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Young Emirati prepares for gruelling Arctic challenge

The young Emirati will for the first time submit her body to the extremes of physical endurance in the freezing North Pole this April to become the first Arab woman to set foot in the Arctic.

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Elham aims to be the first Arab woman to set foot in the Arctic. She has been undergoing rigorous training for her trip.

Image Credit: Francois Nel/Gulf News

Dubai: Elham Al Qasimi has pushed her intellectual abilities all her life to make it to the top, be it at the London School of Economics or her number crunching job at JP Morgan.

But the young Emirati will for the first time submit her body to the extremes of physical endurance in the freezing North Pole this April to become the first Arab woman to set foot in the Arctic.

The gritty 28-year-old Emirati will ski 100 to 200 nautical miles across the Arctic and cross the last degree of latitude, unaccompanied and unassisted. That means Elham will use, in her own words, "just what God has given me — my hands and legs" to propel her

devoid of any motorised equipment. And so she will carry the supplies needed to last her during the two-week trek on a sled led by her or on dogsleds without airdrops or re-supplies of any kind.

"Intellectual challenges have been the biggest for me in almost five years. I succeeded in my academic pursuits, in my job which I thought I never would. One has to step out of one's comfort zone to find out how much we can achieve and that is the challenge I am undertaking," Elham told an audience of teenage girls at Al Mawakeb school in Al Barsha yesterday, where she graduated in 1999.

Opportunities

From her last camping experience in the desert as a girl scout to her current mission Elham said it was all about responsible action.

"Scared of what? You cannot take things lightly. You have to understand the challenges and risks and do the right preparations, which include having the right equipment and the knowhow to use it. You do not get the opportunities. You grow into it when it is your dream," said Elham who trained in both martial arts and gymnastics as a student in the US.

After resigning from her job as an investment manager last November, Elham has been undergoing rigorous training programmes to prepare herself for her sub-zero adventure. Her trip will see her skiing numerous miles a day — steering clear of cracks in the ice, surviving on little sleep and of course leaving no trash.

"I will not be flushing any toilets, not using my i-phone or using electricity. I will use solar power to charge my satellite phone, melt ice to drink water and carry all the trash I generate. The expedition will leave zero carbon footprints. I want to go to the Arctic because it is untouched and so I should leave it as such for the next person to go there," said Elham.

Elham will start her trek from a Russian polar ice station at 80 degrees latitude and will be accompanied by two more adventurers.