International Day of Democracy, celebrated on 15 September each year, is an opportunity to assess the state of democracy around the world, and more pertinently, why this form of government has failed to take hold in the Arab world. Even in Kuwait, where a quasi-democracy has taken a tentative hold since the country's independence in 1961, it has at best become a model for a dawdling democracy that has not risen to expectations in meeting the aspirations of people.

It is an anomaly that while there has been a growth in the democratization process worldwide, democracy has by and large failed to find a foothold in this part of the world. That there is not even one fully democratic nation in the Arab world is as much a sign of disquiet over the results of recent Western attempts to implant democracy in the region, as it is a telling demonstration of how conservative traditions and religious dictates continue to hold sway over the Arab world.

In Kuwait the vestiges of democracy began to sprout as early as the 1930s and this eventually led to elections being held among members of erstwhile influential families to the 1938 legislative council. In a probable harbinger of how future politics would evolve in Kuwait, the legislative council was dissolved the very next year by the then ruler Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Following abrogation of the protection treaty with Great Britain and the country's emergence as a fully independent nation in 1961, the 11th ruler and first Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salim Al-Sabah once again led the nation along the path of democracy. The country soon witnessed the development of political institutions, adoption of a Constitution, and elections to the 50-seat unicameral National Assembly. The Constitution, which has guided Kuwait's democratic march for the past six decades, emphasizes that people are the source of power, establishes roles for the three branches of government — the executive, the legislative and the judiciary — as well as espouses the principle of separation of powers between these three entities.

Since then, elections have been held almost regularly to elect members to the parliament, but just as regularly the assembly has been dissolved by orders of the Amir, due to conflicts between the elected parliament and appointed executive.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8
High rents propel Kuwait to top-twenty ranks globally

A

partment renters in Hong Kong pay the highest rents in the world, with the cost of renting a one-bedroom apartment in the city being on average USD 2,178. Among states in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) bloc, Qatar was the most expensive with an average rent of $1,545 and ranking 4th globally, followed by the UAE in 10th spot globally, with an average rent of $1,187. In contrast, the average monthly rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Kuwait City, which ranked 18th globally, was $999 and in the suburbs this was down to $730.

The affordability of rents can be seen as a lesson in the relative relationship between income and cost of living in a city, and could help expatriates when making decisions on taking up employment in a new country. For instance, an expatriate with a stable high income may find renting an apartment in Kuwait to be a bargain relative to Doha or Dubai. But they should also factor in other costs, as well as facilities and amenities available, before taking up an appointment in Kuwait.

On the other hand, someone with a lower income in Kuwait may be attracted to seek employment in Saudi Arabia where a one-bedroom apartment outside the city center can be had for $270 per month, or a third of what it costs in Kuwait. However, making a decision based on apartment prices alone would not be advisable, an expatriate would need to consider other factors and costs as well, including the facilities, amenities and relative freedoms available to expatriates in the country, before deciding to board that flight to Kuwait.

The ranking of most expensive cities based on apartment rents was compiled with the cost of renting a one-bedroom apartment in Kuwait City, which ranked 18th globally, was $999 and in the suburbs this was down to $730.

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The ranking of most expensive cities based on apartment rents was compiled

Loan installments come under radar of MoCI

The widespread practice of offering consumers installment plans for the purchase of durable consumer goods in Kuwait, has reportedly come under the scanner of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI). With an increasing number of complaints against companies for allegedly charging exorbitant interest rates on their installment schemes, the ministry is said to be looking at plans to tighten the loan market, by reviewing and rationalizing the interest that companies can charge consumers on loan installments. Other measures being considered by MoCI are said to include setting up a supervisory mechanism to ensure compliance with the controls regulating credit operations. Currently, the loan installment scheme operated by companies and commercial establishments does not come under the supervision of the Central Bank of Kuwait, and as such there is no control over installment sales of goods and services, or any other form of forward sales. Preparations in this regard will include coordination between MoCI and the Central Bank, to set up a working mechanism and a joint memorandum of understanding between the two parties. Among other requirements for companies providing loan installments will be the obligation to show upfront and in writing the actual cost of the loans to the customer.

These measures are said to be part of the moves by MoCI to protect the consumer, and educate them regarding the reality of the basic prices of their goods, and the interest margin that will be added to the cost of purchasing in installments.

Austerity plans include ration reductions, job support cuts

As part of belt-tightening measures announced by the Council of Ministers to curtail public expenditure, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) are said to be separately studying various proposals on how to cut costs. While the Ministry of Commerce and Industry is said to be studying the possibility of reducing the quantity of certain items in the food rations supplied to low-income households, PAM is said to be looking at cutting employment support to nationals aged 60 and over.

Among the items that could be whittled down by the ministry are rice and sugar, which could witness a reduction in quantity of rice from 6.25 kilos per person to 5 kilos, and sugar supplies could drop from 2 kilos per person to 1 kilo. An earlier proposal to include infant food in the category of reductions was reportedly turned down by the ministry.

Meanwhile, PAM is reportedly studying the possibility of stopping payment of employment support to nationals who are 60 years old and above. The authority is also said to be re-examining several other state subsidies provided to this category of citizens. Also, under consideration by the Authority is a review of the labor support disbursement granted to nationals employed in the private sector, and to limit this support to only those earning less than KD3,000.
Prisoners to serve sentence at home with surveillance bracelet

Center for abuse victims to finally open

Despite the authorities launching a center in Ahmadi to shelter victims of domestic abuse in Kuwait, no cases have made their way to the center so far, despite several incidents of domestic violence being reported since the opening of the venue.

A main reason for this anomaly is allegedly because, though the building had been fully equipped with facilities and amenities by the Supreme Family Council, which is affiliated with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Community Development, the ministry has not assigned any employees to staff and operate the center. Even a hotline telephone that was installed at the shelter is yet to be activated due to various other reasons.

But reports indicate that following recent visits by human rights groups, including by relevant United Nations entities in Kuwait, there is a sudden spurt of activity and the center is expected to open its doors in the immediate future to receive victims of domestic violence.

Among other reasons cited for the inactivity of the center are the lack of a specific budget, absence of qualified employees to handle domestic violence cases and to provide counselling and psychological care to the victims. Exactly a year ago since Fatima al-Ajmi, aged 35 and pregnant was shot and killed, reportedly by a family member, a shelter for protecting victims of domestic violence is gearing up to open its doors.

The brutal murder of Al-Ajmi, which led to days of protests and demonstrations by social activists in Kuwait, possibly served as a catalyst for the National Assembly to speedily pass a law ten days later granting women legal protection against domestic violence. The law had been pending in parliament for a long period without lawmakers being able to reach a consensus on its wordings.

