

First official visit to Emirates by a Norwegian delegation

The Norwegian crown prince and 80 delegates will arrive in the capital tonight on their first official visit to the UAE. Accompanied by the Norwegian minister of oil and energy, the minister of trade and industry, the deputy foreign minister and a number of business leaders, Crown Prince

Haakon Magnus said he hoped to establish partnerships between the two nations in various areas such as the petroleum sector, renewable energy, gas, environment and marine transportation fields. "I think many see a lot of potential in a variety of sectors," he said.

Two jailed for life after heroin find

Two men from Afghanistan who admitted possessing 7.2kg of heroin, which they claimed was for personal use, were sentenced to life in prison in Dubai yesterday. The men were convicted of possessing narcotics with intent to sell after smuggling the heroin in fabric reels last August.

Tamim retrial

The retrial of the politician Heshar over the murder of Tamim in Dubai, after an appeal court suspended the retrial last month.

'Role model' adventurer begins trek to North Pole

'I am calm and collected but a little on fire'

Emirati becomes first Arab woman to attempt the long and arduous journey that will fulfil her dream and make history for the UAE

Alison McMeans

DUBAI // The first Arab woman to try to reach the North Pole set off on her long and exciting adventure yesterday.

"I am calm and collected, but also a little bit on fire," Elham al Qasimi said before boarding her flight to Norway from Dubai International Airport for the first leg of her journey.

"I can already picture myself there. I am about to accomplish my lifelong dream."

The Emirati will cross-country ski from Borneo Ice Station, near Longyearbyen in Norway for 11 days to reach the pole. Skiing for about eight hours a day in temperatures around minus-30°C, she plans to cover up to 100 nautical miles.

"The mental preparation has been the most important part of my training – the ability to keep going when your feet are swollen and you

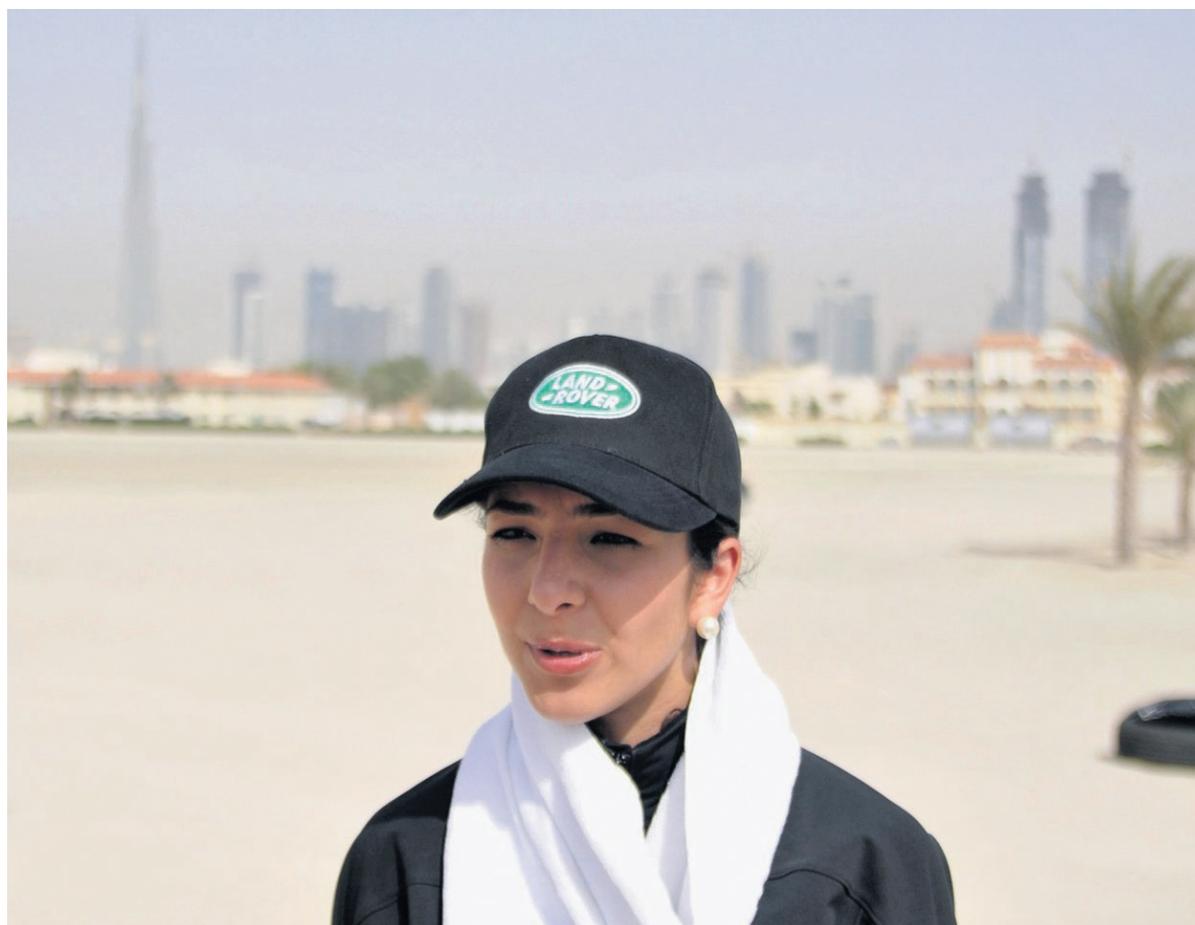
forget why you are even out there," she said.

