

By Invitation



Prof. Odeh Al-Jayyousi

Crisis-driven Innovation: Stephen Hawking journey

“Sweet are the uses of adversity”. It was the illness of Stephen Hawking that made him devote all his life to science. Nevertheless, he did not allow his illness to limit his imagination and innovative thinking. But the spring of his innovative mind was attributed to his wife Jane Wilde since she gave him a sense of purpose and something to live for. However, it is not an easy task to communicate science to public, especially if it is about cosmology and the origin of the universe. Physicists use both experiments and speculation to explain natural phenomena. For example, a set of theories in physics were devised to explain the origin of planet including the concept that distorted space-time bends light from distant galaxies and the concepts of imaginary time, supersymmetry and superstring, parallel worlds, and multi-space-time dimensions.

However, we should be mindful of the fact that theoretical physics is founded on speculation as illustrated in the idea that the Universe is a wave function. Moreover, many ideas in theoretical physics are hypotheses like the concept of Multiple Universes which has no empirical evidence. This explains Einstein view of quantum mechanics when he said: “God does not play dice with human beings”.

The journey of Stephen Hawking started in his book, *A Brief History of Time*, a best seller book where 10 million copies were sold. He is a popular science writer who showed how science and life are interlinked. He expanded the boundaries of human understanding of the Universe and tried to develop a Theory of Everything to reconcile the two divergent theories; i.e., quantum mechanics which explains the physics of small atoms and the general theory of relativity by Einstein which only explains the physics of stars and galaxies.

Who created the universe? If we say the universe is eternal, this contradicts with the concept of entropy and second law of thermodynamics. Einstein accepted the notion “the necessity of a beginning and the presence of superior reasoning power”. To answer this question, there is the cosmological argument which says there must be a cause for natural events; the teleological argument which argues that design in the cosmos implies a purpose; and rational argument which says that order in nature implies a mind or intelligent design.

Hawking was warning of the state of Anthropocene due to technology and climate change.

Islamic worldview of cosmology started in early writings of Al-Biruni and Ibn Sina where cosmological science is interlinked with revelation. The unity of the creator calls for humans to understand the cosmos as a duty. Every “thing” is living, articulate and intelligent and follows natural laws. Order and unity lies in all parts of the cosmos since there is logical coherence and Nature is viewed as a book of signs and embodies a sacred whole. We are responsible to develop a worldview that can enlighten human relationship with cosmos to ensure civilizational sustainability.

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(The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the policy or position of this newspaper.)

Syrian rebels to evacuate town

Amman

Syrian rebels will evacuate a besieged town in eastern Ghouta, opposition sources and officials and a military media unit run by the government’s ally Hezbollah said on Wednesday, the first such deal in the last rebel bastion near the capital.

Fighters from Ahrar al-Sham, which holds Harasta, agreed to lay down arms in

return for safe passage to opposition-held northwestern Syria and a government pardon for people who wished to stay, the opposition sources said.

Some 1,500 militants and 6,000 of their family members will be transported to rebel-held Idlib province in two batches starting today, the Hezbollah military media unit said. (Reuters)

At least 32 killed in Kabul suicide blast



A sandal is seen laying on the ground along a road at the site of a suicide bombing attack in Kabul

Kabul

A suicide bomber blew himself up near a shrine in Kabul yesterday, killing at least 32 people and wounding dozens, as the Afghan capital celebrated the Nawruz holiday marking the start of the Persian New Year.

The explosion underlined the threat to the city from militant attacks, despite government promises to tighten security in the wake of an attack in central Kabul that killed around 100 people in January.

Militant group Islamic State, which has claimed several previous attacks on Shi’ite targets, claimed responsibility, saying the attack specifically targeted Shi’ites celebrating Nawruz, its Amaq news agency said.

The Taliban, which often

fighters Islamic State’s local affiliate in Afghanistan, issued a statement denying any connection to the blast.

Kabul had been on alert for attacks over the Nawruz holiday but the bomber was still able to detonate his explosives as people were leaving the Kart-e Sakhi shrine, in a heavily Shi’ite area in the west of the city.

“People were heading home joyously after the end of the ceremony when the suicide bomber detonated his explosives among them,” said Kabul police chief Daud Amin. “Many of our countrymen were martyred.”

Interior Ministry spokesman Najib Danesh said the bomber had apparently intended to reach the shrine, which was attacked during a Shi’ite festival in October

2016, but had been prevented from getting closer by police checkpoints.

“We had our security in place in and around the shrine,” he said. “All the casualties were young people who were either passing by on the road or gathering to enjoy Nawruz.”

“Un-Islamic” fest

Nawruz, an ancient Persian festival to mark the start of spring, is widely celebrated in many parts of Afghanistan but has also faced opposition from some fundamentalist Muslims, who say it is un-Islamic.

Waheed Majroh, a spokesman for the ministry of public health, said 32 people were confirmed dead with more than 50 wounded being treated in hospitals in the city.

Women and children were among the casualties, he said.

Wednesday’s attack was the latest in a series to have struck Kabul this year, including one earlier this month that targeted the mainly Shi’ite Hazara minority.

The seemingly endless attacks have undermined support for the government of President Ashraf Ghani, who offered last month to hold peace talks with Taliban insurgents fighting to drive out international forces and reimpose their version of strict Islamic law.

The Taliban have so far shown little sign of accepting the offer of talks with the Western-backed government, which they consider an illegitimate regime, although they have offered to talk to the United States. (Reuters)

Israel hit Syria ‘nuclear reactor’ in 2007

Jerusalem

Israel’s military admitted for the first time yesterday it was responsible for a 2007 air raid against a suspected Syrian nuclear reactor, a strike it was long believed to have carried out.

The admission along with the release of newly declassified material related to the raid comes as Israel intensifies its warnings over the presence of its main enemy Iran in neighbouring Syria.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has also repeatedly called for the nuclear deal between world powers and Iran to be changed or eliminated.

US President Donald Trump, who met Netanyahu at the White House this month, has said that the nuclear deal must be “fixed” by May 12 or the United States will walk away.

An Israeli military spokesman declined to respond to questions related to



Syrian President Bashar al-Assad (C) looking at a project plan during a visit to Deir Ezzor in April, 2007

the admission and the release of the documents, including over the timing, which could be seen as a warning regarding Iran’s activities.

The declassified material includes footage of the strike, video of a speech by military chief of staff Gadi Eisenkot on the operation and pictures of secret army intelligence communiques about the site.

A military statement

summarising the operation lays out the case for why Israel carried out the strike at the desert site in the Deir Ezzor region of eastern Syria on what it says was a nuclear reactor under construction.

It has long been widely assumed that Israel carried out the strike. Syria has meanwhile denied it was building a nuclear reactor.

“On the night between

September 5th-6th, 2007, Israeli Air Force fighter jets successfully struck and destroyed a Syrian nuclear reactor in development,” the Israeli statement says.

“The reactor was close to being completed. The operation successfully removed an emerging existential threat to Israel and to the entire region -- Syrian nuclear capabilities.”

Israel’s admission is by no means the first time its military has been identified as the source of the attack.

In 2008, less than a year after the strike, US officials accused Syria of having sought to build a secret nuclear reactor and acknowledged Israel destroyed it in the raid.

The UN atomic watchdog declared in 2011 that the Syrian site was “very likely” to have been a nuclear reactor, adding that information provided to it suggested that it was being built with North Korean assistance. (AFP)