The passage of the ‘Law on Protection from Domestic Violence’, on 19 September, 2020 finally allowed Kuwait to catch-up with more than 155 countries worldwide where explicit laws protecting women against domestic violence exist. Among others, the new legislation called for the establishment of shelters to protect victims of domestic abuse and a hotline to receive domestic violence complaints, as well as to provide counseling and legal assistance for victims, and issuing restraining orders to prevent abusers from contacting their victim.

Mubarak Al-Kabeer Academy to train Royals

A project to train young royals in leadership skills, as well as in the fields of politics, economics, administration and media among others, is to be launched shortly.

The Mubarak Al-Kabeer Academy for Leadership, which is being readied in accordance with international specifications and based on well-studied foundations and curricula, will target the training of young men and women from the ruling family. A three-year program at the academy will include various training courses, reading programs and external tours, as well as writing a final graduation project.

The seriousness of the project is underlined by the fact that the Supreme Council for Planning and Development has been assigned to launch the project. Also, Dr. Nasser Al-Mujibel, a member of the Council, has been tasked to be in charge of the project and to administer admissions to the academy.

Informed sources stressed that though the academy is named after Mubarak Al-Kabeer Al-Sabah, admission will not be only to the offspring of Mubarak the Great, but to all young members of the royal family.

Qualifications for admission to the academy will include several criteria, including personal desire, and passing a personal interview as well as an IQ skills test. The academy, which will be self-financed, is said to be awaiting final approval for its launch from the Council of Ministers.
Homemade buttery scones

**Ingredients**
- 1/2 cup dried currants
- Juice and zest of 1/2 small lemon (about 2 tbsp juice and 2 tsp zest)
- 1 cup chilled heavy cream
- 3 tbsp unsalted butter, melted
- 3/4 tsp baking soda
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1 cup unbleached all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- 1 cup chilled heavy cream
- 3/4 tsp baking soda
- 1 tbs unsalted butter, melted
- 2 cups unbleached cake flour
- 1 cup chilled heavy cream
- 3/4 tsp baking soda
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1 cup unbleached all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1 cup unbleached all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- Equipment
  - Stand mixer or food processor
  - Small mixing bowl
  - Small glass or nonreactive bowl

**Equipment**
- Preheat the oven to 204 degrees Celsius. Spray a rimmed baking sheet with nonstick vegetable oil spray or nonstick baking spray and set aside.

**Instructions**
- Preheat the oven to 204 degrees Celsius. Spray a rimmed baking sheet with nonstick vegetable oil spray or nonstick baking spray and set aside.
- In a small mixing bowl, combine the cream and egg yolks and whisk.
- Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate overnight.
- Sift the flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt into the bowl of a food processor fitted with a metal blade.
- Scatter the butter chunks over the flour. If you are using a stand mixer, mix at medium-low speed for 30 seconds. If you are using a food processor, process in eight (1-second) pulses. Either way, the mixture should resemble powdery sand in some spots and coarse sand in others. Do not overmix.
- Add the egg mixture and mix at medium speed for 30 to 45 seconds, or process in 4 (1-second) pulses, just until the dough barely comes together. It should be lumpy, with raggedy edges — not smooth at all.
- Heavily dust a work surface with all-purpose flour. Scoop the dough out onto it, scatter the currants and zest on top, and gently mix them in.
- Divide the dough in half. Sprinkle a pinch of flour on top of one of the halves and shape into 15 to 20cm round with a thickness of about 2cm. Repeat with the other portion of dough. Use a pizza wheel or a large knife to cut each circle into six even wedges. Be sure to cut all the way through to the bottom so the wedges are separated.
- Brush the tops of the scones with the melted butter. Sprinkle with sugar if using.
- Bake until golden-brown on the tops and bottoms (15 to 18 minutes).

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**Baking English Muffins to perfection**

If you are wondering whether preparing English muffins from scratch is worth your while, then the answer is yes. These fluffy-on-the-inside, chewy-on-the-outside baked goods are easy to prepare and fancy enough to present to guests. They are just as versatile as bagels and can be paired with spreads, jams and jellies. Here is everything you need to know about preparing English Muffins.

**The dough:** English muffin dough is generally enriched — with butter, milk (or other dairy), and/or sugar — though often only lightly so (and eggs are not usually in the mix). It is a yeast-raised dough that benefits from the structure or higher protein levels of bread flour. Unlike doughs that are intensely mixed, English muffin dough requires minimal handling, which means there is no need for strong, intense gluten strands. Breads that are rigorously mixed, like broiche, have a tight crumb structure, whereas those that are handled minimally have a more open structure. It is also worth noting that the dough should not be overly tacky: If you find yourself with sticky dough, knead in a few tablespoons of extra flour until it is smooth and easy to handle.

**Dipping the outside:** Before you can cook the English muffins, you need an important garnish of sorts. To create the signature outer, the English muffins are dipped in a textured flour or meal, the most common being semolina flour or cornmeal. This coating on the exterior will help the muffins from sticking during the first part of their cooking process.

**‘Cooking’ the crust:** Once the dough has been shaped and has had its final rise, it is cooked in a cast-iron skillet before it hits the oven. The hot skillet gives the outside a golden, crackly appearance and sets the crust, then the soft interior gets finished in the oven. While this is one extra step, it also means a shorter overall bake time. Make sure the skillet is nice and hot, but not smoking hot, before adding the muffins. Cook until golden (two to four minutes), then flip and repeat on the other side. If you have a large cast-iron griddle, you can do them all at once. If not, work in batches. Transfer the finished muffins to a parchment-lined baking sheet.

**Baking:** English muffins bake at a high temperature for a short amount of time. Bake for seven to nine minutes at 246 degrees Celsius. These muffins will be much puffier and fluffier than the kind you are used to seeing, and since they will not brown too much more in the oven, it can be difficult to tell when they are done. The best way is to stick a thermometer in there. Go in at the side so that the hole will be easier to hide to whomever you are serving and make sure you settle the thermometer in the very center. Look for an internal temperature of between 93 and 102 degrees Celsius.

**Cooling:** Muffins must be cooled for five to ten minutes before serving. They will still be nice and warm, but their crumb structure will have had time to set and some steam will slowly escape from the interior. If you are making your muffins a good bit in advance, no problem either. Let them cool completely, then transfer to an airtight container. The cooled muffins can be warmed in a low oven or toasted to perfection.

**Serving:** Grab some butter, jam or jelly. Then slather, bite, and repeat.
Whistleblower wins reward-money from Nazaha

Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) has awarded the reward-money in cash to one of its whistle-blowers, following successful prosecution of the corruption case.

