

# PEOPLE, PLACES & EVENTS

## IN MEMORIAM: M.G.K. MENON

TWAS Founding Fellow **M.G.K. Menon**, an acclaimed Indian physicist whose research and advocacy for science exerted global influence, passed away in November 2016, at the age of 88.



Menon was one of the scientists who in 1981 met in Rome and signed a document that led to the creation of TWAS. He was a TWAS Founding Fellow and served as the Academy's first vice-president from 1983 to 1988. He served as president of the International Council for Science [ICSU] from 1988 to 1993.

A native of Mangalore, India, Menon exhibited a precocious talent in physics. He earned a master's degree in physics from the Royal Institute of Science in Bombay, and his PhD in 1953 from Bristol University in the UK. But even before earning his PhD, he made important contributions to the study of the decay of charged K particles into so-called pions. Another important contribution to physics came in 1955: at that time Menon was at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research [TIFR], where he paved the way to neutrino physics by recording the first-ever interaction of a cosmic ray neutrino generating a particle called the muon. In 1966, at the age of 35, he was appointed TIFR director. In 1972, he chaired the Indian Space Research Organization, heading the Indian Space Programme during a crucial period from January–September 1972 right after the sudden death of Vikram Sarabhai, the father of India's space programme. With his skill in leadership,

Menon was appointed as secretary to the government of India [1971–1982]. Menon has been described as the architect of India's modern science and technology culture. "M.G.K. Menon was one of the most brilliant men that I have known," said C.N.R. Rao, a TWAS Founding Fellow and former TWAS president. "He contributed much to scientific organizations in India. Above all, he had a warm personality and was a dear friend of mine."

Menon expressed his talent not only in high-energy physics, but also in fields such as atomic energy, electronics, environment and technology. His diplomacy and *savoir faire* played an important role in gathering consensus among intellectuals over the protection of a fragile ecosystem in the Silent Valley rainforest [Kerala], which was in danger due to plans to build a hydro-electric dam. He saved this precious area, and now there are suggestions to rename the Silent Valley National Park in his name: MGK Menon National Park.

Menon was the recipient of the Padma Vibhushan, the second-highest civilian award of the Republic of India. He was also a Fellow of the Indian Academy of Sciences and the Royal Society [UK].

## HASSAN WINS SCIENCE DIPLOMACY HONOUR

**Mohamed H.A. Hassan**, TWAS founding executive director and currently the Academy's interim director, has been awarded one of seven Science Forum South Africa [SFSA] 2016 Science Diplomacy Awards. The prize recognises his commitment and career-long efforts to use science to build international cooperation. Hassan is a Sudanese mathematician

who played a leading role in TWAS's founding and growth, working closely with TWAS founder Abdus Salam, a Pakistani physicist and Nobel Laureate. After directing the Academy for 25 years, until 2011, Hassan served as TWAS treasurer until the end of 2015. Using his foresight and charisma, he succeeded in establishing international bonds that made the Academy an influential institution, with networks that reach to the highest levels of science, education and government across the world.

Hassan was also influential in bringing the InterAcademy Partnership [IAP] to Trieste. IAP today represents more than 130 academies of science, medicine and engineering, frequently offering guidance on science-related policy to address regional and global challenges. Hassan is also the founding president of the Network of African Science Academies - NASAC [2001–2012]. He was the president of the African Academy of Sciences from 2000 to 2011 and helped in establishing the Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World [OWSD].



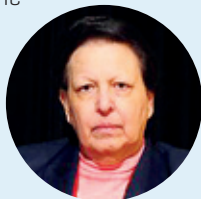
He strengthened ties with the Italian government and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency [Sida], two key supporters of the Academy and its programmes. The prize was announced by Naledi Pandor, South Africa's Minister of Science and Technology, on 9 December 2016 during the Science Forum South Africa event in Pretoria.



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## IN MEMORIAM: NAJIA KBIR-ARIGUIB

**Najia Kbir-Ariguib**, an esteemed Tunisian chemist, passed away on 17 November 2016. Kbir-Ariguib was elected to TWAS in 1985, and was among the first women elected to the Academy. She was the founder and former director of the National Institute of Scientific and Technical Research in Tunisia.



She obtained her PhD at the University of Paris, and then returned to Tunisia where she became full professor [1978] at the University of Tunis. There she carried out research in inorganic chemistry.

Her field of investigation was natural mineral resources, including briny water, lake salts and clays.

Kbir-Ariguib was a member of the Tunisian Chemical Society and a fellow of both the African Academy of Sciences and the Arab Academy of Sciences. She served as the coordinator of the National Programme on Phosphates and Briny Water, and served on national committees and other bodies focused on environment, remote sensing and chemical education.

## HARSH K. GUPTA RECEIVES AXFORD MEDAL

**Harsh Kumar Gupta**, a 1995 TWAS Fellow and a world-renowned expert in Earth sciences, has been presented with the 2016 Axford Medal for his outstanding contributions in geosciences.

Gupta served as a secretary to the government of India [2001-2005] and as a member of the National Disaster

Management Authority of India [Status: Minister of State of Government of India, 2011-2014].

His scientific activity has focused on the investigation of the Himalaya and Tibet Plateau region, where he proved for the first time the existence of an abnormally thick crust below. His leadership in disaster management is globally recognized, as well as his competence in building major geoscience programmes at the global level. Among his major accomplishments is the establishment of the Indian Tsunami Early Warning System.



In addition, he set up a model to distinguish between normal earthquakes and quakes triggered by water reservoirs. He has authored over 200 scientific papers and five books. Further, he compiled and edited *Encyclopaedia of Solid Earth Geophysics* [Springer, 2011], a landmark treatise of more than 1,500 pages in two volumes. The Axford Medal is bestowed by The Asia and Oceania Geosciences Society in the name of Professor W.I. Axford, for his vision of academic excellence and scientific cooperation in Asia and Oceania.

## JONATHAN JANSEN TO LEAD ASSAF

The Academy of Science of South Africa [ASSAf] has a new president: Professor **Jonathan D. Jansen**, a 2010 TWAS Fellow.

Born in South Africa, Jansen is the immediate past vice-chancellor and rector of the University of the Free State [UFS], and is currently a fellow at the Centre for Advanced Studies in

the Behavioural Sciences at Stanford University [USA].

Jansen earned his PhD at Stanford. His interests focus on education policy, science education and sociology of knowledge.

His engagement in promoting tolerance, democracy and defending human rights has earned him the Education Africa Lifetime Achiever Award and the Spendlove Award, both in 2013.



His book, *Knowledge in the Blood: Confronting Race and the Apartheid Past* [Stanford, 2009], won the Nayef Al Rodhan Prize, the largest award from the British Academy for the social sciences and humanities.

Jansen holds honorary degrees from the University of Edinburgh, the University of Vermont and Cleveland State University.

ASSAf was founded in 1996 to respond to the need of merging science and democracy in South Africa. It works to generate evidence-based solutions to national problems, and at developing partnerships with national, regional and international organisations to help build South Africa's capacity in science, technology and innovation.

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