



Group photo with karate trainer captain Sobh Sadeq and Balsam Al-Ayoub

KUWAIT CITY, Oct 17: Amongst all sporting events, Kuwait has become a witness to a very new and inspiring cross-gender sports event, attracting boys and girls alike. Well-known fencing champion Balsam Al-Ayoub has developed a unique program for children and teenagers which aims at sports, health, character, team spirit and building positive values. Balsam Al Ayoub has been one of the fore-runners to promote gender equality both in the state of Kuwait as well as on international grounds. Recently her new program, "A Champion amongst us" became the focus of a Japanese documentary who discovered this innovative approach which has been supported by the "Kuwait sports club", Khaifan. They flew down all the way from Japan and have documented the camp, which is soon to be telecasted on the Japanese TV.

Balsam Al-Ayoub created a low-budget program in order to be scalable to all segments of the society. "Gender equality needs support in all income groups. Unless it is supported by the society the reach out is going to be low. However I feel it is my responsibility as a citizen of this State and also being a good human being I need to invest in human than on other things. Transfer of knowledge will not only help in developing a nation, but also definitely help in the betterment of the society by erasing the gender inequality and make each one to respect the other," said, Balsam Al-Ayoub.

The event was held from the 2nd of August, 2015 until the third week of August, this event was organized and held at the Kuwait sports club. There were about 20 boys and girls who had collectively participated in the event where in they practiced sports and lifestyle skills. They received training in various segments like sports, they were trained in Basketball, Gymnastics, swimming, self-defense techniques like karate and fencing, yoga and breathing techniques. In addition to sports and sporting techniques. The other segments were character building where they learnt etiquette, cooking, stitching, art and crafts. This was the first time ever such a camp has been organized where both boys and girls are learning sporting techniques together in The State of Kuwait.

"It has been my dream since the last two decades to see both the gender practicing together and to ensure that they respect one another. I have been working towards gender equality and women empowerment, and today I was able to see my dream come true in this event," said Balsam Al-Ayoub.

She added, "I was initially skeptical, however I knew there is always a beginning and I began working on this project. I decided to work on it single



Empowering girls through sports



Balsam training Jaden Al-Jeeran on gymnastics



Balsam teaching fencing to a little girl

handedly, I'm happy with the outcome. I would like to extend my gratitude and special thanks to the Kuwait sports club for allowing me to utilize their club's facility to carry out my project."

Gender equality is an international topic today, with even the United Nations, UNESCO and many other global organizations also working towards the gender equality. Gender equality is one of UNESCO's two global priority. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for the creation of sus-

tainable and peaceful societies. Currently people are working seriously with even the United Nations trying to implement gender equality and women empowerment across the globe, where in training and knowledge transfer is important. Similarly when every child is taught to look at each other with respect and understand that sport is for all and sport as to be a part of every individual's lifestyle to stay healthy. Women are no exception when it comes to staying healthy. If a woman wants to pursue a sports career she should be welcomed and this will happen when it is imbibed in our childhood, so that the future generation will not have gender inequality. When both boys and girls practice and learn together, they will look at each other on par and respect each other and learn to give them their space.

Although comparing Middle East with other developing countries, they are well ahead and have adopted to gender equality in most of the fields, however Kuwait and Middle East has been no exception when it comes to women in the field of sports. Training and participating freely in sports or making sports as a lifestyle for a woman from this part of the world has been more of a Taboo. Even for that matter children (both boys and girls) are not permitted to train together.

"One of the main reasons for me to begin with this project was that I will be able to spread gender equality amongst the new generation using sport as well as combining it with arts, health, positive character building all this will train them to work and play together and look at one another as equals. I was able to successfully carry out the project with the support of Kuwait sports club who had allowed me to use the club and the facilities at the club to execute the project," added Balsam.

**The Struggle**  
Kuwait is one of the most developed countries in the Middle East. In more than 90 percent of the sectors there is gender equality, however in the field of sports we are way behind. Although Kuwait has 15 governmental clubs for men, 10 governmental youth centers and 3 clubs for women. Out of which two are not in use currently. The women have the rights, but are not aware and also the society does not allow the women to step up in the field of sports. Youth centers by law is for both genders, however traditions they have been put to use by the men and the women are not given a chance. Comparatively there has been a lesser number of clubs for women. Many women are still unaware that they have the freedom and rights to use all the three clubs. If we notice again, there has been a gender bias where there are more clubs for men than women. The youth centers are also dominated by men.

There has been a gender equality in

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# MAKING THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE



Coach Osamah Adel and Balsam Al-Ayoub during fencing training.



Group pic with gymnastics trainer captain Ahmad Khatab



Learning gardening

Kuwait, when it comes to holding positions, women never hold key position in the field of sport. By culture and traditions the positions are taken up by men.

Women do not get financial support or monthly income for training in sports. There are no leagues, they do not have professional trainers. Though the law does not pose a hindrance, tradition and society does. Recently when one of the international champion walked into the AlFatat club to practice, she was stopped and asked for her identification and asked her to fill in the application, when they found she was over 30, they said she cannot practice at the club, but can be a member. "Women cannot practice once you cross the age of 30, but can be a member alone, isn't that curbing ones freedom. Isn't that gender inequality?" asks Balsam.

The new generation should know their rights and fight for it. The men should also know that women can compete in the field of sports and give them the way to lead and train. They should be trained from young not to look at women differently. This is exactly the main objective of the event organized by Balsam.

"When I began working on this project I did fear. After the very first day, I was more eager to plan the program, since each of the children enjoyed the activities and practicing

together. They were in fact one of my motivational factor. I knew taking care and training 20 children all by myself was a lot of responsibility, yet I was able to do it. I knew I was not wrong and I was only transferring knowledge and my experience. It will help the future generation to fight for their right," said Balsam.

"It was a huge responsibility, yet the feeling of satisfaction that I was able to bring a small change in the society. I have been able to work on gender equality and I know it is just the beginning!" added Balsam.

**Women and Sport in Kuwait**

Gender equality still prevails in Kuwait when it comes to sport. Most of the decision makers in the Sport governance are men. Women in Kuwait are ignorant of the sport rules and rights they have. The decision makers only send teams when it comes to representing the country. "If you ask about women leagues and the accolades won by them, is almost close to none, however I do not blame the women, I'm only trying to emphasize that the sport's governing bodies, should give equal importance to women and the country should have women sports leagues too. Sufficient preparation throughout the year is mandatory, it is only then that we will be in fit position to face opponents in the game," added Balsam.

Today we all know that gender

equality is no longer a national talk, it is an International case when there is gender inequality. It is every human's right to practice sport. "Women need to know their rights and fight for it. Every woman needs to adopt sports as a lifestyle and there is no age where she is going to be stopped from practicing sport. Why are the governmental clubs having rules that when women are over 30 years, they cannot practice sport in the governmental clubs. It is every human beings right to stay fit and healthy," asks Balsam.

**How the project began**

During summer I started this project when my elder sister came to me and asked what have I planned for my niece for the summer and then when I was wondering what I could offer for girls, since training girls in the field of sport is not welcomed as much as the boys are trained. As I was preparing a project a few of my friends and well-wishers wanted their children to join the project and slowly wanted to know if the boys could train along with the girls too. Though I was very skeptical initially, I organized it on a very low budget and successfully carried out the project which included training them in Health, positive character, arts. They learnt :gymnastics, Self-defence like karate, yoga, cooking, arts and crafts, stitching and swimming too.

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Gender equality in sports will create a powerful generation



equality

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