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Kuwait hopes to build back better after a year of the pandemic



THE TIMES REPORT

When a minor viral infection erupted at a wet-market in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019, there was no indication that it would soon transform into a global pandemic the likes of which the world has not witnessed in the past one-hundred years.

By the time the international community began to realize the magnitude of what they had to

contend with, and world health authorities belatedly conceded the disease was a full-blown global pandemic, the virus had already spread across much of the globe. The contagion overwhelmed health systems, challenged policy-makers, confined students and workers to their homes, and devastated economies around the world, all the while infecting millions and claiming the lives and livelihood of people everywhere.

A year into the pandemic, the world is still grappling with a persistent virus that remains



resistant to known treatments, and which continues to infect and cause deaths worldwide.

Despite the recent roll-out of several vaccines against the disease in many countries, the virus has remained potent, mutating into new strains that could potentially overwhelm current preventive measures and further challenge the global scientific community.

Kuwait like every other country has not been immune to the virus. The global pandemic, which was first reported in the country

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Digital certificate on Mosafer to validate vaccinations



A digital certificate that identifies a holder and authenticates that they have taken an approved COVID-19 vaccination is to be launched by the Directorate General for Civil Aviation (DGCA), to facilitate the entry and exit of passengers through Kuwait International Airport.

The new service, developed by National Aviation Services (NAS) company for the DGCA, will form part of Kuwait's online Mosafer platform. The Mosafer service already facilitates entry of inbound passengers by allowing them to record their PCR test results prior to taking the flight to Kuwait.

Last week, the Cabinet issued exempted vaccinated travelers arriving in Kuwait from the mandatory institutional quarantine, including those who have received one dose of the vaccine more than five weeks before landing in Kuwait, or both doses of the vaccine, with the second dose taken more than two weeks before arrival in the country.

In a recent media statement, Group CEO of NAS Hassan El-Houry confirmed that the KuwaitMosafer.gov.kw platform is fully ready to assist in the verification of vaccinations issued in Kuwait through its new online COVID-19 Vaccination Certificate. Passengers that are exempt from the institutional quarantine in Kuwait can use the Vaccine Certificate feature on KuwaitMosafer for authentication of their vaccine records.

The new digital vaccine certificate supports global efforts to implement innovative border control policies for safer travel during the pandemic. KuwaitMosafer is a first-of-its-kind online platform to facilitate travel requirements for passengers travelling through Kuwait International Airport.

El-Houry explained, "The KuwaitMosafer platform ensures faster procedures for passengers arriving to Kuwait, a simple user friendly interface and contactless secure process. By simplifying post-Covid travel requirements, we hope to make it easier for people to travel to Kuwait while following all



Hassan El-Houry, Group CEO of NAS

the local entry rules and regulations."

KuwaitMosafer is directly linked to the Kuwait Ministry of Health vaccine records online. Passengers simply complete the mandatory registration on the KuwaitMosafer platform and generate a quick QR code on departure to or arrival at Kuwait International Airport. The QR code can be used to view or share their Kuwait vaccine records. It refers to the passenger's vaccine record online allowing the airport or airline officials to verify the required number of vaccinations and their authenticity.

This makes it easier for processing and eliminates the need to carry paper documentation when travelling. The entire process is online and ensures complete security and data privacy for the individual's records at all times.

El-Houry added, "NAS is also working with international organizations to integrate a similar verification process for travelers heading to Kuwait that are vaccinated outside the country. We are doing the best we can to leverage the KuwaitMosafer platform and facilitate travel for all. In the near future, this will also help drive the safe return to normal daily activities in the country," said the Group CEO of NAS.

On a related note, the DGCA has exempted diplomats and staff accredited to diplomatic missions, as well as official visitors to Kuwait, from registering on the Mosafer platform prior to their travel to Kuwait.

The new exception was announced by the DGCA, through a circular to all airlines operating at Kuwait International Airport (KIA), requesting them to adhere to the new guidelines when boarding passengers inbound for Kuwait.

Though they are exempt from pre-registering, diplomats and all other passengers arriving at KIA must continue to have a negative PCR certificate, valid for 72 hours from the date of the test, to prove they are free from coronavirus infection. The passenger should also not display any external symptoms such as high temperature, repeated coughing, sneezing that could indicate an infection. On arriving in Kuwait, the Ministry of Health personnel will conduct a PCR test to verify the passenger is free of coronavirus infection.

Charitable organizations to be monitored during Ramadan

Ministry of Social Affairs has emphasized the donations collected during the holy month of Ramadan, by approved charitable organizations in the country, should be only through bank transfers or automated payment methods, such as K-Net, or online electronic applications via phones and text messages of telecommunications companies, or electronic collection devices at approved charities.

The ministry added that inspection teams will conduct field inspections throughout the holy month of Ramadan in all governorates,

and at the headquarters and centers of charitable societies.

Regarding permitting charitable societies to provide food in mosques during Ramadan, the ministry clarified that the health authorities have not approved iftar tables at mosques to break the fast in the evening. However, it was permitted to distribute individual meals for breaking the fast, provided it was organized taking into account the social distancing and other health guidelines to prevent coronavirus infection.

Dhaman to complete five health care centers before 2022

Dhaman, the Health Insurance Hospitals Company tasked with providing healthcare to expatriate residents in Kuwait, is said to be moving ahead with its plans to complete the construction of an integrated healthcare system by 2022.

Dhaman said it would finish equipping five primary healthcare centers by the end of 2021, and that there would be around 20 clinics in each center fully equipped to provide a host of medical services including family medicine, pediatrics, and dental services, as well as radiology and laboratory services. Besides these primary health care centers, Dhaman hospitals in the Ahmadi and Jahra regions will be equipped with a capacity of 300 beds in each hospital.

The cost of health insurance for the beneficiaries is to be set at KD130 per year, but a guarantee company is said to be studying various other options, including designing insurance policies at reduced prices for families.

Dhaman is expected to complete the first



phase in its health care system by equipping all facilities with the best equipment and technologies and with experienced medical personnel and administrative staff. By the beginning of 2022, the company plans to fulfill all the requirements to receive its target group of beneficiaries from the new mandatory health insurance scheme. They also expect to successfully accomplish the transition phase from the Ministry of Health to Dhaman's facilities and provide integrated health care services to expatriates in Kuwait.

**Wear a Mask
Even After You're Vaccinated**

It takes a while for the Covid vaccine's protection to kick in. Even after you're fully vaccinated, others will be unprotected. Scientists are hopeful that vaccinated people won't spread the virus, but more research is needed.

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IOM organizes workshops for media professionals



International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UN Migration agency in Kuwait, in partnership with the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Kuwait organized two workshops for media professionals on the topic of 'Responsible Reporting on Migrants'.

The workshops aimed to provide media professionals with a better understanding of the local migration context, as well as enhance their skills and accuracy of information when reporting, and on employing a compassionate and humane approach when covering stories on migration in the media.

The two workshops were organized within a duration of a week, with a three-day workshop targeting media professionals, and an additional two-day workshop for social media influencers and university students. The training event was implemented under IOM's cooperation project agreement signed with the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Kuwait in November 2020, and in coordination with the Ministry of Information, Kuwait.

"Beyond these institutional responsibilities, the reality is that thousands of people post negative and hateful content on their social media accounts every day, and at some point, explicitly call for violent action against migrants and other vulnerable groups," said Mazen AboulHosn, IOM Kuwait Chief of Mission during his opening remarks. "Comments on social networks are more than just words, and they should not be seen as harmless, especially when social networks are a source of information for migrants and the general public, and contribute to their experiences."

For his part, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Kuwait H.E. Laurens



Westhoff said, "In the past 10 years, social media has had increasing influence. Many people on social media do not adhere to the principles of responsible reporting and the algorithms make the receiver hear the same opinion over and over again. We need to be inclusive and allow as many voices as possible to express their opinion then leave it to the receiver to make their own decision. I am very happy to be sponsoring this event on behalf of the Netherlands. I also thank IOM and the Ministry of Information in Kuwait for making this workshop possible".

IOM invited speakers from various concerned entities to present their views, including representatives of the Ministry of Information, the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM), Kuwait University, and the Gulf Cooperation Council Joint Program Production Institution (GCCJPPI), as well as several renowned news and reporting agencies such as the BBC, Thomson Reuters

Corporation and Agency France-Presse (AFP).

Through these workshops, IOM Kuwait aims to empower media professionals to promote ethical and informed journalism by embracing sensitive reporting that is fair and balanced. This is of particular importance when working with migrant workers, including vulnerable persons and communities, who are often portrayed in a negative manner in the media, and yet are amongst the most affected by the current health and consequential financial crises.

The training sessions are a way to inform reporters on the comprehensive migratory situation and the importance of understanding the context in full, with emphasis on human trafficking and its underlying issues. They further aim to guide media professionals on accurate terminology related to the migration management and enhance their skills and provide tips and techniques required for

conducting interviews with vulnerable individuals and covering stories on sensitive issues.

Ethical and well-informed journalism is a key element in combating misinformation and hate speech and promoting social cohesion within each society.

Speaking about the workshops, Managing Editor of The Times Kuwait, Reaven D'souza said, "Very glad to attend the Responsible Reporting on Migrants workshop conducted by IOM and the Ministry of Information. The workshop was very illuminating and gave me a better understanding and insight into the issue. This will greatly help us as we are constantly faced with many dimensions of the issue."

News Producer at Sky News Arabia, Kuwait Office, Iqbal Ahmed, added, "I really enjoyed attending the training course over a period of three days, they were fruitful and useful at all levels, especially with the amount of information provided to us by the distinguished lecturers from various entities. It was very important and an added value to our work as media professionals and editors from various agencies. The session topics chosen are very important for all media professionals, because they will actually contribute to strengthening the writing of reports in a more responsible way that takes into account all the social and psychological effects and the extent of its impact."

Senior Media Specialist - Programs, at the Ministry of Information, Salem Abdul-Halim Al-Kaabi noted, "The session aimed at promoting the values of free and responsible media work and focusing on the central role of the media in producing responsible reports that are fair and balanced and that supports the Sustainable Development Goals, that are in line with the global agenda".

Foreign schools permitted to conduct in-person examinations

The decision last week by the Ministry of Education (MoE) to allow schools to conduct paper exams and set dates for the resumption of classes from September has been widely welcomed by many people.

Ministry of Education has reportedly begun extensive meetings to finalize the procedures for setting exams, counting the number of students who will take the exams and inviting them, as well as educational and administrative bodies, to register to receive the Corona vaccine.

The MoE decision is especially welcome news to Indian schools in Kuwait who had earlier requested the MoE to allow them to conduct in-person paper examinations for students appearing for their board exams. They had pointed out that



students appearing for board exams were at risk of losing an academic year if they failed to take the annual written examinations on time.

