

# NATION



## Prayer Timings

FAJR	SHURUQ	ZUHR	ASR	MAGRIB	ISHA
4:08	5:33	12:27	15:51	19:15	20:40

Add four minutes for Abu Dhabi, deduct four minutes for Ras Al Khaimah and six minutes for Fujairah.

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# Nine candidates in the race to become Emirati astronauts

Staff Reporter

DUBAI—The selection of the UAE's first astronaut corps has reached its final evaluation phase, with nine candidates in the running.

The Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre (MBRSC) has said the nine candidates will undergo an "intensive assessment" in Russia by experts from the Russian space agency Roscosmos.

After the assessment, a corps of four astronauts will be chosen, based on the comprehensive evaluation on each candidate.

The tests will be carried out by experts from Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre and will include intensive medical and physical tests for each candidate to ensure they are ready for special space-related training. This may extend up to 14 days for each candidate.

"The last phase of the evaluation process for the nine candidates will be a major step for us to choose the best candidate who will represent the UAE in space and carry out national missions assigned to space exploration and scientific research to benefit humanity. This supports the objectives of the UAE Astronauts Programme, as well as the directives of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime

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director-general of the MBRSC

Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, to build national capabilities in space science and take this sector to strategic levels," Yousuf Al Shaibani, director-general of the MBRSC, said.

"We appreciate the fruitful and constructive cooperation with a long-established organisation such as Roscosmos. The first task will be to prepare a final comprehensive evaluation of each candidate, to select the first Emirati astronaut corps in accordance with the highest international standards, in addition to the agency's task of training two astronauts, for one of them to join the flight to the International Space Station (ISS) in April."

The nine out of the 18 candidates have passed the one-to-one interviews by the MBRSC. After the UAE's first astronaut corps of four has been chosen, one of them will jet off to space in April for a

10-day mission at the International Space Centre.

The Russian Space Agency, Roscosmos, and the MBRSC have recently signed an agreement to send the first Emirati into space and participate in scientific research in a Russian mission to the ISS.

Two astronauts from the Emirati corps will be trained in Russia, one primary and one backup. One of them will be joining a crew of a Russian commander and an American astronaut in Soyuz MS-12 spaceflight, which is planned to launch to ISS in April 2019. The others will receive extensive training for future long duration space missions.

The UAE Astronaut Programme, which is funded by the ICT Fund of the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, had received a total of 4,022 applicants when it was first launched end of last year.

Only 95 were then chosen to go through medical, psychometric and ability assessment tests. After that round, 38 candidates qualified for the initial interview stage and extensive psychology tests, followed by 18 who qualified for assessment tests by the MBRSC higher committee and international space agencies. Now, only nine remain for the final evaluation round.

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## THE UAE ASTRONAUT PROGRAMME