Acting Secretary-General of Nazaha, Dr. Muhammad Bozbar, said that reward-money is presented to whistle-blowers who reveal incidents of corruption in public offices. The money is disbursed as per executive regulations, and based on the merits of individual cases, where the whistle-blower is also required to fulfill certain conditions.

The whistle-blower is entitled to the reward-money only after a successful verdict is issued in the prosecution case against the corruption charges. And, usually the reward-money awarded by the Authority is a percentage of the amount recovered from the perpetrator, or perpetrators, of the corruption.

Al-Sayer partners with NGOs to donate blood

A l-Sayer Holding conducted a blood donation campaign in association with the Central Blood Bank, and local non-governmental entity Trash Hero Kuwait, which is a registered Non-Profit Organization (NPO) in Kuwait. The campaign, which extended for five days, was aimed at inspiring the Kuwait community with the noble ideal of donating blood to save lives, in particular during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis that has increased the need in hospitals for life-saving blood.

More than 30 volunteers contributed five hours a day to support more than 60 donors who arrived to donate blood. All participants underwent a medical assessment before donation to ensure they are sufficiently fit and healthy to give blood. Other volunteer organizations involved in the campaign included Green Hands, Tarahom, Kuwait Response & Rescue Squad, and Spread The Passion.

Nehad Al-Hajj Ali – GM of Corporate Excellence at ALSAYER Group expressed his utmost gratitude to the volunteers who joined the campaign. “Such a gathering shows great solidarity from us to others, whom we have never met or know. Blood donation is an excellent service to humanity, and we look forward in the future to partnering in more such voluntary services to serve our community,” said Al Hajj Ali.

He added, “We are also grateful to the management and staff at Blood Bank Jabriya unit for their effective support during these critical days. As part of ALSAYER Corporate Social Responsibility we are always keen to raise awareness among our employees, customers, and society to elevate the spirit of giving and coming together for the prosperity of the Kuwait community.”

PCR test mandatory for all incoming passengers

A recent case of infection from the Delta variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus was detected in Kuwait, confirmed the Chairman of the Advisory Committee to Confront Corona, Dr. Khaled Al-Jarallah. He added that the infected person was a citizen, and not as Rumored an expatriate.

The infected person was a citizen, and not as Corona, Dr. Khaled Al-Jarallah. He added that the variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus was recently case of infection from the Delta variant to Kuwait. Unless subjected to PCR test on arrival.

Behbehani, who stressed the importance of conducting PCR tests on all incoming passengers to prevent newly mutated viruses, especially Delta, from entering Kuwait.

He pointed out that a traveler entering Kuwait may be immune or not show any symptoms of infection with Delta, but could become the cause for the spread of the variant in Kuwait, unless subjected to PCR test on arrival.

Dr. Behbehani also called on everyone to get vaccinated to protect themselves and their families from the virus and help the authorities in the aim to acquire community immunity at the earliest.
Bank deposits to be secured with only partial guarantee

A bill aimed at amending the law on government guarantee of bank deposits, which was enacted in 2008 to enhance financial stability, is reported to be under consideration by the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK).

The new bill will absolve the government from its responsibility to provide 100 percent guarantee of all deposits in local banks, and replace it with a partial guarantee that covers only a specific upper limit for every customer. The proposal to provide only partial guarantee is said to be linked to the aim of CBK to improve the country’s sovereign ratings by international rating agencies, standing. Some rating agencies had downgraded Kuwait’s sovereign ratings in recent months citing, among others, that the government guarantee of deposits constituted an additional obligation on the state, even if it was only an indirect obligation.

The agencies said that a full guarantee obliged the state to pay depositors, if any bank defaulted on its payment, and that this puts additional pressure on the rating, despite the unlikelihood of banks defaulting in Kuwait given their financial strength and creditworthiness.

CBK is said to be working on an alternate effective system to replace the state guarantee. Several proposals are reported to be under consideration, including the establishment of a separate entity, or fund that works in cooperation with banks to provide a guarantee on a portion of the customers’ deposits, and another system where the government continues to remain a guarantor of a certain minimum amount of money, regardless of the total value of the deposits.

Customers’ choice of banks where they will hold their deposits in future, if state guarantees are lifted, will depend on two main considerations: either based on the name and reputation of the bank, or on the interest offered by the bank, which would lead to raising the level of competition among local banks, said the CBK.

Kuwait’s wealth fund tops regional funds

Latest data released by the International Institute for Sovereign Wealth Funds shows that Kuwait ranks third globally and first regionally in terms of its assets. Of the total USD9.1 trillion held by sovereign wealth funds (SWF), Kuwait accounted for USD693 billion. The list was topped by the Norwegian Government Pension Fund with assets of USD1.1 trillion, and in third spot was Kuwait’s wealth fund, the Kuwait Investment Authority. Abu Dhabi Investment Authority with assets of USD469 billion came in fourth, and the Hong Kong Monetary Authority with assets of USD582 billion was in fifth spot.

In terms of regional distribution, the Asia region had the largest share of the total, accounting for 42 percent of global sovereign funds, while the Middle East came in second place with 33 percent of the total. Europe and North America came in third and fourth places with 18 percent and 3.8 percent respectively, followed by Australia and the Pacific region with 2.3 percent and the lowest percentage was for Africa and Latin America with 0.9 percent and 0.4 percent, respectively.

The institute explained that the study of the main difference between the value of the funds’ assets during the period between 2000 and 2012 compared to their value during the period between 2012 and 2021, shows that the increase in the assets of funds during the recent period is represented in the investment returns achieved by the funds in the current period of time, especially in the markets where they have spread widely.

Al-Muzaini Exchange opens 117th branch in Kuwait, in Qurtuba

Al-Muzaini, a renowned financial solutions provider and the leading exchange house in Kuwait, has opened its 117th branch in Kuwait at Qurtuba, Block-2. The new branch was inaugurated by the General Manager of Al-Muzaini Exchange Hugh Fernandes, along with senior officials on 1 September. The new branch offers customers a broad range of financial services such as instant bank transfers, instant money transfers, foreign currency exchange and Corporate/Trade transfers, with the best rates and fast turnaround time on transactions, all days of the week. Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Fernandes said: “It is our vision to make financial services accessible to all. Along with our strong network across Kuwait, Al-Muzaini Digital Payment platform available in App Store, Google Play and App Gallery, provides a secure and simplified one-stop financial solution with more unique features such as New Customer Registration, Adding New Beneficiary, Setting rate alerts, Rate trends, Transaction history, Western Union Transfer and more, in just a few clicks, from anywhere, anytime.”
New Uzbekistan emerges under leadership of President Mirziyoyev

O n the occasion of the 30th anniversary of Independence Day of Uzbekistan, the country’s Ambassador in Kuwait H.E. Alyev III, titled ‘New Uzbekistan is becoming a Country of Democratic Transformations, Big Opportunities and Practical Deeds’. The booklet is based on a recent interview by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, where he provides answers to questions over a wide range of topics related to the country.