For her part, President of the Federation of Foreign Schools, Noura Al-Ghanem, said that the paper-based tests approved by the Council of Ministers for foreign schools include all the grades associated with all international academic accreditation bodies.

MoE to reopen schools in September

Minister of Education Dr. Ali Al-Mudhaf announced last week that schools in the country will reopen in mid-September.

Elaborating on the reopening, the education minister noted in a statement during a virtual media conference last Monday that kindergarten, 1st and 2nd grades students will return to schools on 19 September, and the rest of elementary grades will resume studying on 20 September. Middle school classes will start on 26 September, while high school classes will begin on 3 October 3.

On a related issue that has come to the fore in recent days, Al-Mudhaf added that the cabinet has agreed on holding the first-round of paper exams for the 12th grade students during the period from 30 May to 10 June. The second round of exams will be scheduled on 4 July to 13 July.

The statement said that administrative and educational workers of kindergarten, elementary and middle schools will commence their work on the 12 September, and



high school workers on 19 September. The minister also emphasized the need for all 12th graders to be vaccinated, alongside their teachers and concerned administrators.

The education minister also noted that contrary to what was being reported online by some outlets, there were no shortage of teachers to restart schools as planned.

He added that if any shortage was experienced then the ministry would appoint children of Kuwaiti women, bedouins and teachers from other Gulf Cooperation Council states for the school year 2021-2022.

Thought for the week

Hate is too great a burden to bear. I have decided to love.

— Martin Luther King

Cinnamon: A Natural Cure for High Insulin Levels

Ask Mira: Eating Right to Live Happy & Healthy



Diabetes, Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS), Hypothyroidism are three health cases characterized by abnormally high insulin levels. If poorly controlled, these cases can lead to complications like heart diseases, kidney diseases and nerve damages.

Treatment often includes medications and/or insulin injections, but many people are also interested in foods that can naturally control the high blood sugar level.

I am going to talk here about cinnamon, a commonly used spice that is added to sweet and savory dishes around the world, and has actually been used for thousands of years in traditional medicine and food preservation.

I can say that cinnamon is considered a Superfood, because even if it does not contain a lot of vitamins or minerals, it does contain large amounts of antioxidants, which provide all its health benefits. In fact, one group of scientists compared the antioxidant content of 26 different herbs and spices and concluded that cinnamon had the second highest number of antioxidants among them, after cloves.

Cinnamon could help lower blood sugar level and fight diabetes by imitating the effects of insulin and increasing glucose transport into cells. Several controlled studies have also demonstrated that cinnamon is excellent at reducing fasting blood sugar.

Depending on the size of the meal and how many carbs it contains, blood sugar levels can rise dramatically after you eat. So, cinnamon keeps these blood sugar spikes after meals in check. Studies that measured longer-term glucose, or HbA1C levels, also saw modest reductions, according to the Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

FAQs on use of cinnamon

How much cinnamon should I take?

Cinnamon's benefits for lowering blood sugar have been

well-studied, and those studies have typically used 1 to 6 grams per day, either as a supplement or powder added to foods, and blood sugar decreased by the same amount.

What about drinking cinnamon to cure my sweet cravings?

The more sugar you eat, the more sugar you are going to want. So, drinking cinnamon is a method I advise to my clients and it is very efficient. Cinnamon reduces sugar cravings by controlling blood glucose levels. This minimizes insulin spikes after meals that lead to more hunger and consuming even more sugar.

The most effective way is to boil 2 sticks of cinnamon with half a liter of water, add 1 teaspoon of a natural sweetener and drink it twice a day, one after your breakfast and one after lunch. You will notice a big difference the next day directly. Try it Out!

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www.eatlikemira.com.



Mira is a go-to source for nutrition and wellness and has joined The Times Kuwait team in a new weekly column discussing nutrition and answering queries. You can send in your questions to infotimeskuwait@gmail.com

RECIPE

Kunafa Thandai Mousse



Preparation time: 45 min.
Servings: 5 to 6

A totally different take on the traditional Arabic Kunafa, this crunchy, creamy Kunafa Thandai Mousse tastes terrific and makes it an Arabic dessert fusion that is certainly worth creating.

Ingredients:

- For Thandai powder:
- 2tbsp almond
- 2tbsp cashew
- 2tbsp pistachio
- 1 tbsp melon seeds
- 1 tbsp poppy seeds
- 1 tbsp rose petals
- 1 tbsp fennel seeds
- 15-20 saffron strands
- 10 green cardamom
- 2 big cardamom
- 10-15 black peppercorn

For the Kunafa layer:

- 1 cup, shredded kunafa
- 2tbsp unsalted butter
- 1/4 tsp cinnamon powder
- 3tbsp sweet condensed milk

For the Thandai Mousse:

- 1cup whipping cream
- 1/2 cup fresh cream
- 1/2 cup chopped white chocolate
- 1 tsp. saffron dissolved in 2tbsp warm water
- 4tbsp thandai powder

For the garnish:

Chopped pistachios, few saffron threads and rose petals.

Directions:

- For making Thandai powder:
- Blend all ingredients for powder in the mixer on pulse mode.
- Sieve the powder to extract fine powder
- Store in an airtight container

For making Kunafa layer:

- Melt butter in a pan, add Kunafa shreds and roast till crispy and golden brown.
- Add condensed milk, cinnamon powder and mix well
- Turn off the flame and remove the kunafa from pan to a bowl.

For making Thandai Mousse:

- Pour fresh cream into a saucepan, bring to a boil on low flame immediately turn off flame. Add saffron water and chopped chocolate.
- Keep stirring until mixed evenly and no lumps of chocolate are seen.
- Keep chilled in a refrigerator until required.
- Take whipping cream in a large bowl, add thandai powder and little saffron water Whip until stiff peaks form.
- Add the chilled ganache and whip at speed one until combined well.
- Place mousse mixture in a piping bag.

Layering the dessert

- In a serving bowl or individual glasses
- Place one layer of the kunafa mix and pipe the Thandai mousse mixture on it and top it with a few drops of saffron water.
- Add another layer of kunafa mix and Thandai mousse and saffron water.
- Garnish with dry rose petals, pistachio slices and caramel almonds.
- Chill and serve.



Chef Chhaya Thakker

Indian Chef Chhaya Thakker, who has a huge following online on WhatsApp and YouTube will be sharing her favorite recipes and cooking tips with readers of The Times Kuwait. For feedback, you can write to editortimeskuwait@gmail.com

Over 200,000 expatriates lost residency status last year

Around 200,000 expatriates from nearly 20 different countries are estimated to have lost their residencies in the last one year, as they were unable to renew their residency statuses. Most of these expatriates were stranded outside the country due to restrictions imposed on their entry by the COVID-19 crisis over the past year.

Official statistics show that the majority of those who lost their residency status during the period from 10 March 2020 to 15 March 2021 were Egyptian nationals, followed by members of the Indian and Sri Lankan communities.



Expatriates stranded abroad with valid residency visas must contact their companies or sponsors to have their residency status renewed before its expiry, so that they can enter the country when the authorities open the airport to passengers from all countries.

Expatriates whose residency

has expired and have been cancelled will not be able to enter the country, unless their sponsors obtain new entry visas for them from the relevant authorities at the Ministerial Committee for Corona Emergencies.

In the meantime, the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) has revealed that 8,000 expatriates

have left the country permanently and that the residencies of 17,000 foreigners were canceled within the last three months. Most of the cancelled residencies are that of expatriates stranded outside the country who were not able to renew their residency on its expiry.

PAM also revealed the 199 residents transferred their residencies from the government sector to the private sector in the first three months of this year. The authority also approved 18,858 university degrees of residents with specialization, as per the new automated system, while more



than 181,000 work permits were renewed for workers residing in the country during the three-month period. The authority also issued 735 new work permits, in addition to printing 459 work visas.

UN representative lauds Kuwait's commitment to happiness of all

UN Secretary-General Representative Resident Coordinator in Kuwait, Dr. Tariq Al-Sheikh praised Kuwait saying that the UN appreciates its commitment to regional and global peace, human dignity, global partnership, and international solidarity, and human happiness.

In a press release on the occasion of the International Day of Happiness on 20 March, Al-Sheikh added that Kuwait remains a source of pride, happiness, and appreciation for the UN, especially for achieving the happiness of all citizens, residents, and visitors to the country in all circumstances.

He explained that Kuwait worked tirelessly during the COVID-19 crisis to provide security and safety, provide decent livelihoods and took proactive measures. He noted that Kuwait's Voluntary National Review (VNR) report for the year 2019 had stated that by remaining committed to "empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality", Kuwait aims to achieve a resilient society free from inequalities and discrimination.

Al-Sheikh added, "We in the United Nations look forward to the day when we formalize



our cooperation annually to cooperate with the people and residents of Kuwait and its government to help achieve their aspirations for health, prosperity and happiness. With equal opportunities for rights in achieving economic, social and environmental sustainability."

The world celebrates the International Day of Happiness as it is vital of happiness in people's lives, and it was adopted by the UN's General Assembly on 28 June 2012, and in 2015 the UN launched the 17 sustainable development goals, realizing the importance of happiness and well-being as global goals and aspirations in the lives of people all over the world, he added.

MoH requests more vaccines to expand vaccination drive

Ministry of Health (MoH) is reported to have requested for a further two million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, and preparations are said to be underway to receive and properly store the additional doses as and when they arrive.

The ministry has made the request for additional vaccines to meet the increasing demand for vaccination in recent weeks from citizens and expatriates alike, as well as to ensure that vaccinations are provided to the largest possible segments of society at the earliest. MoH is also said to be planning on expanding the vaccination campaign to include all employees working in commercial activities that bring them into interaction with the public, including coop workers and those working in restaurants, salons, shopping complexes, as well as people working in government and private media organizations. The expanded campaign is likely to start rolling out by the end of March or in early April.

The health ministry is set to launch 10 new mobile vaccination units to administer the vaccination to workers in out-of-reach places from where people do not have easy access to the currently designated vaccination centers. The mobile units will be spread out across all the health districts so as to cover all areas of the country and provide vaccinations to the maximum number of people.



A doctor and 10 nurses, a paramedic, and an integrated information system are present in all the mobile units, which would work daily in morning and evening shifts. Two dedicated health centers have also been allocated in each health district to equip and replenish the mobile units.

The mobile units could visit cooperative societies, mosques, markets, banks, airports, and other places to support the ongoing vaccination campaign through the designated health centers and at the Mishref Fairgrounds.

The vaccination campaigns through the field units scheduled to work daily, morning and evening, and two health centers have been allocated in each health area to equip these mobile units.



