

First Arab set for ISS says voyage will make 'history'

Tue, 2019-09-24 21:23

MOSCOW: The Emirati astronaut who will make history by becoming the first Arab on the International Space Station said Tuesday he had received support from around the world before his "dream" mission.

Hazzaa Al-Mansoori, 35, is set to blast into space accompanied by Russia's Oleg Skripochka and NASA astronaut Jessica Meir onboard a Soyuz rocket from Baikonur in Kazakhstan on Wednesday.

Mansoori, who will spend eight days on the ISS, will be the first Emirati astronaut and the first Arab on the orbiting laboratory, but not the first Muslim.

"It is really an honor and we are looking forward to make this mission successful and to come back with a lot of knowledge," the pilot told a pre-flight news conference.

He said the trip was a milestone for his country and the Arab world.

"This achievement will be in history and it will be continued," he said. "The dream has come true."

The journey to [#Space](#) begins with a train ride! The [#Rocket](#) that's going to launch the [#Soyuz](#) MS 15 mission to space being transported to the launch site. 2 days to go![#MBRSC](#) [#MBRSpaceCentre](#) [#HazzaaAlMansoori](#) [#FirstEmiratiAstronaut](#) [#UAEInSpace](#) [@astro_hazzaa](#) <pic.twitter.com/G1xlcD3Gge>

– MBR Space Centre (@MBRSpaceCentre) [September 23, 2019](#)

Mansoori said that he would record his prayer routine on the ISS and broadcast it to people on Earth.

"As a fighter pilot I already prayed in my aircraft," he said, explaining that he had experience of prayers at high speed.

Mansoori also plans to conduct experiments and said he would take Emirati food with him to share with the crew.

I've spoken to Hazza Al Mansouri and Sultan Al Neyadi as they prepare for the space flight. The journey will see the UAE create history and will mark our entry into the world of space exploration, inspiring future generations to aim for greater glory. <pic.twitter.com/us1e0y4RAG>

– محمد بن زايد (@MohamedBinZayed) [September 23, 2019](#)

Skripochka, first-time flyer Meir and Mansoori will join a six-member crew on

the ISS and for a brief period of time the ISS will be home to nine astronauts.

Meir, 42, said it was “quite an achievement” for the United Arab Emirates to have a man in space, given that its program is so new.

She said the crew communicated by using “RunGLISH” – a mixture of Russian and English.

“We still need to work on our Arabic,” she joked.

Mansoori is set to return to Earth with NASA’s Nick Hague and Russian cosmonaut Alexey Ovchinin on October 3. Skripochka and Meir are set to remain on the ISS until the spring of 2020.



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[International Space Station \(ISS\)](#)

[Hazzaa Al-Mansoori](#)

All eyes on historic UAE space mission We have lift-off: The Middle East gets with the space program as it marks World Space Week

[Egypt hands life sentence to Egyptian plane hijacker](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-09-24 20:22

CAIRO: An Egyptian court on Tuesday handed a life sentence to an Egyptian man who hijacked an airliner to Cyprus in 2016 using a fake explosive belt. The charges included using intimidation and threats to seize a plane and abduct its passengers for a terrorist purpose, according to a judicial source.

Seif Eldin Mustafa has the right to appeal within 60 days.

Mustafa commandeered a domestic Alexandria-Cairo flight with 72 passengers and crew on board in March 2016, ordering it to land at Larnaca airport in Cyprus.

Mustafa had taken control of the plane by showing flight attendants what appeared to be a belt stuffed with plastic wires and a remote control. He then asked for the release of all female prisoners held in Egypt, and also to have contact with his Cypriot ex-wife.

He surrendered to Cypriot authorities about six hours after he landed, having gradually released all passengers and crew unharmed.

The Cypriot authorities handed him over to Cairo after a court ruling cleared the way for his extradition.