In the book, President Mirziyoyev details the steps taken for a new Uzbekistan and noted that the building of a new Uzbekistan is ‘not a whim, not a subjective phenomenon, but an objective necessity, which has its own fundamental historical foundations, due to the current political, legal, socio-economic, spiritual and educational situation, based on the centuries-long aspirations of our people and fully conforming to their national interests’.

The president points out in the book that the new Uzbekistan is a state, developing in strict compliance with the universally recognized norms in the field of democracy, human rights and freedoms, and on the basis of the principles of friendship and cooperation with the international community, the ultimate aim of which is to create a free, comfortable and prosperous life for the people of Uzbekistan.

President Mirziyoyev highlights six priority tasks that include social policy, economic development, protecting businesses during the pandemic, fundamental changes in agriculture by initiating food security, protecting the health and life of the people during the pandemic and striving to ensure educational and spiritual work for future development.

Uzbekistan, he notes, is playing a leading and important role in the region through its foreign policy which is based on pragmatism and reconciliation. The country is paying special attention to strengthening the centuries-long ties of friendship based on strategic partnership and mutual trust. The country is also keen to develop the multifaceted and mutually beneficial relations with its main trading partners, such as Russia, China, the United States of America, Turkey, Germany, France, Great Britain, South Korea, Japan, India and Pakistan, and in the Gulf region with the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait, as well as expanding ties with other states.

Kuwait is one of the principal and important trading partners of Uzbekistan in the Middle East and in the Arabic world. This year Kuwait and Uzbekistan will celebrate 27th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. During this period, bilateral political dialogues and diplomatic ties have been established, leading to economic cooperation, economic and humanitarian relations have developed very positively and regular political consultations between the two Ministries of Foreign Affairs are being organized.

On 15-16 July this year, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State of Cabinet Affairs of Kuwait H.E. Sheikh Dr. Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah, visited Uzbekistan. During his meeting with the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev, prospects for expanding practical cooperation between the two countries were discussed in detail, including in the areas of trade, investment and innovation, finance, food security, information technology, education and others.

An agreement was reached between the two sides on holding the next meeting of the bilateral Intergovernmental Commission and preparing a joint program of events within the framework of the 30th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations. During the meeting, a constructive exchange of views also took place on topical aspects of international and regional agendas. The two parties also agreed to develop a roadmap that includes specific activities aimed at achieving among others, bilateral cooperation in the financial credit sphere.

Meanwhile, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development continues to support the implementation of various social projects in Uzbekistan, including in agriculture, infrastructure, transport and healthcare sectors. The Kuwait Fund has signed with Uzbekistan since the Central Asian country’s independence, contributing to financing 10 development projects amounting to nearly $2.5 million, and providing grants and technical assistance amounting to nearly $2.5 million.

On the travel and tourism front, in the last few years, Uzbekistan has taken several practical measures to facilitate the granting of visas to citizens of Kuwait. The two countries have established visa-free entry for holders of diplomatic passports and visa-free entry regime for citizens of Kuwait for 10 days. Direct flights between the two countries have also become operational since last month.

The forethought answers provided by the President in the book, indicates that the transformation to a new Uzbekistan is fast becoming a reality for the people of the country.

MoCI spends millions on subsidies

M inistry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) has spent a total of KD121 million in the first half of 2021 to subsidize food and construction materials, with support for construction material alone accounting for 50 percent of the total expenditure.

Data provided by MoCI shows a remarkable growth in spending on construction materials from January until the end of August 2021, with spending peaking in the first two, and last two months of the period. A total of KD3.5 million was spent in January, KD0.6 million in February, KD12 million in July and KD13 million in August, in a clear indication of the growth of construction work in the residential sector in recent months.

In addition to construction material, MoCI has provided nine subsidized food commodities — rice, sugar, lentils, corn oil, powdered milk, milk and baby food (21 types), tomato paste (two types), and frozen chicken (20 types), including 21 types of baby food, 20 types of frozen chicken and two types of tomato paste.

Supreme Planning Council to promote culture of competency

C reating a culture of competency in government operations is challenging, because the mechanisms for assessing and appointing supervisory cadres are based on foundations of productivity, efficiency and performance measurement, said the Secretary-General of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development, Dr. Khaled Mahdi in a recent media interview.

He revealed that the Council seeks to promote this culture of competency, and do away with the practice of appointments based on connections and relationships. Dr. Mahdi was speaking on the sidelines of a meeting between representatives of the Secretariat General of the Supreme Council for Planning and the Arab Planning Institute, which was held at the Institute’s headquarters recently under the slogan ‘Towards a National Development Leadership’.

Announcing the launch of the project for building a center for development of government agencies, the Secretary-General noted that appointments worldwide are usually based on three criteria — birthright, relationships or competencies. However, in Kuwait, “we want to enhance the concept of competencies through implementing professional development programs for government agencies”.

For his part, Director-General of the Arab Planning Institute, Dr. Badr Malalah, said, “The Leaders Development Program derives its importance from the fact that it deals with one of the most important issues in the Kuwaiti arena at the present time — developing capabilities of leaders in government institutions.
A new waste-recycling plant set up at Al-Salmi near the border with Saudi Arabia is to recycle the millions of waste tyres generated each year in the country that pose a serious environmental challenge.

More than 42 million old vehicle tyres lying in the desert in Kuwait, and forming the world’s largest tyre graveyard, had spread over the desert landscape, some are even swaying in the wind from the nearest residential suburb. The ‘tyre graveyard’ has now been shifted to a new site near the Salmi border by the government in a massive shifting operation, as the site was needed to build 25,000 homes that will form a new residential housing area.

At the new waste-recycling plant run by the private sector EPSCO Global General Trading and Recycling Company, 450 EPSCO employees sort and shred scrap tyres, before machines compact them into rubber-based flooring tiles. The EPSCO plant, which began operations in January 2021, can recycle up to three million tyres in a year.

“The factory is helping society by cleaning up the dumped old tyres and turning them into consumer products,” said EPSCO partner and CEO Ali Al Hassan. The company also plans on exporting products to neighboring Gulf countries and Asia.