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Passenger traffic at KIA in 2020 drops by 11 million



The COVID-19 global crisis has severely affected the travel industry, disrupting airline flight schedules and travel plans of passengers at airports around the world. Kuwait International Airport (KIA) was no exception and saw a dramatic drop in passenger footfall during the past year.

Reporting on the repercussions of the

coronavirus pandemic on air travel in Kuwait, the Director of the Air Transport Department at the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), Abdullah Al-Rajhi, said that around 3.9 million passengers transited through at Kuwait International Airport (KIA) last year. This was a drop of 11.6 million passengers from the 15.5 million who transited through KIA in 2019.

During the same period, the number of flights landing and departing from KIA also decreased by more than 74,000. Moreover, nearly 18 travel and tourism companies in the country had to stop their business activities due to the disruptions in air traffic and passenger travel, while the number of companies operating at KIA dropped from 52 to 47 in 2020.

Al-Rajhi stressed that the airport could not be blamed for an increase in infections in the country as KIA adheres to the strictest precautionary health measures at all times.



Parliament to expel lawmaker

Next session of parliament slated for 30 and 31 March will witness the announcement of the expulsion of lawmaker Bader Al-Dahoum, following the Constitutional Court ruling against his election to the National Assembly.

Revealing this, Parliament Speaker Marzouk Al-Ghanim said, "Al-Dahoum's parliamentary status has been rendered null and void as per constitutional procedure." He added that while he respects the viewpoints of all lawmakers on this issue, the topic will not be up for discussion

or vote during the next session as it is a Constitutional Court decision.

"When a seat in parliament becomes vacant for any reason, an announcement is made instantly before informing the prime minister, pending a by-election to fill the empty seat," said Al-Ghanim. The Constitutional Court had earlier this month stripped Al-Dahoum of his parliament seat, on the grounds that he was ineligible from running in elections.

The Speaker also noted that the next session of parliament would be dealing with a gamut of legislations from dealing with amnesty laws to financial schemes aimed at supporting small and medium enterprises affected by the pandemic, as well as various other matters.



Large turnout to donate blood

In recent days, the Central Blood Bank in Jabriya has been witnessing a large turnout of people willing to donate blood. The increase in number of donors follows an appeal by the blood bank for donors from the A and O blood groups.

The Blood Bank had called on citizens and residents who have received the coronavirus

vaccine to volunteer for blood donation. Experts recommend that while those who received the two doses of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine can donate blood without any delay, those who received the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine must wait 14 days after the second dose before donating their blood.

Those wishing to donate blood can book an appointment in advance and obtain a special security clearance to visit the blood bank during the curfew hours. The blood bank works five days a week from 7am to 8pm. On Friday, the bank can be visited from 1pm until 7pm and on Saturday from 7am until 7pm.

On the first day of the new partial curfew timings, the blood bank saw more than 30 people appear for donating blood between 5pm and 6pm. Some of those gathered there said they were responding to calls made on social media by relatives of patients receiving treatment for coronavirus in intensive care units, while others said they arrived following the appeal by the blood bank for donors. Some donors said they were there to donate blood for people dear to them who were in need of blood transfusions.

UN Representative visits new Human Rights Bureau office



Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG) to the country and the Resident Coordinator in Kuwait, Dr. Tariq Al-Sheikh and his accompanying delegation visited the new offices of the Kuwait Human Rights Bureau located in the Hamra Complex.

During the visit, the delegation congratulated the Head of Kuwait Human Rights Bureau Ambassador Jassem Al-Mubarak and held talks with the bureau on ways to strengthen cooperation and coordination

between the two sides.

Besides the Resident Representative, the UN delegation included the Resident Representative of the United Nations Program in the country, Hideko Hadzialik, the United Nations Counselor Rabia Hussein Makki Al-Jumah, Head of the Kuwait Labor Organization office, Anas Shaker, and official of the UN Public Information Office Asmaa Ait. The meeting was also attended on the Human Rights Bureau side by Hoda Al-Shayji, Lana Abu Eid, and Hisham Marafe.

New chatbot supports healthcare providers in Kuwait

A new online chatbot launched by Gilead Sciences, the US-based biopharmaceutical company focused on researching and developing antiviral drugs, has launched a COVID-19 Middle East Chatbot application, 'Come Chat' to support healthcare providers (HCPs) in Kuwait and the region.

Come Chat provides practicing HCPs with standardized and peer-reviewed clinical and non-clinical studies, as well as relevant scientific updates and the latest international management guidelines on COVID-19 treatment. The platform is available both on Google Play and App Stores and as a desktop version, and covers the most up-to-date clinical COVID-19 data, including safety and efficacy information from global published clinical trials.

Frederico Silva, the general manager of Gilead Sciences, Middle East said, "Ever since the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19 was identified, the team has been working to support governments and the medical community with our decades of expertise in antiviral research and development. The more than a decade worth of investment and research on Gilead's antivirals has been critical in our progress in treating COVID-19 and to help meet patient needs."

Dr. Ayman El-Sayes, the Middle East medical director of Gilead Sciences commented, "Kuwait has made considerable strides in



COVID-19 management, fast-tracking necessary authorizations for treatment options including antivirals. However, there needs to be standardized processes and procedures to ensure the best patient outcomes. Educational platforms that provide easy access to scientific information such as Come Chat can drive the necessary education for trained clinicians to make informed decisions."

Scientific information will constantly be updated on Come Chat as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to drive data and learnings to clinicians worldwide. Come Chat covers a wide variety of information on COVID-19 including but not limited to international and local guidelines, key published studies on all related treatments, new virus variants and more.

Vaccinations do not break Ramadan fast

The Public Affairs Committee of the Fatwa Authority at the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs has ruled that vaccinations during the fasting period of the holy month of Ramadan do not infringe on the Ramadan fast.

The committee was providing its response to a query by the ministry's Undersecretary on the religious implications of taking the Ministry of Health's vaccinations against the coronavirus during the fasting period in Ramadan.

Elaborating on their clarification, the committee said that since the vaccinations

were being administered intramuscular, it does not break the fast of the person undertaking fasting.

The committee further stated that, if a person feels discomfort or has a negative response after taking the vaccination, or if a Muslim doctor recommends that the person should break the fast to prevent any harm or relieve pain from the vaccination, then it is permissible to break the fast and the person can make up for the broken fast after he has recovered.

French mine-hunter in Kuwait, 30 years after first deployment



The French military vessel *L'Aigle* (The Eagle) was deployed during March 2021 in the territorial waters of Kuwait. This ship, a mine-hunter that belongs to a French mine warfare group, comes on a regular basis to the Arabian

Gulf to conduct operations in coordination with the local navies that usually lasts for several months.

This year again, *L'Aigle* traveled through mine-hunting sectors where she carried out measurements at sea, in order to gain a

better knowledge of the underwater environment and thus contribute to the safety of maritime traffic in Kuwaiti waters. She also participated in an exercise with the Kuwaiti naval force, in order to maintain the excellent level of cooperation between the two navies.

However, this year the deployment had a special flavor, as it was the thirtieth anniversary of the liberation of Kuwait. *L'Aigle* was already present in Gulf waters in 1990-91, when she took part in Operation Daguet to liberate Kuwait.

Commissioned shortly before her deployment to the Gulf in 1987, *L'Aigle* carried the most modern technologies for the detection, identification and

neutralization of underwater mines. Today, these technologies are probably outdated but they still remain very effective. The ship is complemented by human expertise; in particular, *L'Aigle* can count on military personnel highly skilled in diving and mine clearance. Her Excellency Anne-Claire Legendre, Ambassador of France, visited *L'Aigle* when the mine-hunter recently berthed at Shuwaikh Port. The French Ambassador was welcomed by the ship's commander Arnaud le Béguec, who introduced her to his crew and its missions.

L'Aigle will certainly return to Kuwaiti waters in the coming years, before she retires after nearly 40 years of exceptional service.

MoI to ensure strict implementation of new curfew rules

Security personnel would strictly implement the new curfew rules issued by the Council of Ministers, which came into effect from 23 March, said the Director-General of the General Administration for Security Relations, Brigadier General Tawhid Al-Kandari.

In a media statement, Brig-General Al-Kandari noted that security personnel have been issued clear and explicit instructions regarding the new curfew hours and rules. The partial curfew will now begin from 6pm, an hour later than the previous curfew starting time of 5pm, and would extend until 5am as before.

People are allowed to walk around for exercise within residential areas only for two hours from 6pm to 8pm, and that residents should adhere to health guidelines, including the wearing of face masks



and maintaining social distancing, while walking. He added that only walking was permitted and the use of scooters or other vehicles during this period was not allowed. al curfew by one hour.

Brig-General Al-Kandari appealed to citizens and residents to abide by the decisions of the Council of Ministers and urged parents to ensure that their children do not violate the decisions. He stressed that the security will implement the law firmly, and whoever violates the decisions will fall under the responsibility of violating the decisions of the Council of Ministers and will be referred to the relevant authorities for further action.

Half a million vaccinated as MoH accelerates pace

Ministry of Health (MoH) is planning on accelerating the pace of its vaccination campaign so that the maximum number of people in the country can be protected as soon as possible against coronavirus infection.

As of last week, the Ministry of Health had administered 504, 660 doses of COVID-19 vaccines to citizens and residents in the country, thereby vaccinating over 11.8 percent of Kuwait's population.

Over one million people are reported to have registered online to receive the vaccinations so far. Large turnout of residents and citizens at the Vaccination Center in Mishref last week due to the ministry extending invitations to over 24,000 people in one day led to overcrowding and the authorities had to reschedule some of the appointments to a later date.

Sources at MoH said the ministry was working on expanding its capacity to immunize at a faster rate following the arrival of sufficient quantities of the vaccine and regular replenishments from the manufacturers. The ministry reportedly has an aggressive plan to immunize two million



people by the end of September through the ongoing vaccination campaign.

New mobile vaccination units have been set up to further increase the frequency of vaccine delivery, and in the coming days the ministry plans on expanding the vaccination campaign to include all employees of cooperative societies, mosques and other places where employees interact with customers on a daily basis.



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Open Day at Indian Embassy tackles community issues

Indian Embassy organized a virtual Open House on 24 March in the presence of the Indian Ambassador H.E. Sibi George. Several important issues of concern to the community were tackled by the ambassador in his interactions with community members during the Open Day.

Ambassador George set the tone for the discussions by urging all Indians in Kuwait to exercise caution as the COVID-19 situation continues to be worrisome. He called on everyone to adhere to the health guidelines and abide by regulations and procedures announced by the authorities in Kuwait, including avoiding all social gatherings and following the new curfew timings. He also

informed the community that there were a few cases of deportations due to violations of curfew timings, and noted that Kuwait has consistently emphasized the need for all to follow all the precautionary measures and guidelines issued by the concerned authorities.

