintenance activities in the deep space environment.

Gateway, designed for sustained exploration and research in deep space, serves as a habitat for astronauts, a staging point for lunar surface missions, and an opportunity for spacewalks while orbiting the Moon. This collaborative effort builds upon Nasa's existing partnerships with the Canadian Space Agency (CSA), European Space Agency (ESA), and Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA), with MBRSC joining the coalition to contribute to human space exploration.

The collaboration between Nasa and the UAE, particularly with MBRSC, follows previous joint endeavours, including the 2019 mission where Hazzaa Al Mansoori became the first Emirati in space. Sultan Al Neyadi's participation in Nasa's SpaceX Crew-6 mission in 2023 and ongoing astronaut training for two additional Emirati candidates underscore the UAE's steadfast commitment to space exploration.

The agreement solidifies the UAE's dedication to the Artemis Accords, guiding international cooperation in Nasa's lunar exploration programme. This collaboration marks a crucial step in advancing the Artemis mission, aiming to land the first woman and the first person of colour on the lunar surface, setting the stage for future human missions to Mars.

The UAE's dedication to space exploration and scientific innovation positions the nation as a proactive international partner contributing to collective progress in the realm of space exploration, further cementing its role as a pioneer in the new frontier of human exploration beyond Earth.