Scrap tyres are a major environmental problem worldwide due to their bulk and the chemicals they can release due to fires or by leaching into groundwater. Kuwait that with a population of only around 4.7 million, had over 2.4 million vehicles in 2019, up from 1.5 million in 2010.

Democracy in Kuwait, 60 years in the making

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

More than half of the elected assemblies since independence have been dissolved, and frequent cabinet reshuffles have led to the swearing-in of 38 cabinets, so far. In the latest round, following elections held in December 2020, the outgoing cabinet of Kuwait’s 16th National Assembly on 15 December, the parliament witnessed one of its shortest-lived sessions. A month after they were sworn-in, the cabinet submitted its resignation over opposition demands to grill the prime minister.

In Kuwait’s semi-democratic set up, the Amir appoints the prime minister who then selects his cabinet of ministers to form the government. The current cabinet, which took office in March, 2021 is once again headed by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, who has now headed three governments since 1992.

The December 2020 elections with a turnout of around 70 percent, saw the emergence once again of a strong opposition bloc. Just 19 of the 43 incumbents who ran for parliamentary seats were returned, with nearly half of the legislators who won aligned with opposition groups, and 29 tribe-affiliated lawmakers — their highest number in parliament since 1992 — making it through in the polls. Traditionalist opposition members, whether tribalists or Islamists, who form the bulk of opposition members were clearly the winners in the election.

Though 29 women ran in the elections, none won, perhaps reflecting deeply entrenched social and cultural traditions views against women running for office. And, although 30 candidates who won elections are under the age of 45, hopes among youth of reforms and a breath of fresh air in parliament were soon dashed, as most of the young cohort of legislators that stood on Reform party tickets, were returned, with nearly half of the legislators under the age of 45, hopes among youth of reforms and a breath of fresh air in parliament were soon dashed, as most of the young cohort of legislators that stood on Reform party tickets.

It is only understandable that if a decade ago, the youth in Egypt sought the blood of Hosni Mubarak in Tahrir square, today they are jeering the failures of democracy in Egypt. These same longings of despots, today they are jeering the failures of democracy in Egypt. These same longings of despots, today they are jeering the failures of democracy in Egypt. These same longings of despots, today they are jeering the failures of democracy in Egypt. These same longings of despots, today they are jeering the failures of democracy in Egypt.

With the emergence of the pandemic, the situation has created invisible interest groups and conflicts of interests, making any meaningful reforms aimed at making the country forward almost impossible.

In Syria and Yemen, nascent democratic pinnings and subsequent foreign interventions have left the two countries tottering on the threshold of becoming failed states. Even in Tunisia, where the ‘Arab Spring’ is considered to have begun blossoming, and where democracy has made inroads since the ousting of longtime President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011, a survey by Pew Research has found that nearly seven in ten people were dissatisfied with the progress of democracy in their country. It is only understandable, that if a decade ago, people in the Arab world were cheering the fall of despots, today they are jeering the failures of democracy.

This change in mindset among the Arab populace in less than a decade has wider ramifications that extend beyond the region. In recent years, there has been talk of growing authoritarianism and stability and growth seems to have limited the damage to the lives and livelihood of citizens. It is countries with dysfunctional states, deeply divided societies, or poor leadership at the helm that have fared poorly in their pandemic responses.

Despite the notion of ineptness among democracies being a fallacy, it has still created a perception among many people that democratic forms of government are incapable of responding quickly to catastrophes. People have come to believe that when it comes to exogenous, a rapid automatic response is preferable to democratic vacillations, with its penchant for upholding personal liberties and freedoms.

Another factor behind the reluctance to espouse democracy in the region is the impact of religious influence on democratic leanings. The contention that religious influences are not responsible for the general failure of democracy to take root in the Arab world may sound compelling, but it is not persuasive. Many mainstream and radical proponents of religious doctrines have for years contended that their faith is incompatible with democracy and urged followers to shun this “Western” practice.

Repeated independent surveys have also shown low scores for freedom and democratic principles in this region. While change in this attitude among people may come over time, they will first need to reconcile their religious beliefs with their democratic aspirations.

Not just in the Middle-East, around the world democracy seems to be in recession. The same survey by Pew Research on Tunisia quoted above, also revealed that globally people are more dissatisfied than satisfied with the way democracy is working. Even in established democracies dissatisfaction with democracy is rife. More than half of those surveyed in the UK (69%), the US (59%), France (58%) and Japan (53%) expressed dissatisfaction with how democracy is working in their country. Not surprisingly, the recent assertion by US President Joe Biden that this century would be Asia’s century, was met with a mixed reception, with countries expressing dissatisfaction with how democracy is working in their country, but not just in the Arab world.
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LOCAL

Tajikistan celebrates Independence Day

The state independence of the Republic of Tajikistan is the most important historical and national date of the country. The President of the Republic of Tajikistan H.E. Emomali Rahmon noted the importance of this historic date: “It was independence that gave us a historical opportunity to own our homeland, build our national statehood, revive our national traditions and values, realize the age-old dreams of our people and ensure freedom for peoples.”

In the late 1980s, the so-called parade of sovereignties began in the USSR. The union republics and autonomies began to proclaim their independence from the central leadership of the state, and republican laws became a priority over union laws. On 24 August, 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the Tajik SSR adopted the Declaration ‘On the sovereignty of the Tajik SSR’ at the second session. It proclaimed that “the Tajik SSR independently solves all political, economic, social and cultural issues on its territory, except for those issues that Tajikistan voluntarily transfers to the competence of the USSR.” Article 5 stated that the Supreme Soviet of the republic had the right to “terminate the validity of USSR documents that contradict the legal rights of Tajikistan.” This declaration became the first official document on the way to the independence of Tajikistan.

On 9 September, 1991, at the session of the Shuroi Oh (Supreme Council) of the Republic of Tajikistan, a resolution was adopted ‘On the State Independence of the Republic of Tajikistan’ with the wording: ‘The Republic of Tajikistan is an independent, democratic, legal state.’ This has become an important historical event for the people of Tajikistan.

Over the 30 years of independence, the Tajik people and the population of all Tajikistan have achieved great political, economic, social, cultural and spiritual achievements. Among the most important achievements during the period are the political and legal achievements of national unity and reconciliation, ensuring peace and stability, saving the national state from destruction and the integrity of the primordial borders. Without unity and integrity it is impossible to build a free state, to realize the historical dreams of the nation, future goals and campaigns. Independence and nation-state building are inextricably linked and cannot exist without each other. It is independence that provides the basis and the possibility of building a nation-state.