Cypriot courts had heard appeals since 2016 against the extradition of the 61-year-old to Cairo, rejecting his arguments that he would not receive a fair trial in Egypt.



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Cyprus extradites Egyptian hijacker who dropped legal fight
Ex-wife in Cyprus denies EgyptAir hijacker's activist claim

[El-Sisi calls on US to take Sudan off terror-sponsor list](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Tue, 2019-09-24 16:50

NEW YORK: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi used his speech at the UN General Assembly to amplify a call to get neighboring Sudan off the US' list of countries deemed sponsors of terrorism.

El-Sisi told world leaders Tuesday that taking Sudan off the list would help the country tackle economic problems and reclaim what he called "the place it deserves among the international family."

Sudan has been on the US list since 1993. Khartoum says getting off it is crucial to rebuilding the country after years of sanctions.

The US administration began a process to take Sudan off the list. The procedure was put on hold when mass protests erupted in December against former ruler Omar Al-Bashir. The military ousted him in April. Sudan's new Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok recently said he'd discussed the issue with the Trump administration.

El-Sisi also said that a concerted effort was needed to stop militias taking control of Libya.

On Monday, US President Donald Trump voiced support to the Egyptian president, saying that El-Sisi "has done (in Egypt) some things that are absolutely amazing in a short period of time."

"When he took over not so long ago, it was in turmoil. And it's not in turmoil now," Trump said in a press conference along with El-Sisi after their meeting. "Egypt has a great leader. He's highly respected. He's brought order. Before he was here, there was very little order. There was chaos. And so I'm not worried about that at all."

El-Sisi, who has been waging a harsh crackdown on militants, blamed

“political Islam” for the protests and the turmoil in the Mideast. He stopped short of naming the Muslim Brotherhood directly.

“I want you to rest assured that, especially in Egypt, the public opinion and the people themselves are rejecting this kind of political Islam in Egypt,” he said.

“They have demonstrated their rejection before, and they reject those to have control on the country for only one year.” Egypt is fighting an insurgency led by a local affiliate of Daesh in the Sinai Peninsula as well as smaller militant groups allegedly belonging to the Brotherhood.

Meanwhile, Egyptian security forces killed six suspected members of the Muslim Brotherhood in a shootout in Cairo, the Interior Ministry said Tuesday.

The six were killed in a firefight when police raided their hideout in the Cairo suburb of Sixth of October, the ministry said in a brief statement.

The ministry oversees police forces. The statement said the suspects were planning militant attacks. It did not say when the raids took place. Egypt branded the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization in 2013 and arrested thousands of its members after the military’s ouster of President Mohammed Mursi, who hailed from the group, amid mass protests against his brief rule.



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Trump calls on world to stand up to 'Iran's bloodlust'
LIVE: UN General Assembly General Debate Day One

Lebanese held in Greece on hijacking suspicion to fly home

Author:

By BASSEM MROUE | AP

ID:

1569344369399320600

Tue, 2019-09-24 09:01

BEIRUT: A Lebanese citizen who was detained in Greece on suspicion of involvement in a 1985 TWA hijacking and set free after it turned out to be a case of mistaken identity is in good health and expected to fly back to Lebanon, the man and his wife said Tuesday.

Mohammed Saleh's wife, Leila, told The Associated Press by telephone from her home in the southern Lebanese port city of Sidon that she spoke with her husband, who also sent her his photos as proof that he is fine and staying in a hotel while he completes necessary paperwork ahead of his return home.

The 65-year-old man was arrested Thursday on the resort island of Mykonos, where he stopped during a cruise. The name on his passport came up on a European police computer system as that of a man wanted by Germany over the hijacking, in which an American was killed.

The police statement said German authorities were unable to identify the suspect and finally said Monday afternoon that they wouldn't be seeking his extradition because he was not the man they wanted. The Greek police never released the man's name.

On Tuesday morning, Saleh sent the AP a short text message: "I am still working on the release documents. I am free but there are some measures in order to get a visa."