9 qualified for space flight assessment

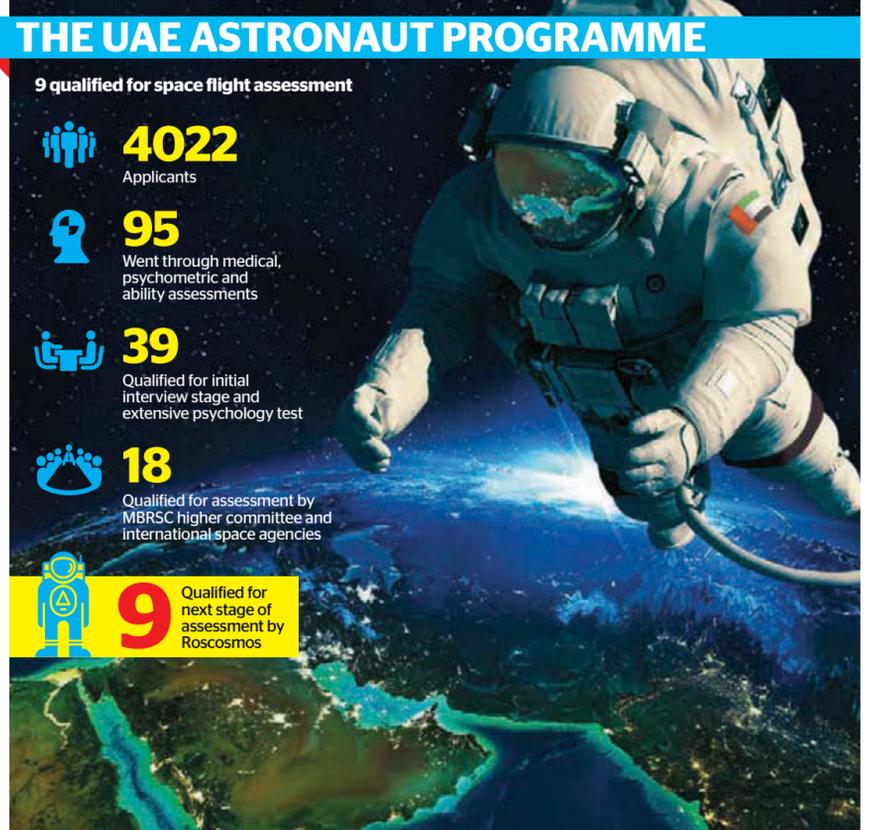
**4022**  
Applicants

**95**  
Went through medical, psychometric and ability assessments

**39**  
Qualified for initial interview stage and extensive psychology test

**18**  
Qualified for assessment by MBRSC higher committee and international space agencies

**9**  
Qualified for next stage of assessment by Roscosmos



# UAE space missions moving rapidly, says Nasa expert



Dr Jim Rice says he is looking forward to the UAE's 2020 Mars Hope mission. He will be in Dubai this month to attend a Nasa space camp.

Sarwat Nasir

DUBAI—The UAE's Hope spacecraft could have helped enhance Nasa's knowledge on Mars' current and extreme dust storms if it was already orbiting the Red Planet, as the giant dust storms have put the Mars-based Opportunity Rover "in danger", a senior Nasa expert, who has been working on moon and Mars missions for the past 30 years, has said.

Dr Jim Rice, Nasa geology team leader and co-investigator on the Nasa Mars Exploration Rover Project Science Team, is scheduled to visit Dubai this month as a guest lecturer to the UAE's first Nasa-curriculum space camp that is being organised by Compass International, in collaboration with the UAE Space Agency.

Massive dust storms have spread all over the Red Planet in the past month, swallowing up Nasa's Opportunity rover. The US space agency had not heard back from the rover since June and the motor vehicle is currently in low-power mode.

"I'm looking forward to your nation's 2020 Mars Hope mission. It is unfortunate that the Hope mission is not at Mars right now because it would greatly enhance our knowledge of the massive dust storm that has enveloped the planet for the past month and put the Opportunity Rover, which I work on, in danger," Dr Rice told *Khaleej Times* in an exclusive interview.

Dr Rice also touched on the UAE's other space missions, which he said are moving rapidly and will help the space industry in various ways. Rice is also keen on exploring opportunities on how he can participate in some of the UAE's space projects. He said the UAE's mission to build an entire city on Mars by 2117 is an "interesting and ambitious long-term project" that should yield useful informa-

## 'MARS IS NOT JUST A DESTINATION, IT'S OUR DESTINY'

It is important to educate the youth about Mars as it will be a prominent destination for robotic and human astronaut missions in the coming decades. Dr Jim Rice, a senior Nasa expert has said.

Dr Rice said Mars is not just a destination for humans, but is "our destiny".

"I believe it is important for the youth to study Mars because this planet figures to be a prominent destination for not only robotic missions but also a place where astronauts will voyage to in the coming decades. These future efforts will require a well-educated, technologically competent and

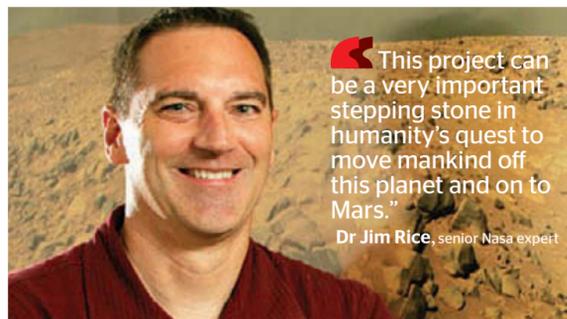
motivated workforce to fund, plan, build and test and operate all these missions. This workforce will come from today's youth. Additionally, exploring Mars provides the opportunity to possibly answer intriguing questions such as the origin and evolution of life off the Earth," he added.

"Another reason for the importance of Mars exploration is more a long-range goal. Mars will be mankind's next home in the cosmos after Earth. The history of mankind clearly shows that we are an extremely curious species as well as the planet's greatest explorers. In fact, I assert that this curiosity and

sense of exploration has allowed mankind to not only survive but flourish on this planet."