At the beginning of the formation of its independence, the republic was engulfed in a civil war and in these difficult conditions a balanced policy was formed, which was aimed to ensure the inviolability of the state and the cohesion of the nation, a firm political position of the country in the international arena. Fortunately, at this predetermining stage, thanks to the efforts of the country’s leadership, Tajikistan has become a full-fledged member of the international community. As a result of lengthy negotiations, an end was put to the civil war — after five years of armed conflict, the ‘General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan’ was signed — which is a unique national achievement during the period of independence. Today the experience of Tajikistan in achieving peace is recognized by the world community.

In the subsequent period, the basic principles and political traditions of Tajikistan’s foreign policy continued to address the primary tasks for the development of the country, in particular, with a view to consolidating peace and national harmony, and strengthening political, economic and social reforms. During this period, the country’s leadership announced an ‘open door’ policy and the need for a worthy presentation of the cultural heritage of Tajiks to the world. In this connection, a multi-vector, balanced and progressive foreign policy was launched, which included the expansion and strengthening of friendly ties, and fruitful cooperation with various countries of the world. Thanks to this policy, Tajikistan strengthened its position in the international arena, contributed to the solution of world problems, began interaction with many countries and, taking into account national interests, ensured a balance of its own and common interests in foreign policy. The open-door policy is the basis of Tajikistan’s foreign policy.

Most of the political initiatives put forward by the leadership of Tajikistan were accepted and supported by the world community. These initiatives include: the development of regional cooperation, a number of initiatives for the rational use of water resources, cooperation in the field of energy, the fight against terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking. The initiatives of the leadership of Tajikistan, in particular in the water area, also received wide international support, including from the United Nations.

On 21 December, 2016, the UN General Assembly adopted a relevant resolution — first proposed by the President of the Republic of Tajikistan in 2015 — declaring the years 2018 - 2028 as the International Decade for Action ‘Water for Sustainable Development’. The decade, which officially began on 22 March, 2018 and will end on 22 March, 2028, started off with a high-level international conference held in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan in July 2018. The conference on implementation of the International Decade for Action ‘Water for Sustainable Development, 2018-2028’ witnessed the participation of high-level representatives of the UN member states, international and regional organizations and other stakeholders.

During this conference, a wide range of issues related to water resources were considered. The results of the conference gave new impetus to the process of implementing the ‘water decade’, and formed the basis for the development of specific recommendations with a view to strengthening measures to achieve goals and objectives in the field of water resources. At the end of the conference, the final document, the Dushanbe Declaration, was adopted.

The main trends of our time and the processes associated with them require responsible awareness and creative promotion of global interests.

Ambassador lauds strong relations between Tajikistan and Kuwait

Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, Ambassador of Tajikistan H.E. Dr. Zabidullah Zabidov, affirmed the development of a high-level of political relations between Tajikistan and Kuwait, which he described as “distinguished and continuous”.

He also highlighted his country’s aspiration to deepen partnership and expand bilateral cooperation between the two countries in all fields, and especially in economic and food security domains.

During a press conference held at the embassy on the occasion of the celebration of his country’s National Day, Zabidov indicated that about 18 agreements in various fields have been signed in recent years between his country and Kuwait, and that a number of other agreements are planned to be signed in the near future.

Revealing an upcoming visit to Kuwait by the Tajik President and Foreign Minister that is slated to take place before the end of this year, the ambassador clarified that the visit will aim to deepen relations between the two sides, especially in the sectors of economy, investment and tourism.

On the resumption of talks with Jazeera Airways to open direct flights between Tajikistan and Kuwait, Ambassador Zabidov said, “We held talks with Jazeera Airways to open the direct line, and we have almost agreed on an agreement on this matter, with plans to begin direct flights between Tajikistan and Kuwait before the end of this year.”

Regarding the latest developments on granting visas to those wishing to travel to the country, the envoy explained that there is a relatively new in granting visas, except that his country planned to exempt Kuwaitis from obtaining a visa as soon as possible. He added that there was no problem for residents wishing to travel to his country, as they can receive a visa in a very short time.

He reassured all those wishing to travel to his country of the stability of the health situation in Tajikistan and the very low rate of infections, explaining that there are no conditions for arrivals except for a negative PCR test before arrival, and also that there is no quarantine for those vaccinated with two doses of approved vaccines.

Expressing disappointment at the relatively low level of Kuwaiti investment in his country, the ambassador said he hoped to boost them, given the huge potential for investments in Tajikistan, especially in the tourism sector which is high priority in the country’s economic policies, and has the potential to attract a large number of tourists from around the world.

On another note, Ambassador Zabidov praised Kuwait’s role in facilitating the process of safe transit for Afghans, pointing out that his country calls on the international community to take urgent measures to ensure stability in Afghanistan, through negotiations as soon as possible.

He went on to add that his country strongly condemns all forms of lawlessness, murder, robbery and injustice against the people of Afghanistan, especially Tajiks, Uzbeks and other minorities.

Pointing to Tajikistan’s commitment and support for restoring security and stability in Afghanistan, the ambassador said his country would not recognize any government that is formed through persecution and oppression, and which does not take into account the position of the entire Afghan people, and does not consider the interests and aspirations of all shades and ethnicities of Afghanistan.
COVID-19 pandemic had major economic impacts on the Middle East

Kuwait and its Gulf partners in precarious fiscal positions. Last fall, Moody’s downgraded Kuwait’s bond rating to A1 from Aa2, and more recent changes have caused Standard & Poor’s (S&P) in June to cut Kuwait’s credit rating from A to A-, saying that the government has “placed a comprehensive fund to foster these deficits.” The crisis continues.

Financial Deficit

The rapid drop in oil prices has put Kuwait and its Gulf partners in precarious fiscal positions. Last fall, Moody’s downgraded Kuwait’s bond rating to A1 from Aa2, and more recent changes have caused Standard & Poor’s to cut Kuwait’s credit rating from A to A-, saying that the government has “placed a comprehensive fund to support these deficits.” The crisis continues.

Impact of Coronavirus in Kuwait

Kuwait's short-term economic outlook prior to the coronavirus pandemic had already been lackluster, with economic growth annually declining since 2014. Economic growth in Kuwait reached only 0.4 percent in 2019, and the political conditions following the death of Emir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in 2020 brought on more pressure to address the government’s debt.

Interestingly, the negative economic impact of Kuwait was very similar to other (non-oil-exporting) countries, which experienced decline in GDP. Compared to its Gulf neighbors, the forecast for GDP growth places Kuwait as the fifth worst drop for 2020.

