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**Would you work in the Middle East?**

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• At least 70 people died on Sunday when a bridge collapsed at Mardan, 100km north of Pakistan's capital Islamabad. Witnesses said about 200 people were on Paarhoti Bridge when it fell, flinging pedestrians and cars into the flood-swollen river.

• Archaeological investigation at the site of the £30M Bermondsey Square

development in central London has revealed the skeletons of several 11th century monks, a large quantity of ceramics and Medieval graffiti, as well as the lower portions of the long-disappeared Bermondsey Abbey.

• The Highways Agency is preparing to roll out its revised capability assessment

# Engineers seek to leave Lebanon as conflict grows

FIFTEEN PER cent of engineers working in the Middle East said this week that they planned to leave the region as a result of on-going conflict in Israel and Lebanon.

Many said that the hostilities had made working in the region more difficult.

More than 2,000 engineers were interviewed by international recruitment consultant EPCglobal in conjunction with *NCE*. Most, 71%, said that the region had become a more difficult place to work in, with 65% claiming that the region is more dangerous than ever before.

But security experts played down the risks. "Let's not forget that unrest in the region goes back a long way," said one. "I can understand why engineers think that, but it was probably the fall of communism in the 1990s that really made the world a more dangerous place," said security consultant C2i International

director Mark Cooper.

"I suppose it has [become more dangerous] if you are based in Lebanon, but in the region as a whole I am not sure that much has changed. It is another scene in an act in a play," he said.

"Most danger comes from accidents. Road traffic accidents are still the biggest cause of death and injury for people working overseas," says Cooper.

However, a massive 72% of the engineers polled believed the biggest threat to personal safety in the region came from aggrieved groups or individuals, or the knock-on effect from the bombing of a symbolic institution or building.

According to the poll, engineers believe Iraq is the most dangerous place to work, followed by Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Cooper confirmed this view: "The most dangerous places to work in the world at the moment

are: Iraq, followed by the Niger Delta, specifically for oil and gas engineers, Afghanistan and then Saudi Arabia – westerners are still being targeted there."

**Bernadette Redfern**

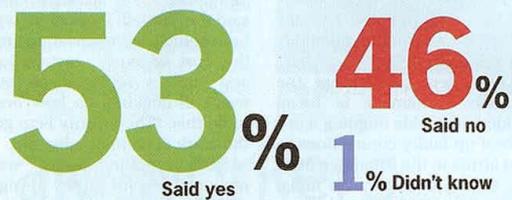
• For full survey results go to [www.nceplus.co.uk](http://www.nceplus.co.uk).

(see also feature p16).



## NCE 500

We asked: Would the current situation in Lebanon stop you from working in any other Middle Eastern country?



What do you think? Have your say at [www.nceplus.co.uk](http://www.nceplus.co.uk)

The NCE500 is 500 engineers who agree to be polled on a different subject each week.

# Staying power

What is it really like to work in the Middle East? Bernadette Redfern looks at the pros and cons of living in the world's biggest building site.

## INSIDE THE MIDDLE EAST

**W**ould you work in the Middle East? The resounding answer from engineers is yes. Although conflict is destabilising Lebanon, Israel and Iraq, engineers believe that the majority of the region remains a safe and attractive place to work (see survey in News).

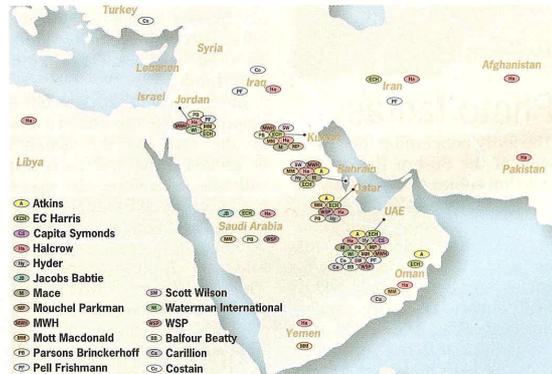
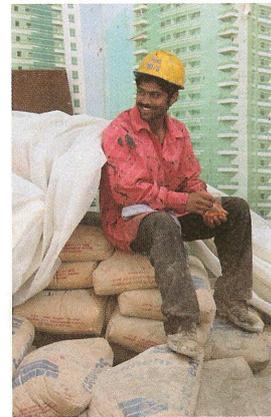
UK companies have worked all over the Middle East, throughout the last century. As oil revenues continue to grow, the region is pumping cash into infrastructure investment like never before.