Saleh needs a visa now to be able to go to Athens as those going on cruises don't need one since they only spend a few hours on the island.

Saleh, a long time journalist for Lebanon's daily As-Safir daily that folded in 2016, was released without charges and was being put up at a hotel on the Aegean Sea island of Syros, where he had been detained the past four days, a Greek police statement said.

The Lebanese foreign ministry said authorities in Greece were told by the Germans that Mohammed Saleh is not the wanted man and was released late Monday. It said Saleh will later get his passport and go to Greece although there might be some delays because of a public transport strike in the

European country.

TWA Flight 847 was commandeered by hijackers shortly after taking off from Athens on June 14, 1985. It originated in Cairo and had San Diego as a final destination, with stops scheduled in Athens, Rome, Boston and Los Angeles. The hijackers shot and killed US Navy diver Robert Stethem, 23, after beating him unconscious. They released the other 146 passengers and crew members on the plane during an ordeal that included stops in Beirut and Algiers. The last hostage was freed after 17 days.

Several Greek media outlets had identified the Mykonos detainee as Mohammed Ali Hammadi, who was arrested in Frankfurt in 1987 and convicted in Germany for the hijacking and Stethem's slaying.

Hammadi, an alleged Hezbollah member, was sentenced to life in prison but was paroled in 2005 and returned to Lebanon.

Germany resisted pressure to extradite him to the United States after Hezbollah abducted two German citizens in Beirut and threatened to kill them. Hammadi, along with fellow hijacker Hasan Izz-Al-Din and accomplice Ali Atwa, remains on the FBI's list of most wanted terrorists. The FBI offered a reward of up to \$5 million for information leading to each man's capture.



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Lebanese PM, Saudi minister talk support for country's economy
Ship hijacked near Libya by migrants rescued at sea

Adrift in Iraq: Deportees from US describe fear and isolation

Author:

Reuters

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Tue, 2019-09-24 10:08

BAGHDAD: Since being deported from the United States in January, Hani Al-Bazoni has spent most of the past eight months in a small room in the Iraqi city of Basra, waiting for his sister's daily visits.

Some days, he says, he struggles to get up from his mattress on the floor. On others, he looks at pictures of his wife and seven children, all US citizens: his eldest is a cadet in the US Marines, his youngest is three.

"I am too afraid to leave the house," Bazoni told Reuters. "I don't know anyone here and I don't have any money."

Bazoni is one of dozens of people of Iraqi origin deported from the United States since 2017, when Iraq agreed to take back its citizens with criminal convictions as part of a deal to remove itself from President Donald Trump's travel ban targeting people from several Muslim-majority countries.

US congressmen, lawyers and human rights activists say Iraq, still riven by sectarian divisions 16 years after the US-led invasion, remains unsafe for such returnees.

As a refugee in the 1990s, Bazoni moved to the United States, where he spent time in jail on assault charges. He also worked as a translator for the military. That job leaves him vulnerable in Iraq, where influential Iranian-backed militias oppose the presence of US troops.

His family won't let him go outside, scared that paramilitaries might round him up.

Prior to 2017, Baghdad had refused to allow such repatriations, citing political, logistical and human rights concerns.

"I never thought I'd come back to Iraq," Bazoni said. "I lost my job, I lost my family, I lost my kids. And maybe soon, I'm going to lose my life."

Following the 2017 deal, the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) arrested hundreds of the 1,400 Iraqis eligible for deportation because they had criminal convictions, which would have prevented them from gaining US citizenship.

It said at the time it was arresting people with convictions for violations from homicide to drug charges who had been ordered removed by an immigration judge.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) sued on their behalf. Though initially successful in stalling deportations, the case was overturned after

appeals, and deportations picked up in April.

ICE said 61 Iraqis were deported in the year to Sept. 30, 2017, and 48 in the following 12 months. The ACLU said it had been told by ICE that 30 Iraqis have been deported so far in 2019. Many of the more than 370 arrested since 2017 now await deportation.