The need for diversification

The Oxford Economics Middle East Report estimates that Kuwait's 2021 GDP growth is 2.5 percent, driven by expansion in the non-oil sector. However, the Kuwaiti economy’s heavy dependence on the oil sector means that the economic recovery will be hampered until the OPEC+ production cuts end in 2022 and Brent crude prices rise above pre-pandemic levels. The shock of falling oil prices and the closure of economic activities have weakened the diversification efforts that Kuwait and many other oil-based economies are trying to achieve. In addition, the slow deployment of vaccines in Kuwait could hurt its neighbors continue to hinder the reopening of its economy.

Many of the problems with Kuwait and its GCC neighbors' efforts to expand into non-oil sectors stem from the reliance on the private sector as a viable path to diversification and the lack of a clear strategy to attract foreign capital to invest in attractive revenues. For economic diversification programs to succeed, oil-exporting countries such as Kuwait must focus on producing goods and services that do not depend on the sale of oil and petroleum derivatives. Unfortunately for Kuwait, this challenge was a nearly impossible task even before the pandemic, and it is now more difficult than it used to be, with hydrocarbons accounting for 90 percent of total exports in Kuwait and Qatar, more than 80 percent of total exports in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and more than 50 percent of total exports in the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, according to the United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics database.

OPEC+ negotiations

Prior to the pandemic, global oil demand had fallen from 100 million barrels per day in the fourth quarter of 2019 to 83 million barrels per day in the second quarter of 2020. Combined with the failed OPEC+ negotiations in March 2020 between Russia and Saudi Arabia, the decline in travel and movement due to the epidemic, and a large glut in global oil supplies, the price of Brent crude dropped to less than $30 a barrel.

After global shutdowns in March and April 2020, West Texas Intermediate (the US crude oil benchmark) turned negative for the first time in history as suppliers reached maximum storage capacity in the absence of demand. After OPEC production cuts were later agreed to by about 10 million barrels per day, oil prices remained near 30 percent below pre-pandemic levels.

With the global economy gradually reopening, oil prices returned faster than expected, with Brent crude reaching more than $70 as of June 2021. As the economic effects of the Corona epidemic recede over time, the countries of the Middle East will remain at risk, and their economic problems will not subside in the short-term without proper fiscal and monetary measures. The way they conduct their fiscal and monetary policy operations will be critical as the global economy recovers.

During the pandemic, countries in the Middle East underwent major changes in fiscal and monetary policy to adapt to the decline in economic output. Several GCC countries have provided liquidity support to maintain credit flows, and central banks in these countries have cut interest rates by an average of nearly 140 basis points.

Despite the positive reaction from global financial markets to these expansionary policies, financial risks such as the budget crisis in Kuwait present a real challenge. High debt and low reserves will constrain the policy options available to these countries in the event of future shocks. A key indicator of success will be their ability to diversify their economies.

Saudi Arabia Experience

Long-term investments such as Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 have resulted in bold plans that have gone from paper to reality for energy production, manufacturing, trade and alternative energy investments. Saudi Arabia's plan has already demonstrated clear benefits for its citizens, including increased participation of women in the workforce, non-oil revenues, and the growth of small and medium businesses.

Saudi Arabia's plan to be powered by 50 percent renewable energy by 2030 is commendable, but the economic effects of the pandemic have hampered further development despite signs of a serious desire to achieve further successes.

This report was prepared by Dr. Matthew Oliver, a professor at the Georgia Institute of Technology, and Turner Stevens, an economics student and non-resident researcher at Reconnaissance Research.
Tajikistan had to face the problem of ensuring establishment of peace and stability in the agriculture and other sectors. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Tajik people, their creative and good undertakings were installed capacity of 3,600 MW, it is the largest hydropower, as Tajikistan has great potential for the sustainable development of the country along with all the development of socio-economic spheres, the implementation of which is an important factor on the path to ensuring food security in the country. Also, to achieve the goal of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan identified several strategic goals that contribute to improving the quality of life of the population, ensuring energy independence and full provision of all industries with electricity, increasing the economy of the country over 30 years of independence, the significant measures are being taken. The head of state has repeatedly called upon to preserve and enrich the age-old traditions, values, and creating favorable conditions for the fledged education of new generations, which is an important factor for the development of the country. On the 28th anniversary of state independence, the second unit of the Rogun hydroelectric power plant under construction on the Vakhsh River, part of the Vakhsh cascade and with an installed capacity of 3,600 MW, it is the largest hydroelectric power station in Tajikistan and representatives of international financial institutions, the diplomatic corps, business and other representatives of Tajikistan took part in the inauguration ceremony. On the 28th anniversary of state independence, the second unit of the Rogun HPP was launched on 9 September, 2019, with President Rahmon launching the second unit by pressing a symbolic button. Breaking the communication deadlock is a national task and an important factor in the development of the country along with all the strategic goals.

This goal covers the reconstruction and construction of roads and railways, bridges, tunnels, airports and other transport infrastructures in accordance with international standards, the implementation of which should gradually bring the republic out of the communication deadlock, and put it in a transit region. Some structures of Tajikistan are of a regional and international nature and provide the country’s access to seaports and major transit roads of other countries.

Food security is another priority strategic goal. This is the main task of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan. In this direction, in order to achieve goals that contribute to improving the living standards of the country’s population, significant measures are being taken. The development of agricultural production is an important factor on the path to ensuring food security in the country. Also, to achieve accelerated industrialization of the country, the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan has under taken strong control the implementation of the adopted sectoral programs and investments. Apple Pay has intensified its activities to attract direct investment, create new manufacturing enterprises, commission dormant enterprises and create jobs.

Over the years of independence, significant results have been achieved, including the development of socio-economic spheres, raising the standard of living of the population and creating favorable conditions for the sustainable development of all spheres of public life. A new social system has been formed that meets the spirit of democracy and civil society, a market economy is developing, the results are positively reflected in the way of life of members of society. Along with this, the situation in the modern world obliges the people of Tajikistan to move towards further renewal of all spheres of life, and most importantly for the fully-fledged education of new generations, which is called upon to preserve and enrich the age-old traditions and values of their people.

Summing up the results of the development of the republic over 30 years of independence, it can be stated that during this short historical period it was possible to strengthen the foundations of the new young independent state, to determine the main directions of the domestic and foreign policy of the state based on the national interests of the country and the peoples inhabiting it.
The terrorist attacks of 11 September, 2001, were a horrific shock. Images of trapped victims leaping from the Twin Towers are indelible, and the intrusive security measures introduced in the wake of the attacks have long since become a fact of life.