Figures produced by *Middle East Economic Digest's* project tracker *MEED Projects* reveal that the value of projects in the Gulf topped \$1trillion (£526bn) this April and roughly half of these (\$545bn) are construction schemes.

A recent survey by *NCE* reveals that UK construction companies are turning over more than £1bn in the region (*NCE* 23 March) and this figure is rising sharply. This means that UK companies are soaking up more and more work. "Business is booming and the motor is Dubai, it is still ahead of the game and it's moving very quickly, but other parts are coming up behind it. Abu Dhabi and Qatar are going to be very busy," says Parsons Brinckerhoff director Tim Judge. "Abu Dhabi is the next growth area," agrees WSP director Tom Smith, "and we are interested in Doha. In the medium term Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are potential markets, with Iran and Iraq being long-term possibilities."



**"UK firms have a 0.2% share of the Gulf's £500bn construction market"**



**UK firms have concentrated in the UAE, but see potential in Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran.**

Both the nature of the projects being worked on and the countries keeping UK engineers busy are growing. "Historically buildings, energy, water and project management have tended to be our strongest markets, says Mott MacDonald business development director Kevin Stovell.

"However, we're now finding that with the development of rail systems, expansion of airports and general transport infrastructure opportunities are opening up as well as projects in other sectors." Saudi Arabia is on the hit list of virtually all consultants in the

region and it is not difficult to see why. *MEED Projects* estimates that there is a minimum of \$50bn (£26.3bn) worth of infrastructure work underway. Projects include the enormous \$28.5bn King Abdullah Economic City, a \$5bn; 950km railway between Riyadh and Jeddah; a \$3bn, 23km road bridge linking Ras Hameed to

Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt; and the \$1.5bn expansion of King Abdulaziz International Airport.

And, noting criticisms of unsustainable development and environmental negligence levelled at Dubai (NCE 21 April 2005), the Saudi government is rewriting its environmental legislation with the help of WSP. "We are advising the government on environmental legislation and benchmarking it against global best practice," says Smith.

UK Trade & Investment is keen to encourage more UK companies into the region but take up is slow. Security concerns are deterring companies. "The top-line issue in Saudi is what happens to the House of Saud. It has been in danger for the past five to 10 years and should it fall no one

knows what will happen," says international security consultant C2i director Mark Cooper.

"You have to remember that 19 out of the 20 9/11 suicide bombers were Saudi nationals. It is an important and complex country with inherent volatility. At the moment the security forces there are pretty successful. Terrorists are killed and captured weekly, but westerners are still being targeted," he says. But despite the threat of terrorism and political instability there is a much bigger danger that engineers in the Middle East need to be aware of says Cooper. Road traffic accidents are still the biggest cause of death and injury for people working overseas," he says. So if you are planning to work in the Middle East, fasten your seatbelt.

## What to expect

Tax-free salaries, supersize construction projects, more responsibility, a fast-paced work environment, less bureaucracy, all year sun, cultural diversity and incredible opportunities are drawing in engineers to the Gulf.

If you are considering a career in the Middle East, find someone to advise you on the best opportunities. Be determined and honest about what you want, says recruitment consultant BBT resourcing director Daniel Griggs.

"Go there first and have a look, take a holiday and see if you like it," advises EPC Global chief executive Tobias Read.

One thing is for certain, civil engineers will have no problem getting a job in the region should they decide to make the move.

Skills shortages is the biggest issue holding back the construction boom (NCE 23 March). "We are struggling like everyone else," says Hyder Middle East director Rod Stewart.

"There is plenty of opportunity and the continuing growth in scale means that we are looking for people with strong project management skills."

Scale is something Hyder is well aware of as designers on what will soon be the world's tallest building.