When asked if human residency on Mars is actually achievable, Dr Rice said: "Yes, absolutely. Mars is not merely a destination but our destiny. However, there is much work to be done before this happens. It will challenge our imagination, dedication and technological prowess and many of the advancements made in order to achieve this goal will have direct benefits for people back on Earth. I have always felt that mankind must explore or expire."

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**This project can be a very important stepping stone in humanity's quest to move mankind off this planet and on to Mars.**

Dr Jim Rice, senior Nasa expert

tion about how to explore and live on Mars in the future.

"This project can be a very important stepping stone in humanity's quest to move mankind off this planet and on to Mars, thereby making us a multi-planet species. I personally hope to learn more about this effort first-hand while I am in your nation and possibly discuss any future participation in this project," Rice said. His career spans 30 years working on Nasa Moon

and Mars missions, as well as conducting field geology investigations around the world in numerous Moon and Mars analog sites.

"I am impressed with the UAE's commitment and its plans for space exploration in both the manned and unmanned sectors. For a space agency that was formed just in 2014, things are moving very rapidly. I have read that the UAE astronaut selection programme started last year with the goal of sending

four Emiratis into space within the next three years."

Dr Rice will be holding an educational discussion with students at the Space and Rocketry Academy Camp, which is being held from July 15 to August 23 at the Lapita Hotel in Dubai Parks and Resorts.

"I am going to be discussing a wide range of space exploration topics with the students while I am in Dubai. These topics will range from the early history of the Space Age (1950s and 1960s) to the major discoveries of current ongoing Mars missions, as well as talking about future Mars missions being planned around the world including the UAE's 2020 Hope Mission to Mars. I will also be discussing some basic orbital mechanics addressing the timing of when and how missions can be launched and the selection process for Mars landing sites, the effects of space travel on the human body and why space exploration is important for our future," he said.

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# Orphan kids to learn space secrets for free

Sarwat Nasir

Two orphan children will soon be learning all things related to space, including lessons from senior Nasa experts, thanks to the organisers of the UAE's first Nasa-curriculum space camp that is being held in Dubai.

The two children, Abdulrahman Rashid Obeid Al Muftol and Issa Ahmed Ali Al Hosani, are part of the Sharjah Social Empowerment Foundation and will attend the camp for free.

UAE-based firm Compass International, the regional partners of Nasa and the US Rocket Space Centre, are organising the camp in collaboration with the UAE Space Agency and offered the free spots to the orphans. The cost for the five-day Space and Rocketry Academy Camp is Dh2,650 per student.

Senior experts from Nasa will be guest-lecturing at the camp, which is being held from July 15 to August 23 and will educate the youth on space missions, as well as teach them how to build model rockets.

Mariam Ali Al Dhanhani, spokesperson of the Sharjah Social Empowerment Foundation, said the children's participation in the space camp will help empower them.

"The foundation is keen to pay attention to the orphans as their family, where it is imperative for us to direct all efforts, listen to their concerns, touch their needs and provide all the conditions set for their distinct care in order to direct their energies on the right track," Al Dhanhani said.

"Our message is that we work to distinguish orphans and their mothers in the community by focusing on developing their ambitions, building their abilities and launching their talents in sustainable ways. We do this through innovative practices to achieve social prosperity in partnership with various segments of society."

Lissy Donald, managing director of Compass International, said: "I feel we need to make all our children space-ready. Residing outside Earth might be sooner than most of us anticipate,



**Residing outside Earth might be sooner than most of us anticipate, and it's extremely important for us to ensure that each of the students gets to follow their dreams."**

Lissy Donald, managing director of Compass International

and we feel it's extremely important for us to ensure that each of the students gets to follow their dreams. Money should not determine what one can or cannot do. We do hope that they make the best use of this great opportunity that is given to them in their own city," Donald said.

"The day any of these two kids make a foray into space exploration, I would be the one with the biggest smile. We at Compass believe that every space enthusiast is entitled to a global standard of training in their area of interest and we intend to provide exactly that level of space and rocketry training at this camp. The social or economic condition of a student should not limit his aspirations and hopes, and that is our thought behind helping these children. For me, money is not everything, it's what we do with the money that makes it valuable, and for this camp being able to help these two students is the most valuable outcome I could have asked for."

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Abdulrahman Rashid Obeid Al Muftol and Issa Ahmed Ali Al Hosani are part of the Sharjah Social Empowerment Foundation and will attend the Nasa space camp for free.