"Deportees are treated with immediate suspicion, simply caused by their association with America," said Daniel Smith, a human rights researcher who has been an expert witness in dozens of deportation cases.

Some arrive in a country they haven't seen in decades, with no network, no identity documents and little Arabic. Their vulnerability leaves them open to accusations of spying, kidnapping for ransom and harassment from militias, Smith said.

Neither the authorities in Baghdad nor the White House responded to requests for comment for this story. The State Department referred questions to the Department of Homeland Security. The DHS and ICE did not respond to requests for comment.

'PERSECUTION, TORTURE OR DEATH'

In interviews with Reuters, nine men sent back to Iraq described their struggle to reintegrate. Separated from families and jobs, they said they were depressed, suicidal and feared for their safety.

Several claim mistreatment by ICE, which they said coerced them into signing deportation orders or stole money they were arrested with. ICE did not comment.

One of the men, Nash, 55, who asked Reuters not to use his full name, said he spent two days sleeping on a bench in Baghdad airport with nowhere to go after his deportation, until a stranger lent him a phone so he could find a place to stay.

He found a roommate, Jimmy Aldaoud, a fellow deportee from Michigan. Both were from minority Christian communities, which the Trump administration has said it wants to protect.

Aldaoud was born in a Greek refugee camp to Iraqi parents and had never been in Iraq before his deportation. The 41-year-old had mental health issues and diabetes. He died last month because he couldn't get access to care in Iraq, his family has said. He was buried in Michigan two weeks ago.

"There will be more Jimmy Aldaouds if this continues," said Congressman Andy Levin, a Democrat from Michigan who says the deportations violate US law and is seeking bipartisan support for a bill to stall them.

Levin's district has the highest number of Iraqi-born residents in the country, eight of whom have been deported since April, his office said. Most deportees committed their crimes young, and signed plea deals they hadn't understood would get their green cards revoked, Levin said.

"Most of these people they don't speak Arabic, they were never in Iraq or haven't been since childhood. They're totally Americanized," Levin said.

"You're basically sending them back to persecution, torture or death. Our policy doesn't allow that."

Nash, who worked as a roofer, was convicted in 1989 on a petty drug charge. An immigration court found him deportable in 1994, and his green card was revoked. He earned several stints in prison in the ensuing years for non-violent, drug-related charges.

'NO IDENTITY'

Levin, lawyers and human rights activists argue that if deportations can't be halted, the US and Iraqi governments should at least give deportees proper documents.

Most no longer have their original Iraqi papers and said their US documents were taken by ICE in detention. Iraq allows them to be deported on one-way travel documents, which last six months.

"These are not considered by local authorities to be an adequate proof of identity," said Smith, which he said meant they were left vulnerable to arrest by Iraqi authorities.

Iraq's Embassy in Washington referred Reuters to the ministry of foreign affairs in Baghdad, which did not respond to requests for comment.

Obtaining Iraqi documents is difficult. Some deportees have waited weeks, months and in one case more than a year.

Nash has hit multiple dead ends in getting a new ID. The travel document that allowed his return to Iraq expired last month, and his birth certificate was stolen 40 years ago.

"According to Iraq, I have no identity," said Nash. "But I was Iraqi enough to be deported."

He said his efforts to obtain documents had involved digging through the rubble of his childhood home in Baghdad, tracking down relatives around the world on Facebook and trying to find his father's grave in Baghdad.

He's running out of options.

"I am 55 years old, I spent 40 years in Michigan, I never left: how much more American can I be?" he said. "I made a mistake when I was a kid, and I got locked up before I got citizenship, so fine I get it.

"But if I can't be an American, at least let me be Iraqi."





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For Kurdish Iraq's women entrepreneurs, persistence pays offIraq detains suspect in deadly bombing that killed 12