

## MIDEAST RESEARCH CENTER BRINGS 'ENEMIES'...

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During a visit to SESAME last week, physicists and engineers, among them an Iranian, an Egyptian and a Palestinian, were working quietly on the beam lines.

Hossein Khosroabadi, 40, a physicist from Tehran, said the secret for getting along is to focus on the science. "If you start talking politics, it makes a problem for us," said the beamline specialist. Egyptian physicist Gihan Kamel, 41, said she hopes SESAME will open doors for women in science. The research center will enable female graduate students and doctoral candidates to conduct their research in the region, sidestepping cultural norms that often deter Arab women from traveling to the West on their own.

Yet even at SESAME, where the pursuit of science is meant to transcend barriers, traditional gender roles creep in, said Kamel, a beamline scientist. As the only woman on the advance team of the project, she said she always has to prove she's good enough for the job. Plans for an advanced regional research center go back to the late 1990s, a hopeful period in which Israelis and Palestinians reached interim peace deals, or Oslo Accords, that were to lead to Palestinian statehood on lands Israel occupied in 1967.

Years of negotiations failed, but SESAME survived. The idea to forge meaningful scientific contacts in the Middle East came from scientists involved with CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research, one of the first European organizations established after the devastation of World War II. CERN dwarfs SESAME in many ways, including with a particle accelerator that at 27 kilometers is more than 200 times longer than the one in Jordan. But the idea of science as a tool for breaking down barriers is central to both. Among the early CERN-affiliated scientists who spotted the potential

was Eliezer Rabinovici, a physicist at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

After the Oslo Accords, "we thought maybe that's the moment when one can try and establish a bridge of understanding between Israelis and our neighbors, the Arabs," Rabinovici said. Palestinian accelerator physicist Maher Attal, who has been with the project from the start, recalled the elation of scientists over each milestone, including in April when they ramped up the electrons to full speed.

"We were just shouting and shaking hands with each other," said Attal, 43, from the town of Qalqiliya in the West Bank. Scraping together some \$100 million for the first phase of the project was a struggle. Donors included the European Union and member states. Jordan also provided the land and the building. Still missing are a dormitory, offices and a cafeteria. "We only built the core of the facility," said Toukan.

Disagreements are aired at biannual meetings of SESAME's governing council which includes representatives of member countries and observer states such as France, Germany, Britain, Japan, Russia and the United States. UNESCO, the U.N. agency promoting culture and science, is a sponsor. Toukan said things got heated a few times when regional conflicts intruded. He said Israel threatened to walk out when the Palestinians demanded to be listed in the charter as "state of Palestine," in line with a 2012 UN General Assembly upgrade of their status at the world body.

Arab member stations persuaded the Palestinians to hold off in order not to endanger the project, said Toukan. Israel's Science Ministry said it can't comment on the content of closed-door meetings. A deadly clash on the high seas between Israeli troops and Turkish pro-Palestinian activists was also "a very tense moment," Toukan said. — AP

## PROPHET'S WIFE AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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account or a business in her name until the feminist movement helped change these backwards laws.

Also, in her time, it was considered immoral for a woman to propose to a man. When we look at these two issues, socially and legally, Khadijah was far more empowered than my own grandmother. In addition to that, when the Prophet (PBUH) received the first revelation, he ran home in fear and asked his wife Khadijah to comfort him. She was obviously a strong, caring wife in

whom the Prophet (PBUH) could seek refuge. I would like to encourage those who are interested to read further about the life and times of this amazing, empowered, Muslim woman.

*Courtesy of the TIES Center: The TIES Center is a social and educational hub for expats in Kuwait whose motto is: Tolerance, Information, Empowerment, Solidarity. For more information, please call 252301015/6 or log onto: www.tiescenter.net*

## BLAST KILLS SAUDI POLICE

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Last month, gunmen killed two civilians and a rocket-propelled grenade left a policeman dead in the area. The United Nations has urged Saudi Arabia to halt demolition of the 400-year-old Almosara district, which it

says has caused "injury, deaths and material losses to the civilians". Awamiya, in Eastern Province, has seen repeated security incidents in recent years, following protests that began in 2011 and developed into a call for equality. Most of Saudi Arabia's Shiites live in Eastern Province and have long complained of marginalization in the Sunni-ruled kingdom. — AFP

## LAWYER CALLS EL-SISI A 'TRAITOR' OVER ISLANDS

CAIRO: A leading Egyptian rights lawyer widely expected to run in next year's presidential election has called President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi a "traitor" over his government's decision to hand over two Red Sea islands to Saudi Arabia. Khaled Ali made his comment during a meeting of opposition parties called Sunday to denounce an ongoing review by lawmakers of the April 2016 agreement that surrendered the islands to the Saudis.