As the first Arab woman to attempt the journey she has attracted worldwide attention, with many girls looking up to her as a role model. But this is not a title Ms al Qasimi, 27, is comfortable with.

"There are quite a few role models for Arab women who have done fantastic things and I can't steal their thunder," she said.

"History happens with one woman at a time. It's important to look inwards to break down your boundaries because so often they are just a perception. If you want to do something you should go out and do it."

Inevitably, not all the attention is positive. For every couple of hundred messages of support she receives there is one questioning how the trip is appropriate for a woman, despite the expedition raising money for Peas (Promoting Equality in



Top of the world: Elham al Qasimi has the Burj Khalifa behind her, the North Pole ahead. Jumana ElHeloueh / Reuters

African Schools) and the Palestinian Children's Relief Fund.

"Everyone has an opinion because the UAE has such a strong sense of community. It's only natural that some people think this is out of place," Ms al Qasimi said.

She shrugs off the naysayers with ease, knowing that her family are behind her.

As she checked in for her flight she was surrounded by friends and family wishing her well. To show their support, many were wearing bracelets specially made by the Dubai jewellers Tejori Gems – these can be bought for Dh100 to raise money for her charities. "You better wear that the whole time I'm out there," she joked with a friend.

Some members of her family are

making the trip to Norway to see her off, while her father, Abdulghafour Mohamad Rafi Qasimi, will be with her all the way to Longyearbyen.

"As a father I am anxious about what will happen to her," he said. "I was more worried in the beginning but, being part of her plans, I feel a little better."

The family agree that her sense of adventure comes from Mr Qasimi, and this has helped father and daughter forge a particularly close bond.

Even as a child, Ms al Qasimi pushed boundaries. Now she is one of those rare people who pushes them as an adult; in her case, all the way to the top of the world.

"It is one of the last untouched

places in the world," she said. "It has always been my dream to travel to the North Pole but it will not always be possible."

During the journey she will be pulling 30kg of supplies in a sledge, and she will be accompanied by a guide. Once she reaches the North Pole she will be picked up by helicopter and taken back to Norway where she will be reunited with her family.

She straps on her skis on Thursday to begin her journey from Norway to the North Pole. Anyone wishing to follow her adventure online can do so on Twitter@PolarBent or by logging on to her website, www.Elhamalqasimi.com.

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