Noting that the main theme of this Open Day was on COVID-19 vaccines, the Indian ambassador stressed the need for community members to register for the COVID-19 vaccination and to take the shots at the earliest available opportunity. He pointed out that everyone above 16-years of age needs to register for the vaccine and added that no Indian should be left behind on account of not being aware of how to register or where to take the vaccinations. He called on all Indian associations to circulate these messages to their members and also to reach out to all Indians in all parts of the country to register.

The Indian ambassador also pointed out that those without Civil IDs or without proper documents could come forward and register with the Embassy. "We will work with the authorities to ensure that all Indians get vaccinated. It is a work in progress," said the ambassador. He added that everyone at the Embassy, the Indian Community Support Group (ICSG), and all our associations are ready to provide all support to those in need. "Whether it is air tickets, or food material, or emergency medical treatment, or legal assistance, the Embassy is here to extend



full support on a means-tested basis," said Ambassador George.

Another important matter that came up during the Open Day was the issue of examinations. The ambassador noted that for the first time in the history of Kuwait, JEE examinations were held in Kuwait this year, and he expressed his hope that going forward, Kuwait will also have a center for NEET and NATA examinations.

Saying that Embassy officers are in real-time contact with all stakeholders involved in the organizing of board exams for school students, he added, "The Embassy will do everything it can to ensure that children will not lose an academic year and also to ensure the health and safety of all concerned are not compromised in any way.

Ambassador George also informed the Open House participants that the Indian embassy had a few positive cases of COVID-19 during the month and that the embassy had to close down public services at the chancery premises for ten days, though emergency services were continued. The passport services also continued at the three centers in Sharq, Fahaheel, and Abassia. He asked all the Indians living in Kuwait to continue using the multi-lingual feedback forms at the Embassy and at the three Passport centers. These feedback forms make a difference for us to keep monitoring the quality of services. We are also resuming the Legal Help Desk from this Saturday from 10am till 12 noon, said the ambassador.



Recruitment of Filipino domestic workers faces new hurdle



A new stumbling block to the return of Filipino domestic workers to Kuwait, and the recruitment of new workers, cropped up last week with the Public Authority for Manpower objecting to the Philippines side requesting monthly reports on recruitment of Filipino domestic workers to the country.

The Philippine embassy's request to provide it with a monthly report on all movements and conditions of domestic workers that each labor office brings to Kuwait was refused by the Director of the Department for Regulating the Recruitment of Domestic Workers in the Public Authority for Manpower, Nasser Al-Mousawi.

Following the embassy's request to recruitment offices to provide the embassy with reports on all Filipinos who were recruited from 2018 and 2019, the labor offices had begun the process of contacting the sponsors in order to ascertain the status of their domestic workers. However, Al-Mousawi's statement regarding the illegality of contacting the sponsor made the offices stop that for fear of legal accountability. An urgent meeting to address the issue with the Philippine side has been planned for Saturday, 27 March. The head of the Technical

Voluntary Committee to Study the Situation of the Domestic Workers Sector, Bassam Al-Shammari, criticized Al-Mousawi's statement. He pointed out that Al-Mousawi stated on one of the local TV channels, that "any complaint received from any citizen, according to which the domestic workers office contacted him, should go through the PAM office and should not be done directly.

Al-Shammari stated that communicating with sponsors of domestic workers to check on the condition of their workers is an inherent right of recruitment offices, which are the first points of protection of the contractual relationship between the sponsor and the worker.

He pointed out that the follow-up operations on the conditions of the Filipino domestic workers in Kuwait, by companies and recruitment offices fall within the framework of their role to periodically follow up on the conditions of employment, and provides positive indications that about 95 percent of the Filipino workers are stable in their work and obtain all their rights, according to what is stipulated in their contracts, whether in terms of salaries, entitlements, rest hours or annual leave.

Parliamentary finance committee recommends loan postponement

The parliamentary finance committee has put forward a proposal to postpone the payment of consumer and installment loans to local banks and other financial institutions in the country for a period of six months.

Revealing the proposal, MP Khalil Al-Saleh, lawmaker and parliamentary finance committee representative said that the committee agreed to a proposal to postpone the payment of consumer and installment loans in local banks, investment companies and financing companies for a period of six months and subject to the supervision of the Central Bank of Kuwait.

Al-Saleh added that the committee also agreed to postpone the payment of the financial obligations owed to citizens by the defaulters fund, the family fund, the credit bank, the housing welfare institution and the social insurance institution.

Analysts note that the cost of postponing the loan installments for a period of six months would exceed KD400 million and the government is expected to reject the proposal. However, since the Parliamentary Financial and Economic Affairs Committee has announced its approval of the proposal, the matter is expected to be submitted to a vote in the National Assembly.

Kuwait Human Rights Diwan chief meets Australian Ambassador



Head of Kuwait's Diwan of Human Rights Ambassador Jassem Al-Mubarak held talks with Australian Ambassador in Kuwait Jonathan Gilbert on Wednesday on duties of the Diwan and how they were in compliance with international human rights accords.

The Diwan, in a statement Wednesday, said the meeting was within the framework of ongoing

meetings with officials locally and internationally. Al-Mubarak noted progress of human rights situation in Kuwait, which was keen on promoting human rights, it said.

Gilbert reaffirmed Australia's support to human rights issue, and said the country was keen on exchanging expertise to promote human rights agencies.

KUFPEC's mission and strategies in Indonesia

Interview with Sheikh Nawaf S. Al-Sabah Act. KUFPEC CEO

Can you describe KUFPEC's Global Strategies which make KUFPEC today?

KUFPEC was established by Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) in 1981. It was projected to be an international oil and gas company focused on production, development and exploration activities.

KUFPEC aims at enabling KPC to diversify its income, position the State of Kuwait more firmly on the international stage and grow its core oil and gas business. It aspires to expose Kuwait's upstream labor force to the industry's international best practices and knowledge.

KUFPEC's current portfolio consists of 45 projects, includes five operated exploration assets in Pakistan, Indonesia, Australia and other 13 countries with a total of 59 companies as partners in various Joint Ventures.

Our production has increased over the time and has stabilized above 100,000 boed, supported by a 2P reserves base of 430 mmbae.

KUFPEC implemented a new strategy to transform its portfolio to what makes KUFPEC today through primary goals and focus on:

Build a long-life asset base that can generate production and reserves growth and deliver consistent cash back to KPC; and

Build a diverse world class portfolio that will act as a bridge so that KPC can second staff to learn from leading operators and to transfer capabilities and new technology back to Kuwait.

What strategic steps that KUFPEC take in dealing with these formidable challenges?

First, we took immediate actions to protect and support our workers while ensuring that critical business operations continue and collaborate seamlessly.

Second, we reviewed current portfolio and restructured our business to mitigate our risks and plan our short and long terms goals to focus more on exploration activities and business value return.

Third, we put our business continuity plans and cash flow to a rigorous stress test under various scenarios focused on identifying key gaps and shortfalls, and we deployed and scale collaboration tools including virtual environments.

What is your plan on expanding KUFPEC's exploration destination in South East Asia?

South East Asia is an area which has a particular interest for us. In that region alone we have two area offices: Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur.

In Indonesia, as recently as last year, we were awarded with the Anambas block in the West Natuna basin and this year we just completed our joint study in exploration area in Sumatra.

Also last year, we announced a major, multi-TCF gas discovery in Malaysia. This



shows how active we are in exploring opportunities in South East Asia.

Our plan is to continue to monitor the available opportunities, focusing on proven basins and to consider the best offered fiscal terms. Our team has proven experience and capabilities to evaluate and execute on our exploration and production goals. We also ensure to bring value to the host countries where we operate.

How do you see KUFPEC's participation in oil and gas exploration for decades in Indonesia?

KUFPEC has been actively investing in Indonesia since early 1980. KUFPEC was operator in the Seram non-Bula Block for

more than 20 years from the exploration stage, field development drilling, facilities construction, and production stage.

The Seram facility included a mini refinery which processed the crude into High Sulphur Fuel Oil and Naphtha. KUFPEC, along with the operator, explore, develop and produce Natuna Sea Block A, which currently contributes an average of ~10,000 boed net to KUFPEC.

Natuna Sea Block A is a sophisticated operation and one of the highest-producing blocks in Indonesia with multiple fields, platforms, subsea satellite wells and gas export pipeline to Singapore.

KUFPEC regained its status as an operator in Indonesia in June 2019 when the government of the Republic of Indonesia



Meeting with HE Retno LP Marsudi, Indonesian Foreign Minister and senior officials from Indonesian Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources (Kuwait, 1 September 2019).



awarded the Anambas Block Production Sharing Contract to KUFPEC Indonesia (Anambas) B.V., a subsidiary of KUFPEC.

The Anambas Block is located in the Natuna Sea covering an area of 3450 km2. The block neighbors Natuna Sea Block A. The Anambas Block provides intriguing upside potential due to its strategic geographical location and neighboring fields.

The first three years of exploration commitment includes 3D license purchase, reprocessing of 3D data, conducting G&G studies and drilling one exploration well.

How do you view Indonesia's potential and prospect for investment in oil and gas sectors? And where do you see KUFPEC's participation in this regard?

Indonesia still has potential to attract investors. The country provides a mix of mature basins on the western side and a more frontier type of exploration on the eastern side from the total of about 60 sedimentary basins.

We applaud the Government's efforts to encourage new investment, however in view of a prolonged low oil price environment it will require more attractive terms and conditions to boost Indonesia's upstream competitiveness. This is especially necessary given the fundamental changes to the international energy market due to both COVID-19 and the worldwide energy transition.

We recognize that the greatest value to KUFPEC comes from a balanced portfolio with strong producing assets such as Natuna Sea Block A and a stable pipeline of new exploration blocks such as Anambas in Indonesia, along with similar assets worldwide energy transition.

We recognize that the greatest value to KUFPEC comes from a balanced portfolio with strong producing assets such as Natuna Sea Block A and a stable pipeline of new exploration blocks such as Anambas in Indonesia, along with similar assets worldwide. We intend to keep growing our business in Indonesia by looking for more business opportunities that fit with our corporate strategy.

Courtesy:
Embassy of Indonesia, Kuwait
Indonesia In Kuwait Magazine



Pakistan Day celebrated with zeal online

Pakistan Day celebration was organized online, in adherence to health guidelines and operating procedures outlined by the Ministry of Health, and so as to accommodate the large Pakistani Community in Kuwait. The event was also broadcast on several social media channels.

The program was organized under the patronage and chairmanship of the Ambassador of Pakistan to Kuwait H.E. Syed Sajjad Haider, with the first phase of the celebrations being conducted by Radio Kuwait Urdu Service host, Nida Mirza, and Nouman Aslam Ghumman. Both hosts highlighted the theme of Pakistan Day and welcomed all the attendees.

