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Super computers to boost Cyprus' research standing

Technological bridge between Europe and the Middle East

By Patrick Dewhurst

THE Cyprus Institute is set to establish Cyprus as a high-performance computing centre with the launch of two major research projects this week, "LinkSCEEM" and "Cy-Tera" which will form the basis for a regional supercomputing centre, supporting training and educational activities in computational sciences.

The first project, LinkSCEEM, is an EU funded initiative to develop the institute's strong scientific ties in the European and the Eastern Mediterranean high performance computing communities.

The aim is to build scientific and technological bridges between Europe and the

Middle East, and to advance computation-based scientific research, for example in climate change, digital cultural heritage and synchrotron (atomic particle acceleration) applications.

The second project, Cy-Tera, will install a USD\$1

million supercomputer and visualisation facility at the institute to pioneer scientific research in the region.

Funded by the Research Promotion Foundation, this will see the first high-performance computing infrastructure facility in Cyprus, serving the Institute, its partners and regional scientific researchers.

Only two other super-computers exist in the eastern Mediterranean region; both in Egypt.

Professor Magdy Nagi, Head of ICT at the Library of Alexandria which houses one of the super computers, was in Cyprus to oversee the preparations for the Cy-Tera's installation and staff training, as part of the LinkSCEEM.

Nagi said the computer will have the processing power of around 10,000 personal computers (PCs) and is capable of solving highly complex calculations in sub-

jects ranging from concrete buildings and car chassis to environmental problems.

The accompanying visualisation facilities, Nagi said, would allow users to see their subjects displayed in three dimensions on a U-shaped bank of screens and floor. "For example, if you are studying genetics and you want to compare two sequences, you can go inside the genes themselves and become familiar with how they work."

The hardware alone will cost USD\$1 million, but the additional infrastructure and staffing costs for the Cy-Tera project could cost almost the same amount.

Asked about the value this could bring to Cyprus, Nagi said that the benefits would outweigh the financial costs, but perhaps not financially. "This is one of the first supercomputers in the region, and while pure research does not pay, it will make Cyprus famous in this

domain. Knowledge (from the computer) that can be used cannot be evaluated," he said, adding that "scholars will come here to get the experience and try to solve problems".

Communications and Works Minister Erato Koza-kou Markoulli agrees. She said at the project's launch event on Tuesday "The work carried out by the Institute is of paramount importance as it contributes to the development and promotion of new technologies which are necessary to address the challenges faced by Cyprus".

She added, "Scientific research creates the future. And there is no branch of research more associated with the future than information and communication technology (ICT)... investing in ICT research is the absolute core of our effort to get out of this current crisis."

The computer is due to be switched on in the next six months.