



Above and at right: Curiosity snaps the surface of Mars.



Below: Nagin Cox
Photo by Ihab Qurtal

MARS 'Dare to do mighty things'

By Cinatra Fernandes
Arab Times Staff

Photos courtesy of NASA/JPL-Caltech

Nagin Cox, Senior Engineer at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, delivered a lecture titled 'Dare to do Mighty Things: Hitting the Road on Mars' detailing many facets of space explorations and the importance of working in teams, presented by the Center for Research in Informatics, Sciences and Engineering at the American University of Kuwait, and the Embassy of the United States in Kuwait.

Zainab "Nagin" Cox has served as a systems engineer and manager on multiple interplanetary robotic missions; including the Galileo mission to Jupiter, Mars Exploration Rover missions, and the Kepler telescope mission to search for earth-like planets around other stars. Currently, Cox is a Mission Leader on the operations team for the Mars Science Laboratory (MSL), NASA's Mars Curiosity Rover, which landed in August 2012 and has been exploring Mars ever since.

She started her talk with a video taken of the JPL team on the memorable day the Curiosity Rover landed. "We were trying to do something that had never been done before and we didn't know whether it would work", as remarked, as the video showed the jubilant reactions of the team working on the project as the data came in from Mars, as well as the multitude of people gathered around the country and the

world watching as events transpired.

She shared that she had desired to work at JPL since she was 14, "All I ever wanted to do was to work on robotic missions of exploration. I've had the chance to work on multiple missions. I joined JPL in 1993, I can't believe it has been 25 years but it is just as amazing as when I first started."

She pointed out that when most people think about the space programmes of the world, they tend to think of the International Space Station, the astronauts and space shuttles but there are more parts to what space agencies do which includes the robotic side to space exploration. She recalled not wanting to be an astronaut growing up and explained that part of the reason she wanted to work on robotic missions was because they precede human missions and see places for the very first time.

In her lecture, Cox explained the structure and centers of NASA, describing the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena California run by California Institute of Technology. She informed that there are 5,000 people that work at JPL that first started out as an army facility in the 1930s. When NASA was formed in 1958, JPL was given the job of the robotic exploration of the solar system and beyond. JPL

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