The first phase of the program included speeches and patriotic songs. Eman Ijaz, Kazim Naveed, and Aaima Khalid delivered patriotic speeches on the occasion of National day, while famous Kuwaiti singer,



Mubarak Al Rashid, and Zagir Hussain enchanted the audience by performing national songs. Famous Pakistani poets, Sayad Sadaqat Ali Tirmazi, Fayyaz Wardague, and Bader Semab presented their poetry and highlighted the spirit of patriotism among the audience.

The second phase of the program was hosted by Inaam Morganite and Radio Kuwait Urdu Service host Abdullah Abbasi. Many leading figures from the Pakistani community residing in Kuwait expressed their views on the national



day. Several members from the Pakistan community participated in the program and expressed their patriotism while adding that all Pakistanis living abroad should play an important role in the development of Pakistan.

In his address to the gathering, Ambassador Haidar paid tribute to all

Pakistanis and said that each community member was an ambassador of Pakistan in Kuwait and should strive to highlight the positive side of Pakistan. He also urged all community members to be cautious of the ongoing pandemic and to adhere fully with the health and safety guidelines issued by the authorities in Kuwait.

Kuwait hopes to build back better after a year of the pandemic

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

in late February 2020, continues to extract a heavy toll on the state. It has constrained mobility of people, disrupted social interactions, dampened market enthusiasm, and stifled economic growth across all sectors. Public weariness with extended restrictions, and growing disdain for the recommended health and safety guidelines, have probably contributed to the sharp increase in infections and fatalities reported in recent weeks, and which in turn has exacerbated the already precarious situation.

However, it is not all doom and gloom after an year of the COVID-19 crisis, which has been described in some quarters as annus horribilis, a horrible year marked by disaster and misfortune. There were plenty of instances where our response to the pandemic has been extraordinary, and we should build on these strengths. But there were also many shortcomings, from which we could learn valuable lessons that would allow us to build back better and which could help develop a more resilient and diversified economy in the years ahead.

Taken as a whole, the overall response of the government to the pandemic has been at best mixed. On the health front, the authorities are no doubt doing an admirable job, they have been transparent and forthcoming on news about the infection from the beginning of the outbreak. Health ministry officials provide daily reports on the evolving situation, even as medical personnel from the health ministry, along with other government entities, civil society organizations and volunteers, continue to do a remarkable job of responding to the virus and assisting those in need wherever they are in the country.

Medical professionals have also moved quickly and efficiently to test, trace, quarantine and treat those infected. And, since the roll-out of the vaccination campaign in late December of last year, the health authorities have so far vaccinated over half a million people in the country. Similarly, on the social front, the ministries of commerce and social affairs, along with other relevant bodies, have worked tirelessly to ensure people have access to essential food supplies, in addition to providing the country with sufficient reserve stocks of food and other essential items.

However, it is in its economic response to the pandemic that the government has been found most wanting, and been widely criticized. Beleaguered by the virus and by the stringent response of the authorities to contain and curtail the viral infection, the economy which was already in a fragile state

to begin with, has been floundering to find a footing since the start of the pandemic.

A liquidity crunch that the government has been desperately trying to shake-off has tenaciously persisted into 2021. Relatively low global oil prices throughout 2020 that led to a sharp fall in state revenues and a yawning budget deficit continues to deplete whatever reserves the government had in its treasury, the General Reserve Fund. In addition, since the start of the crisis, the shortfall in the budget has widened from the emergency expenditures and measures that the authorities had to incur in order to tide over the various financial fall-outs from the outbreak.

Notably, in the early stages of the pandemic, with the financial hands of the government figuratively tied in knots, it was the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) along with banks and other financial institutions in the country — undoubtedly, on orders of the authorities — that stepped in with measures to ease financial restrictions and revive the economy.

To encourage banks to lend to customers, the CBK reduced discount rates to banks to a historic low of 1.5 percent, and lowered Capital Adequacy Ratio from 13 percent to 10.5 percent. Risk weightage for lending to small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) was also sharply lowered from 75 percent to 25 percent. This accommodative stance by the CBK allowed Kuwait Banking Association — a grouping of the country's major commercial lenders — to announce a moratorium of up to six months on bank loans, including waiver of interest and postponement charges, if any, for both citizens and expatriate retail clients, as well as SMEs.

For its part, a Cabinet meeting on 31 March, 2020 approved a slew of measures to support the economy, including providing loans on concessional and long term basis to SMEs, as well as postponed payment of installments funded by the Kuwait National Fund for SMEs and the Industrial Bank of Kuwait. In addition, self-employed Kuwaitis registered under Chapter Five of Social Security Law were provided support with salaries and given exemption from contribution towards social insurance for a period of six months.

While the economic stimuli offered so far have provided relief to many, it has not helped the economy overcome the pressures brought on by the simultaneous demand and supply shocks that erupted following the pandemic. On the demand side, the unrelenting spread of infections and increasing deaths in the country tempered consumer and market sentiment that led to a sharp fall in demand. At the same time, on the supply side, the strict measures introduced by the authorities to rein-in

the virus and to control infections had the unintended consequence of curtailing supply, by restricting business and economic activity in the country.

Repeated partial and full curfews, long lockdowns, and closure of land borders, as well as air and sea ports, constrained economic activity in the country and had a negative impact on market sentiment. On the other hand, the restrictive measures imposed had seemingly little impact in curbing infections or improving the overall pandemic situation in the country. Obviously, without additional support and timely intervention from the authorities, the economy is expected to continue its apparent free-fall down an endless chasm.

Faced with what appeared to be a life and death threat from an unseen virus, the authorities were understandably nonplussed and probably overreacted, when the number of infections and deaths began to rise sharply in mid-May of last year. A timeline of the response by authorities reveals the hotpotch nature of decisions it has taken over the past one year.

Initially, the authorities responded to the infections by suspending work across all public sector entities on 11 March, and four days later, suspended all commercial air travel and border crossings. The authorities also urged people to stay at home voluntarily. But, voluntary being synonymous with 'ignoring' in Kuwait, the government had to resort to a partial curfew from 5pm to 4am from 22 March, which was then extended until 6am on 6 April. The curfew timing was further extended to 8am to prevent congestion during Ramadan that began on 24 April.

With the number of infections showing no signs of abatement, the authorities decided to impose a 20-day full curfew from 10 May to the end of that month. The full curfew was gradually eased from June, in what the government termed "a five-step, phased return to normalcy." However, since August 2020, Kuwait has remained stuck in phase-four of its return to normalcy.

Following another spike in infections at the start of 2021, the government again resorted to restriction on movement and closure of business activities from 7 February of this year. The authorities also banned the entry of non-citizens to the country, initially for a period of two weeks, which has since been extended 'until further notice'. Celebration venues and all public gatherings, including National and Liberation Day celebrations slated for later that month, were also banned.

The restrictions and partial curfew that were initially for a month and scheduled to end on 7 March, have now been extended for one

more month until 8 April, in the wake of 1,716 new infections being recorded on 4 March of this year. The pandemic has evolved rapidly since the first confirmed cases of coronavirus infection were reported on 24 February of last year. The first cases were among a group of travelers who had returned on a flight to Kuwait from the Iranian city of Mashhad,

where the disease was rife at that time. Five days later, by the end of February, number of reported cases in the country had grown to 45.

By mid-May the number of infections had soared to cross the 10,000 mark, with the virus adding a new dimension to its presence in Kuwait by claiming its first victim, a 46-year-old Indian national, who succumbed to the illness on 4 April. Remarkably the country managed to hold down deaths from the disease, with the total number of those who succumbed to the virus remaining below 100 for nearly a year of the pandemic. The fatality number crossed the 1,000th mark only on 14 February of this year. Though the relatively low death-rate was a relief to the health authorities, it was no consolation to the hundreds of families left bemoaning the precious lives they lost to the virus.

Since the start of the pandemic, with the exception of a few days in May 2020, the number of infections reported daily had also been below 100. However, since the middle of February 2021, the number of daily infections have remained stubbornly above the 1,000 mark, with the highest number of daily infections recorded on 4 March, when a total of 1,716 people were confirmed to be infected. The number of critical cases needing admittance to intensive care units in hospitals, which had remained below 1000 since November, have also soared from early February, with new daily admittance to ICUs averaging over 100 since then.

While Kuwait began conducting random swab tests only on 13 May, the number of daily swabs have remained below 10,000 for much of the time and has crossed into five-digit territory only occasionally. Unsurprisingly, a year into the pandemic, Kuwait has managed to test less than half its population, reaching a total of just 1,960,138 test-swabs by last week. And, as of Friday 26 March, there were a total of 225,980 reported cases in the country, with 210,024 people recovering from the illness and 1,270 succumbing to it since the start of the outbreak. And, this is where the country remains one year following what has no doubt been an annus horribilis. The hope is that the traumas of the year gone by will lay the foundation for the government to build back a better and more resilient economy, and country, going forward.

Celebrating 50 years of Bangladesh Independence

H.E. Major General Md. Ashikuzzaman, Ambassador of Bangladesh

On the auspicious occasion of the Golden Jubilee of Independence and National Day of Bangladesh, I on my own behalf and on behalf of all my colleagues in this Embassy wish to convey our heartiest greetings and warm felicitations to our nationals living in Kuwait. I would also like to express our sincere gratitude to the Amir, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Crown Prince, His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Prime Minister, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and the Foreign Minister, His Excellency Sheikh Dr. Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, and to the brotherly people of the State of Kuwait for their continued support towards further strengthening of the friendly and time-tested relationship between Bangladesh and Kuwait. I also convey my deepest appreciation to all the well-wishers and friends of Bangladesh in Kuwait for their contribution in enhancing the bilateral relations between the two friendly countries.

On this day, 50 years back, the greatest Bengali of all times and Father of our Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman proclaimed independence of Bangladesh in the early hours of 26 March, 1971. People from all walks of life responded to his clarion call, participated in the Liberation war and achieved victory on the 16 December, 1971 to give us an independent Bangladesh. The 26 March is a glorious day in our national life and the day of earning self-identity. On this historic day, I remember with profound respect the architect of our independent Bangladesh, Father of our Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. I pay my deep homage to our four national leaders, all the valiant freedom fighters, the three million martyrs, the 200,000 women who made supreme sacrifices and presented us with independent Bangladesh. My sympathy goes to those families who lost their near and dear ones during the Liberation War. I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to all those foreign nationals who contributed to our War of Liberation particularly India for their moral and physical support in achieving our victory. I also deeply acknowledge the supreme sacrifice made by the members of Indian Armed Forces. Their contribution to the history of our Independence would be written in golden letters forever.