A video of his address before the meeting was posted on social media yesterday. He could now face legal consequences for publicly insulting the president. Egypt's government maintains that the islands of Tiran and Sanafir at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba belong to Saudi Arabia but were placed under Egypt's protection in the 1950s in anticipation of Israeli attacks. El-Sisi has repeatedly emphasized that his government would never cede Egyptian territory or keep what belongs to others.

"The president is a traitor and the prime minister is a traitor," said Ali, who unsuccessfully ran in the 2012 presidential elections won by the Islamist Mohammed Morsi.

"Whoever will be content to lower the Egyptian flag on Tiran and Sanafir and raise the Saudi flag in its place is a traitor," said Ali. Already, there is a court case accusing Ali of making an obscene finger gesture on the street outside the courthouse where the transfer of the islands was annulled in January. If convicted in a final ruling, he could face up to six months in prison or a fine.

A conviction would take away Ali's eligibility to run for office, according to his lawyers. He is already seen as a long shot against El-Sisi, who has presided over a widespread crackdown on dissent. Ali and other critics of the agreement argue that the January court ruling was final and should be respected by the 596-seat chamber, which is packed with El-Sisi supporters. He led a team of lawyers who challenged the agreement in court.

Parliament speaker Ali Abdel-Al, a staunch government supporter, has said the legislature has the constitutional right to ratify international agreements. Court rulings running contrary to this principle, he told lawmakers on Sunday, are only of concern to the judiciary. — AP

## OBESITY 'EPIDEMIC'

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Four million deaths in 2015 were linked to having a Body Mass Index (BMI) of over 24.5, indicating a person is overweight, or of 30 or more, indicating obesity. BMI is calculated by dividing a person's weight in kilograms by their height in centimeters squared.

Of those deaths, more than 40 percent involved people deemed non-obese—indicating that being overweight, even without being obese, is leading to millions of premature deaths. More than two-thirds of deaths linked to a raised BMI were attributed to cardiovascular diseases, marking a sharp increase since 1990.

Of the world's most populous countries, the rate of obesity among children and young adults was highest in the United States, at 13 percent, while Egypt had the highest rate of obesity among adults, at 35 percent of the population. The lowest rates of adult obesity were in Bangladesh and Vietnam, both at one percent. China and India had the highest number of obese children—respectively 15.3 and 14.4 million.

The United States and China, meanwhile, had the great-

est number of obese adults—respectively 79.4 and 57.3 million. In an editorial accompanying the study, Dr Edward Gregg and Dr Jonathan Shaw, both epidemiologists at the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said the most worrisome finding was the approximate tripling of obesity in youth and young adults of middle-income countries—namely China, Brazil, and Indonesia. "An early onset of obesity is likely to translate into a high cumulative incidence of type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and chronic kidney disease," they warned.

The study was based on the latest data provided by the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) study, which tracks the impact of more than 300 types of pathology and injury in 133 countries. Its chief goal was to understand, on a global scale, what is driving "the current global epidemic of disease" related to high body weight, the authors said. The research was unveiled yesterday at the annual EAT Stockholm Food Forum, which brings together scientists, business leaders and policy makers to address ways to transform the global food system to help solve the challenges of climate, sustainable development and health. — AFP

## US APPEALS COURT BLOCKS CONTROVERSIAL...

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The intelligence was so good that the detonation method for the bombs was understood, the Times said, citing two US officials familiar with the operation. Following the US laptop ban, Britain announced a simi-

lar prohibition for flights originating from six countries. Israel's contribution to the intelligence on the laptop bombs became public after President Donald Trump revealed details on it to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in a May 10 White House meeting. Trump's disclosure "infuriated" Israeli officials, according to the Times.— Agencies

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