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First generation of cyber police joins the capital's force

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ABU DHABI // The capital has its first batch of dedicated cyber crimebusters.

Fifteen police officers, including one woman, have completed master of science degrees at Zayed University with a specialisation in cyber security.

They will be equipped with the most up-to-date weapons in their field, following the opening of a new laboratory in the university's College of Information Technology.

Along with a similar lab at police headquarters, the facilities are among the first in the region. They include areas to store evidence and carry out research, and mobile examination stations.

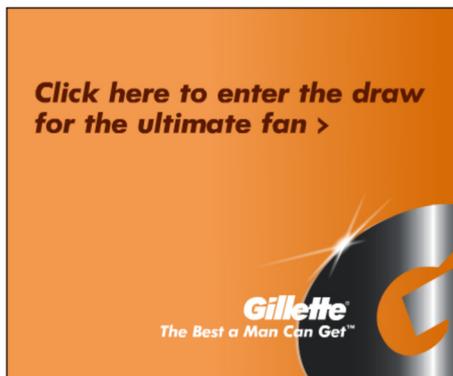
Dr Ibrahim Moussa Baggili, the director of the university's lab, said it would give police the tools to keep up with criminals.

"We will be able to pinpoint where, when and why crimes have happened," he said at Tuesday's opening. "For example, a photo taken using an iPhone can be used to extract GPS information, which can, in turn, pinpoint the location of a crime.

"Students have learned a wide range of skills, from retrieving deleted data from hard drives to tracing e-mail addresses."

The university lab would bridge a gap between the public and private sectors, by offering its research and facilities to companies around the country, he said.

Paul Kurtz, a cyber security special adviser who worked for the two US administrations, said the first graduating class was an important step.



"It's the real battle of the 21st century," he said. "Who controls IT is critical."

With a global rise in cyber crime, the field of IT forensics needed to attract new talent, said Mr Kurtz.

During the two-year course, the officers studied cyber law, terrorism and forensics.

A recent change in the law, allowing digital evidence to be submitted in court, gave police the chance to use new tools to solve crimes, said Mohamed al Obaidili, an officer who works in the IT research and development department. "Before this, we had nothing in Abu Dhabi to deal with these kinds of crimes which, over the last three years, have become more sophisticated," he said.

"But now we can carry out investigations on mobile phone and computer forensics."

A second group of officers is enrolled on the course, with another lab due to open at the university's Dubai campus in the coming months.

Efforts to tackle cyber crime in earnest began in 2007, when Dubai's Telecommunications Regulatory Authority created the UAE Computer Emergency Response Team.

Last year, it was announced that a federal Judiciary Department would be set up to deal specifically with cyber crime. That is scheduled to take place later this year.

It is believed that the federal department will be based in Sharjah and include Emirati judges who specialise in IT crimes.

It will take on cases such as hackers who target national institutions, for instance state banks.

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