Kuwait is the first Gulf country that recognized Bangladesh after its independence in 1971. Bangladesh and Kuwait are enjoying an excellent bilateral relationship since its recognition of Bangladesh as an independent country. Bangladesh started its Mission in Kuwait in April 1974. With the passage of time, the relation has been further developed and strengthened by the prudent leadership of the former Amir His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and visionary leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina. I firmly believe that with the prudent and dynamic leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al Ahmed Al Jaber Al Sabah and present leadership of Bangladesh, the bilateral relationship between our two friendly countries will reach new heights.

The Government of Bangladesh is committed to further strengthening bilateral relations with Kuwait in every domain including political, economic, export and import, trade and investment, manpower, agriculture, education, tourism and defence sector. The State of Kuwait is a development partner of Bangladesh in the Gulf region through the Kuwait Fund and other agencies. Government of Bangladesh and State of Kuwait have signed a number of Agreements/ MoUs in various fields including air transport, education and culture, trade and economy, technical cooperation in manpower, defence cooperation, cooperation in tourism sector, establishment of joint commission for bilateral cooperation, agreement on avoidance of double taxation and agreement on mutual exemption of prior entry visa.

The military cooperation between Bangladesh and the State of Kuwait is very distinctive. The bilateral military ties date back to 1990 when members of Bangladesh Armed Forces took part in the war to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi invasion. The Bangladeshi Forces efforts during the post-gulf war period in 1991 were so memorable, especially their effective participation in inspecting and clearing the landmines that the Iraqi army had planted inside Kuwait during their invasion. Bangladeshi military personnel are rebuilding Kuwait by risking their lives for the past 30 years.

Following the guided path of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is determined to build a prosperous, knowledge-based and happy country. Under direct supervision of Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the government is working relentlessly to establish

pandemic, extra spending on healthcare, emergency humanitarian assistance has been made. The government of Bangladesh announced a stimulus package of about 1.2 lakh crore taka for economic recovery. Some of the notable activities of this package are: create special funds for export oriented industries; provide working capital facilities to the affected industry and service sector organisations; provide working capital facilities to small (including cottage industries) and medium industrial enterprises; increase the benefits of the Export Development Fund; increase coverage of social security; direct cash transfer to the targeted people, formulate various funds for the agricultural sector. As well as financial incentives, various activities including policy support such as reduction of import duty on COVID-19 related products, policy support to increase liquidity in the banking sector have been provided. As a result of these actions taken by the government, the economy is expected to turn around. Now, Bangladesh is successfully coping with the pandemic under the dynamic leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and tireless effort of all concerned. The Government of Bangladesh sent an armed forces medical team, along with necessary healthcare logistics, in order to help fight the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in the State of Kuwait as a good gesture of friendship between the two countries.

I am very much grateful to the Government of Kuwait for providing support to the Bangladeshi people living in Kuwait during the hard time of Covid-19 pandemic. I would like to thank the members of Bangladesh community and different social organizations who individually and in group provide



been continuously trying to offer better services to the Bangladeshi community in Kuwait. Our efforts for rendering better services to the community will continue in the days to come.

On this special day, I request all my Bangladeshi people to continue their efforts unitedly and sincerely for the betterment of the country, for achieving the 'Sonar Bangla' dreamt by the Father of the Nation and strengthen the hands of Hon'ble prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for implementing her vision 2021 and 2041 and to establish a hunger- and poverty-free developed Bangladesh. By being a citizen of Bangladesh, each one of you is a goodwill ambassador for your motherland. The people of Kuwait will come to know Bangladesh through your behaviour, discipline, sincerity, honesty and dedication. They will be encouraged to employ more of your compatriots only when they find you dutiful, trustworthy, courteous and respectful to local customs and values. For the sake of our beloved motherland that we have achieved through a bloody war prolonged over nine months and through the supreme sacrifices of three million martyrs, I earnestly urge all of you to be sincere and dedicated to your services, respectful to your employer and to abide by the rules, regulations and customs of Kuwait. May Allah bless all of you with good health, safety in the workplace and security in life. May the Bangladesh community in Kuwait live in peace and harmony. I sincerely believe that with your continued support, Bangladesh will find its place as a dignified, democratic and secular country in the world.

On this historic day, once again, I express my deep gratitude to the Amir, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Crown Prince, His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Prime Minister, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and the Foreign Minister, His Excellency Sheikh Dr. Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah for their continued support to me and the Embassy for smooth discharge of our responsibilities.

May Bangladesh-Kuwait friendship live forever.

Major General Md. Ashikuzzaman
ndc, afwc, psc, G.

“ Bangladesh is one of the major manpower exporting countries in the world. More than ten million Bangladeshis are working in various parts of the globe. Of this more than 60 percent are in the Gulf countries. As per the statistics of the Government of State of Kuwait, around 300,000 Bangladeshi nationals are living in Kuwait. ”

fundamental rights for all, as well as ensuring economic emancipation for the common people and raising their standards of living. The present government continues to work with utmost sincerity to turn Bangladesh into a developed country by the year 2041. Poverty alleviation, sustainable development, protection of the environment, women empowerment and human resources are some of the key features of Bangladesh's development strategy. Today this country is often cited by the international community as a 'Role Model for Development'. We are proud to announce that the United Nation has declared the graduation of Bangladesh from 'Least Developed Country' to 'Developing Country' in this year.

The coronavirus (COVID-19), which has emerged as a global pandemic, poses a major risk to the global economy. Economic growth of Bangladesh is also slowed to 5.24 percent in FY2019-20. To keep the country's economy afloat in the face of the ongoing Coronavirus

assistance toward our brothers and sisters in the most difficult time of Corona. The pandemic is still going on and I request all my fellow countrymen to strictly follow the health instructions and to have patience. On behalf of all my people here I express our sincere gratitude for taking all of us in the vaccination program.

Bangladesh is one of the major manpower exporting countries in the world. More than ten million Bangladeshis are working in various parts of the globe. Of this more than 60 percent are in the Gulf countries. As per the statistics of the Government of State of Kuwait, around 300,000 Bangladeshi nationals are living in Kuwait. To provide this huge number of expatriates with friendly services, the Embassy has taken several people-oriented initiatives, including introduction of an online complaint register and suggestion box, creating awareness of consular services, 24-hour helpline, organizing sports tournaments, various motivational programmes and others. The Embassy has

EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

A Concert of Powers for a Global Era



**RICHARD N. HAASS
AND CHARLES A. KUPCHAN**

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The recent testy US-China dialogue in Alaska augurs poorly for bilateral relations. And the mounting rivalry between the two countries clearly indicates that the emerging world of multiple power centers could presage an era of increased competition and conflict.

A big part of the problem is that the existing international governance architecture, much of it erected soon after World War II, is outdated and not up to the task of preserving global stability. The US-centered alliance system is a club of democracies, poorly suited to fostering cooperation across ideological lines. Fly-in, fly-out G7 or G20 summits are episodic and spend too much time haggling over communiqués. The United Nations provides a standing global forum, but its Security Council invites grandstanding and paralysis among veto-wielding permanent members.

What is needed is a global concert of powers — an informal steering group of the world's most influential countries. The history of nineteenth-century Europe points the way. The Concert of Europe — a grouping of Britain, France, Russia, Prussia, and Austria formed in 1815 — successfully preserved peace for a half-century in the



absence of a dominant power and amid ideological diversity. The Concert of Europe rested on a mutual commitment to rely on regular communication and the peaceful resolution of disputes to uphold the territorial settlement that ended the bloody Napoleonic Wars.

A global concert offers the best vehicle for managing a world no longer dominated by the United States and the West. The members would be China, the European Union, India, Japan, Russia, and the US, collectively representing roughly 70 percent of world GDP and global military spending. Including these six heavyweights would give a global concert geopolitical clout while protecting it from becoming an unwieldy talking shop.

Concert members would send senior permanent representatives to a standing headquarters in a place determined through mutual agreement. Summits would occur

on a regular basis and as needed to address crises. Although they would not be formal members, four regional organizations — the African Union, the Arab League, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and the Organization of American States — would maintain permanent delegations at the concert's headquarters. When discussing issues affecting these regions, concert members would invite delegates from these bodies and other relevant countries to join meetings.

A contemporary concert, like its nineteenth-century forebear, would enable sustained strategic dialogue. It would bring to the table the most influential states, regardless of their regime type, thereby separating ideological differences over domestic governance from matters requiring international cooperation. It would shun formal procedures and codified rules, instead relying on persuasion and compromise to build consensus.

The concert would be a consultative, not a decision-making body, addressing emerging crises, fashioning new rules of the road, and building support for collective initiatives. It would leave operational oversight to the UN and other existing bodies. The concert would thus augment, not supplant, the current international architecture, by sitting atop it to tee up decisions that could then be taken and implemented elsewhere.

Like the Concert of Europe, a contemporary concert would promote stability by privileging the territorial status quo and a view of sovereignty that precludes, except in the case of international consensus, the use of military force or other coercive means to alter existing borders or topple regimes. Members would reserve the right to take unilateral action when they deem their vital interests to be at stake. Ideally, sustained strategic dialogue would make unilateral moves less frequent and destabilizing.

The concert would also seek to generate collective responses to longer-term challenges, such as combating the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction as well as terrorist networks, promoting global health, forging norms in cyberspace, and combating climate change. These important matters often fall between institutional cracks that the concert could fill.

Imagine what might have been had a global concert taken shape after the Cold War. The major powers might have been able to avert, or at least make far less bloody, the civil wars in Yugoslavia, Rwanda,

and Syria. Russia and the US might have been able to forge common ground on a security architecture for Europe, heading off ongoing frictions over NATO expansion and preventing Russian land-grabs in Georgia and Ukraine. The coronavirus pandemic might have been better contained had a great-power steering group coordinated a response from day one.

Looking forward, a concert of global powers would be a venue for minimizing the risk that US-China differences over Taiwan trigger a major clash. It could facilitate the peaceful resolution of political stalemates in places like Afghanistan and Venezuela. And it could set parameters to limit the interference of countries in each other's internal politics.

Establishing a global concert would be no panacea, however. Convening the world's heavyweights hardly ensures a consensus among them, and success would often mean managing, not eliminating,

“ A Human Capital Index score of 0.40, for example, indicates that a child born today will enter adulthood (age 18) only 40 percent as productive as a peer who receives a complete education and proper health care. ”

threats to regional and global order. The proposed steering group would accept both liberal and illiberal governments as legitimate and authoritative, implying abandonment of the West's longstanding vision of a global order made in its image. And restricting membership to the most important and influential actors would sacrifice representation in favor of efficacy, reinforcing hierarchy and inequity in the international system.

But a global concert has one enormous advantage. It offers the best and most realistic way to advance great-power consensus, and what is workable and attainable is always preferable to what is desirable but impossible. And the most likely alternative to a great-power steering group — an unruly world managed by no one — is in no one's interest.

This commentary draws on an essay just published at ForeignAffairs.com.

Pfizer testing oral antiviral drug against coronavirus



Pfizer, the US-based multinational biopharmaceutical company, has started early-stage US clinical trials of an investigational, oral antiviral drug for COVID-19. According to the company, the antiviral drug, “has demonstrated potent in vitro antiviral activity” against the virus that causes COVID-19, as well as activity against other coronaviruses, suggesting the potential for its use to address future threats.

The new antiviral treatment belongs to a class of drugs known as a protease inhibitor, which has been long used to treat HIV and hepatitis C. The drugs work by blocking a critical enzyme, a protease, that the virus needs to replicate.

“Tackling the COVID-19 pandemic requires both preventions via vaccine and targeted treatment for those who contract the virus.

Given the way that SARS-CoV-2 is mutating and the continued global impact of COVID-19, it appears likely that it will be critical to have access to therapeutic options both now and beyond the pandemic,” said Mikael Dolsten, Pfizer's chief scientific officer in a statement.

Pfizer is also testing an intravenously administered investigational protease inhibitor for patients who are hospitalized with COVID-19. The drug remdesivir made by the US company Gilead Sciences is currently the only US Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved drug for the treatment of COVID-19. The FDA has also granted emergency authorization to two antibody therapies, from Regeneron and Eli Lilly, respectively. Health experts say there needs to be a range of treatments, not just vaccines, in order to completely end the pandemic.

EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

An Ounce of Pandemic Prevention



SALLY C. DAVIES, JEREMY FARRAR, AND JIM O'NEILL

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With the COVID-19 vaccine rollout gaining momentum, world leaders have a chance to focus more on the future of public health. Both domestically and through multilateral organizations such as the G20, the G7, and the G77, the aim should be to strengthen the structures that proved so essential in managing the pandemic.

The World Health Organization, for example, played a critical role in marshaling disparate stakeholders behind a common purpose. Through collaborations like the groundbreaking Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator, governments, multilateral organizations, corporations, and philanthropists have helped to deliver vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics to parts of the world that lack them.

Indeed, we have witnessed an unprecedented level of international, public-private, and private-to-private collaboration during the pandemic. When there was an urgent need for contact-tracing apps, large tech competitors put their rivalries aside to work toward a solution with public-health agencies. The rapid development, testing, and production of vaccines has been a cross-industry undertaking involving governments, academic institutions, start-ups, and large pharmaceutical companies. The same goes for data collation and disease forecasting, which has involved a mix of academia, the tech sector, and government agencies.

Ignoring traditional bureaucratic and sectoral silos has yielded impressive results that should spur us to raise our ambitions for global public health. Ensuring universal, equitable, and affordable access to good health care is crucial for long-term prosperity. But today's health organizations on their own cannot produce the digital and economic tools that we need to achieve such goals. Many of these tools originate outside of the health sector, and require financing, innovation, and know-how from a wide range of sources in order



to be deployed effectively.

That is why the three of us are now working with a wide range of partners to build on the collaborative momentum generated by the pandemic. The immediate task is to identify specific ideas and solutions that should be implemented immediately as part of the recovery from the crisis.

Much of our focus centers on technology. Powerful new digital and analytical tools now allow us to identify, manage, and recover from health emergencies faster

data, or crowdsourced reports, we can identify threats much faster than the traditional microbiology-surveillance system did. (And some groups are even exploring whether routine blood-count data could have predictive potential.)

These new digital tools are comparatively cheap, easy to use, and well suited to protect or anonymize personal data. But there will need to be much more investment to expand their global uptake before the next potential pandemic emerges.

“ Benefits of funding for public goods such as vaccines, diagnostics, sanitation, surveillance, and modeling tools far exceed their individual costs, and represent an investment that will deliver huge productivity gains over time. ”

than ever. True, such tools often face social and cultural obstacles, such as a lack of trust between the public and proprietary data holders, or between government, academic, and commercial organizations. And deploying new tools is even more difficult when data sets are scattered and established practices are deeply entrenched. But, again, the pandemic has shown us that old habits and silos can be broken when the situation demands it.

When it comes to identifying and managing infectious-disease outbreaks, we know from the recent Ebola, Zika, and COVID-19 crises that some indicators have more predictive power than others. By monitoring sewage, social media, mobility

Just as private investors look for opportunities to generate long-term savings as a way to increase returns, so, too, should those who make public-investment decisions. Everyone recognizes that public investments in infrastructure or skills acquisition are needed to enhance long-term productivity. In many countries, public funding continues to flow in this direction even during times of fiscal austerity. Yet when it comes to health, most countries seem all too willing to let illnesses develop and then pay the bill for expensive cures.

Virtually every developed country's health-care system undervalues and underprices diagnostic and risk-assessment tools. Of the \$40 billion the world spends

on development assistance for health every year, a paltry \$374 million goes to pandemic preparedness. Yet by paying more for prevention today, we could avert costs orders of magnitude higher in the future.

Sustained funding for global public goods such as vaccines, diagnostics, sanitation, surveillance, and modeling tools must be one of the policy legacies of the pandemic. The benefits from these investments far exceed their individual costs. They represent a capital investment in health that will deliver far-reaching productivity gains over the long run.

Real change will require real reforms to hardwire this investment logic into all health spending. For example, fiscal accounting rules should be revised to distinguish clearly between health investment and consumption spending.

At the international level, governments should follow the model of the post-2008 Financial Stability Board and launch a Public Goods Stability Board to focus on global public health and climate change, and to direct more funding toward assets that boost resilience and long-term prosperity. Finally, it is time to update the International Monetary Fund's Articles of Agreement to make health a constituent part of the organization's routine economic-monitoring function.

We are pursuing these ideas within our respective organizations, and we invite others to do the same. Ultimately, the right solutions will come from innovators far and wide. The more minds we can bring into the mix, the better our chances of preventing the next crisis will be.

EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Avoiding a K-Shaped Global Recovery



MICHAEL SPENCE, JOSEPH E. STIGLITZ, AND JAYATI GHOSH

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ongoing standby agreements finds that between March and September of last year, 76 of the 91 IMF loans negotiated with 81 countries required public-expenditure cuts that could undermine health-care systems and pension schemes, freeze wages for public-sector workers (including doctors, nurses, and teachers), and reduce unemployment insurance, sick pay, and other social benefits. Austerity, especially cutbacks in these vital areas, will not work any better for developing countries than it would for developed ones. And more assistance, including the SDR proposals discussed above, would give these countries additional fiscal space.

Lastly, developed countries could orchestrate a comprehensive response to the overwhelming debt problems many countries are facing. Money spent servicing debt is money that is not helping countries fight the virus and restart their economies. In the early stages of the pandemic, it was hoped that a suspension of debt servicing for developing countries and emerging markets would suffice. But it has now been over a year, and some countries need comprehensive debt restructuring, rather than the usual Band-Aids that merely set the stage for another crisis in a few years.

There are a number of ways that creditor governments can facilitate such restructurings and induce more active participation from the private sector, which so far has been relatively recalcitrant. As the INET Commission's report emphasizes, if there were ever a time to recognize the principles of force majeure and necessity, this is it. Countries should not be forced to pay back what they cannot afford, especially when doing so would cause so much suffering.

The policies described here would be of enormous benefit to the developing world and would come at little or no cost to developed countries. Indeed, it is in these countries' enlightened self-interest to do what they can for people in developing countries and emerging markets, especially when what they can do is readily available and would bring enormous benefits to billions. Political leaders in the developed world must recognize that no one is safe until everyone is safe, and that a healthy global economy is not possible without a strong recovery everywhere.

The United States expects to 'celebrate independence' from COVID-19 by the country's Independence Day on 4 July, when vaccines will have been made available to all adults. But for many developing countries and emerging markets, the end of the crisis is a long way off. As we show in a report for the Institute for New Economic Thinking's (INET) Commission on Global Economic Transformation, achieving a rapid global recovery requires that all countries be able to declare independence from the virus.

Because the coronavirus mutates, it will put everyone at risk as long as it continues to flourish anywhere in the world. It is thus critical that vaccines, personal protective equipment, and therapeutics be distributed everywhere as quickly as possible. Insofar as today's supply constraints are the result of a poorly designed international intellectual-property regime, they are essentially artificial.

While IP reform in general is long overdue, what is needed most urgently now is suspension or pooling of the IP rights attached to products needed to fight COVID-19. Many countries are pleading for this, but corporate lobbies in advanced economies have resisted, and their governments have succumbed to myopia. The rise of 'pandemic nationalism'

has exposed a number of deficiencies in the global trade, investment, and IP regimes (which the INET Commission will address in a later report).

Advanced economies, especially the US, have acted forcefully to reignite their economies and support vulnerable businesses and households. They have learned, even if only briefly, that austerity is deeply counterproductive in such crises. Most developing countries, however, are struggling to obtain the funds to maintain existing support programs, let alone absorb the additional costs imposed by the pandemic. While the US has spent some 25 percent of GDP to support its economy (thereby greatly containing the magnitude of the downturn), developing countries have been able to spend only a small fraction of that.

Our calculations, based on World Bank data, show that at nearly \$17,000 per capita, US spending has been some 8,000 times higher than that of the least-developed countries.

Beyond unleashing their fiscal firepower, developed countries would help themselves and the global recovery by

pursuing three policies. First, they should push for a large issuance of special drawing rights, the International Monetary Fund's global reserve asset. As matters stand, the IMF could immediately issue about \$650 billion in SDRs without seeking approval from member-state legislatures. And the expansionary effect could be boosted significantly if rich countries were to transfer their disproportionately larger allocations to countries in need of cash.

The second set of actions also involves the IMF, owing to its large role in shaping macroeconomic policies in the developing world, particularly in countries that have turned to it for help with balance-of-payments problems. In an encouraging sign, the IMF has actively supported the pursuit of massive, prolonged fiscal packages by the US and the European Union, and has even recognized the need for enhanced public spending in developing countries, despite the adverse external conditions.

But when it comes to setting the terms for loans to countries facing balance-of-payments stress, the IMF's actions are not always consistent with its statements. An Oxfam International analysis of recent and

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Pancreatic cell treatment for diabetes

Latest available figures from a study published in 2019 by the US-based International Diabetes Federation show that globally around 463 million adults, aged 20 years and above were living with diabetes, and that over 4.2 million deaths in 2019 were attributable to diabetes.

The dollar-cost of health expenditure to treat diabetes in 2019 stood at over US\$760 billion. With nearly 80 percent of diabetic patients now living in low- and middle-income nations, where expenditure on healthcare is generally low, the incidence of diabetes is set to increase in the coming years. Moreover, with 1 in 2 people with diabetes remaining undiagnosed, the number of diabetic patients is expected to soar to 700 million by 2045.

Diabetes develops when the body is no longer able to regulate the levels of glucose in the blood. Over a period of time, this inability can lead to a wide range of life-changing complications, including vision loss, kidney damage, stroke, and heart disease.

In healthy individuals, the concentration of glucose in the blood is maintained at optimum levels through the opposing effects of two hormones, insulin and glucagon.

Two types of cells in the pancreas are mainly involved in regulating the mechanism of maintaining blood glucose levels. Alpha cells in the pancreas produce glucagon, which increases the amount of glucose that the liver releases into the bloodstream. Beta cells in the pancreas produce insulin, which stimulates cells around the body to extract glucose from the bloodstream.

In type 1 diabetes, the immune system targets beta cells, reducing insulin production. By contrast, in type 2 diabetes, cells around

the body become resistant to the effects of insulin. Beta cells respond by producing more and more of the hormone and eventually die.

Previous studies conducted on mice had shown that a synthetic, or 'monoclonal' antibody that blocks glucagon reception in the membranes of liver cells could restore normal blood glucose levels.

Now, researchers at the University of Texas in the US have discovered that blocking glucagon receptors has the indirect effect of transforming alpha cells in the pancreas into beta cells. The newly created beta cells were also found to produce insulin, which helps lower levels of glucose circulating in the blood.

Rather than rely on insulin injections to regulate glucose level, as most diabetic people currently do, giving them back their own beta cells would greatly improve the glucose regulation and quality of life for these people.

Transforming alpha cells into beta cells could be a particularly promising treatment for type 1 diabetes, as even after decades of an autoimmune attack on their beta cells, type 1 diabetics will still have plentiful amounts of alpha cells. If these alpha cells can be harnessed and converted into beta cells it could very well be a viable treatment for anyone with type 1 diabetes. To discover what happens when antibodies block glucagon receptors, the researchers designed experiments in three different mouse models of diabetes.

In the first model, a genetic mutation induced apoptosis, or 'cell suicide', in beta cells in response to a particular chemical treatment. The loss of beta cells reduced the ability of these mice to produce insulin and hence regulate their glucose levels.

When the researchers gave the animals weekly injections of the glucagon receptor antibodies, the treatment significantly lowered the animals' blood glucose levels.

The antibodies were found to indirectly boost the number of beta cells in the pancreas by almost sevenfold.

To discover where all the extra beta cells were coming from, the researchers used a technique called lineage tracing to label alpha cells in the pancreas and track them through several rounds of division. They discovered that the treatment was converting some of the alpha cells into insulin-producing beta cells.

The researchers could not be sure, however, that the treatment would work during a sustained attack on beta cells by the immune system, which is what happens in type 1 diabetes. To mimic this effect, they used another model, with non-obese diabetic mice, in which the animals' immune systems depleted their beta cells.

When the researchers treated these mice with the monoclonal antibodies, the animals' beta cell numbers again rebounded, despite continued immune attacks.



Finally, the researchers tested a third model to find whether the treatment would work in human pancreas cells. They did this by grafting human pancreatic tissue with alpha and beta cells into non-obese diabetic mice, in numbers low enough to ensure that the animals remained mildly diabetic.

When the team treated these mice with antibodies against the glucagon receptor, the human beta cells proliferated, helping to restore blood glucose regulation in the animals. These studies provide hope that a once-weekly injection of a human antibody against the glucagon receptor can enhance functional beta cell numbers. Changing even small amounts of residual beta cells can have a huge improvement in the quality of life for millions of patients with type 1 diabetes, said the researchers.



Five-a-day mix for longevity

A new study shows that the optimal food combination for improving longevity is eating five daily servings of fruits and vegetables — of which, two are fruit servings and three are vegetable servings.

The study, by scientists at Harvard Medical School in the United States, of nearly two million adults across 29 countries worldwide showed that diets rich in fruits and vegetables help reduce risk of several chronic health conditions that are leading causes of death, including cardiovascular disease and cancer. Despite the clear-cut advantage to better health and longevity, only around one in ten people worldwide eat enough fruits and vegetables.

The researchers analyzed data from more than 10,000 adults in the United States whose health and diet were followed for up to 30 years. They also pooled data on fruit and vegetable intake and death from 26 studies that included about 1.9 million participants from 29 countries and territories in North and South America, Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia. Analysis of all studies, with a composite of more than 2 million participants, revealed:

Intake of about five servings of fruits

and vegetables daily was associated with the lowest risk of death. Eating more than five servings was not associated with additional benefits.

Eating about two servings daily of fruits and three servings daily of vegetables was associated with the greatest longevity.

Compared to those who consumed two servings of fruit and vegetables per day, participants who consumed five servings a day of fruits and vegetable had a 13 percent lower risk of death from all causes; a 12 percent lower risk of death from cardiovascular disease, including heart disease and stroke; a 10 percent lower risk of death from cancer; and a 35 percent lower risk of death from respiratory disease, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Not all foods that one might consider to be fruits and vegetables offered the same benefits. For example: Starchy vegetables, such as peas and corn, fruit juices and potatoes were not associated with reduced risk of death from all causes or specific chronic diseases.

On the other hand, green leafy vegetables, including spinach, lettuce and kale, and fruit and vegetables rich in beta carotene and vitamin C, such as citrus fruits, berries and carrots, showed benefits.

The researchers said their study identifies an optimal intake level of fruits and vegetables and supports the evidence-based, succinct public health message of '5-a-day,' meaning people should ideally consume five servings of fruit and vegetable each day.

A limitation of the research is that it was observational, showing an association between fruit and vegetable consumption and risk of death; it does not confer a direct cause-and-effect relationship.

This research provides strong evidence for the lifelong benefits of eating fruits and vegetables and suggests a goal amount to consume daily for ideal health. Fruits and vegetables are naturally packaged sources of nutrients that can be included in most meals and snacks, and they are essential for keeping our hearts and bodies healthy.



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Reimagining diplomacy in a post-COVID world



Dr. S. Jaishankar

Minister of External Affairs of India and author of 'The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World'.

We enter 2021, hoping to put the COVID-19 pandemic behind us. While each society has dealt with it uniquely, global diplomacy will nevertheless focus on common concerns and shared lessons. Much of that revolves around the nature of globalization.

Our generation has been conditioned to think of that largely in economic terms. The general sense is one of trade, finance, services, communication, technology and mobility. This expresses the interdependence and interpenetration of our era. What COVID, however, brought out was the deeper indivisibility of our existence. Real globalization is more about pandemics, climate change and terrorism. They must constitute the core of diplomatic deliberations. As we saw in 2020, overlooking such challenges comes at a huge cost.

Despite its many benefits, the world has also seen strong reactions to globalization. Much of that arises from unequal benefits, between and within societies. Regimes and dispensations that are oblivious to such

happenings are therefore being challenged. We must ensure that this is not about winners and losers, but about nurturing sustainable communities everywhere.

COVID-19 has also redefined our understanding of security. Until now, nations thought largely in military, intelligence, economic, and perhaps, cultural terms. Today, they will not only assign greater weight to health security but increasingly worry about trusted and resilient supply chains. The stresses of the COVID-19 era brought out the fragility of our current situation. Additional engines of growth are needed to de-risk the global economy, as indeed is more transparency and market-viability.

Multilateral institutions have not come out well from this experience. Quite apart from controversies surrounding them, there was not even a pretense of a collective response to the most serious global crisis since 1945. This is cause for serious introspection. Reforming multilateralism is essential to creating effective solutions.

Fashioning a robust response to the COVID-19 challenge is set to dominate global diplomacy in 2021. In its own way, India has set an example. That it has done by defying prophets of doom and creating the health wherewithal to minimize its fatality rate and maximize its recovery rate. An international comparison of these numbers tells its own story. Not just that, India also stepped forward as the pharmacy of the world, supplying medicines to more than 150 countries, many as grants.

As our nation embarks on a mass vaccination effort, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's assurance that it would help make vaccines accessible and affordable to the world is already being implemented. The first consignments of Made in India vaccines

have reached not only our neighbors like Bhutan, Maldives, Bangladesh, Nepal, Mauritius, Seychelles and Sri Lanka but partners far beyond like Brazil and Morocco.

Other key global challenges today deserve similar attention. As a central participant in reaching the Paris agreement, India has stood firm with regard to combating climate change. Its renewable energy targets have multiplied, its forest cover has grown, its biodiversity has expanded and its focus on water utilization has increased. Practices honed at home are now applied to its development partnerships in Africa and elsewhere. By example and energy, Indian diplomacy is leading the way, including through the International Solar Alliance and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure initiatives.

The challenge of countering terrorism and radicalization is also a formidable one. As a society, long subjected to cross-border terrorist attacks, India has been active in enhancing global awareness and encouraging coordinated action. It will be a major focus in India's diplomacy as a non-permanent member of the Security Council and in forums like FATF and G20.

Among the takeaways from the COVID-19 experience has been the power of the digital domain. Whether it was contact tracing or the provision of financial and food support, India's digital focus after 2014 has yielded impressive results. The 'work from anywhere' practice was as strongly enhanced by COVID-19 as the 'study from home' one. All these will help expand the toolkit of India's development programs abroad and assist the recovery of many partners.

The year 2020 also saw the largest repatriation exercise in history — the return home of more than four million Indians.

This alone brings out the importance of mobility in contemporary times. As smart manufacturing and the knowledge economy take deeper roots, the need for trusted talent will surely grow. Facilitating its movement through diplomacy is in the global interest.

A return to normalcy in 2021 will mean safer travel, better health, economic revival and digitally driven services. They will be

“Sustainable renewable energy practices honed at home are now applied to its development partnerships in Africa and elsewhere. By example and energy, Indian diplomacy is leading the way, including through the International Solar Alliance and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure initiatives.”

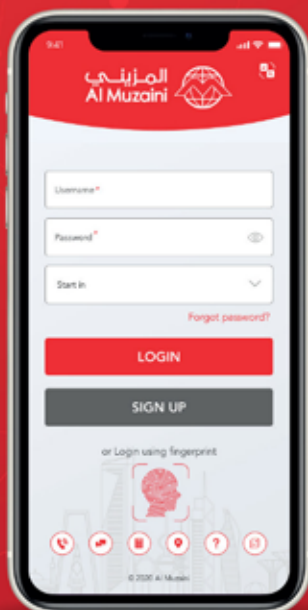
expressed in new conversations and fresh understandings. The world after COVID-19 will be more multi-polar, pluralistic and rebalanced. And India, with its experiences, will help make a difference.

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