But skeptics doubt that it marked a turning point in history. They note that the immediate physical damage was far from fatal to American power. It is estimated that the United States’ GDP growth dropped by three percentage points in 2001, and insurance claims for damages eventually totaled over $40 billion — a small fraction of what was then a $10 trillion economy. And the nearly 3,000 people killed in New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington, DC, when the al-Qaeda hijackers turned four aircraft into cruise missiles was a small fraction of US travel fatalities that year.

While accepting these facts, my guess is that future historians will regard 9/11 as a date as important as the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December, 1941. The surprise attack on the US naval base in Hawaii killed some 2,400 American military personnel and destroyed or damaged 19 naval craft, including eight battleships. In both cases, however, the main effect was on public psychology.

For years, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had tried to alert Americans to the Axis threat but had failed to overcome isolationism. All that changed with Pearl Harbor. In the 2000 presidential election, George W. Bush advocated a humble foreign policy and warned against the comparison to the damage America did to itself.

While the 9/11 attacks killed several thousand Americans, the ‘endless wars’ that the US subsequently launched killed many more. Indeed, the damage done by al-Qaeda pales in comparison to the damage America did to itself.

By some estimates, nearly 15,000 US military personnel and contractors were killed in the wars that followed 9/11, and the economic cost exceeded $6 trillion. Add to this the number of foreign civilians killed and refugees created, and the costs grow even more enormous. The opportunity costs were also large. When President Barack Obama tried to pivot to Asia – the fastest-growing part of the world economy – the legacy of the global war on terror kept the US mired in the Middle East.

Despite these costs, some say that the US achieved its goal: There has not been another major terrorist attack on the US homeland on the scale of 9/11. Bin Laden and many of his top lieutenants were killed, and Saddam Hussein was removed (though his connection to 9/11 was always dubious). Alternatively, a case can be made that bin Laden succeeded, particularly if we consider that his beliefs included the value of religious martyrdom.

The jihadist movement is fragmented, but it has spread to more countries, and the Taliban have returned to power in Afghanistan — ironically, just before the 9/11 anniversary that President Joe Biden originally set as the target date for withdrawing US troops.

It is too early to assess the long-term effects of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. The short-term effects of the chaotic exit are costly, but in the long term, Biden may come to be seen as correct to forswear the effort at nation-building in a country divided by mountains and tribes and united mainly by opposition to foreigners.

Leaving Afghanistan will allow Biden to focus on his grand strategy of balancing the rise of China. For all the damage done by US soft power by the chaotic manner of the exit from Afghanistan, Asia has its own long-standing balance of power in which countries like Japan, India, and Vietnam do not wish to be dominated by China and welcome an American presence. When one considers that within 20 years of America’s traumatic exit from Vietnam, the US was welcome in that country as well as the region, Biden’s overall strategy makes sense.

At the same time, 20 years after 9/11, the problem of terrorism remains, and terrorists may feel emboldened to try again. If so, the task for US leaders is to develop an effective counter-terrorism strategy. Its core must be to avoid falling into terrorists’ trap by doing great damage to ourselves. Leaders must plan to manage the psychological shocks at home and abroad.

Imagine what the world would be like if Bush had avoided the tempting rallying cry of a global war on terror and responded to 9/11 by carefully selected military strikes combined with good intelligence and diplomacy. Or, if he had gone into Afghanistan, imagine that he had withdrawn after six months, even if that had involved negotiating with the despised Taliban.

Looking forward, when the next terrorist attacks come, will presidents be able to channel public demand for revenge by precise targeting, explaining the trap that terrorists set, and focusing on creating resilience in US responses? That is the question Americans should be asking, and that their leaders should be addressing.
Ending ‘Trickle-Down’ Vaccine Economics

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D uring the Irish famine in the 1840s, as more than one million Irish citizens died, vast quantities of food were exported from Ireland to Britain. For the Whig government in London, the defense of commercial interests, the dictates of laissez-faire economics, and political indifference to Irish suffering trumped any obligation to prevent mass starvation by intervening in markets.

The international response to the COVID-19 pandemic bears a discomfiting resemblance to the British response to the Irish famine. Although science and industry have given us the means to immunize the world, nine months after the first arm was jabbed with a COVID-19 vaccine, rich countries are using their market power to direct doses away from poor countries, placing millions of lives at risk.

Consider some recent actions by the European Union. Under a contract with Johnson & Johnson (J&J), the bloc has imported millions of vaccine doses from a company in South Africa — a country where a mere 11 percent of the population is vaccinated and the Delta variant is fueling a surge in cases. Yet efforts to divert vaccine exports from Europe to South Africa and its neighbors were met with a display of vaccine gunboat diplomacy, with the EU threatening to take legal action under a clause in the J&J contract prohibiting export restrictions.

The message to the world was clear. While EU commissioners and political leaders may arrive at UN meetings waxing lyrical about the importance of international cooperation and global vaccine equity, the iron fist of vaccine nationalism is driving real-world policy. When it comes to weighing African lives against marginal gains in the health of already-protected populations facing marginal health risks, effectively diverting supplies from countries where access to vaccines is, quite literally, a matter of life and death.

The current distribution of vaccines is not just ethically indefensible. It is also epidemiologically short-sighted and economically ruinous. Leaving large swathes of the world unvaccinated increases the risk that vaccine-resistant viral mutations will emerge, effectively prolonging the pandemic and endangering people everywhere. Meanwhile, expanding vaccinations would boost economic recovery — adding $9 trillion to global output by 2025, according to an estimate by the International Monetary Fund — and help prevent major reversals in poverty, health, and education.

Basic arithmetic shows that we can vaccinate the world. Estimates by the data analytics firm Airfinity suggest that around 12 billion vaccine doses will be produced in 2021, with output doubling in 2022. That is more than enough to achieve the international target of 40 percent coverage by the end of this year and 60-70 percent by mid-2022.

Unfortunately, it is not enough to achieve the targets while satisfying rich countries’ desire to hoard surplus stocks. With their current contracts, rich countries could achieve full vaccination coverage rates for over 80 percent of their populations, including boosters for vulnerable people, and have a surplus of 3.5 billion doses, according to the Airfinity data — enough to cover the deficit in poor countries and still leave rich countries with a healthy contingency reserve.

Instead, rich countries are actively undermining international cooperation efforts. Aid donors have invested $10 billion in the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) facility, the international program designed to provide vaccines to the world’s poorest countries. That financing has secured contracts for around two billion doses. Additionally, the World Bank has provided $4 billion for COVAX options on an additional 760 million doses by the end of 2021.

Second, to meet the international targets, we need to move beyond intermittent vaccine donations to large scale, coordinated dose-sharing. The EU, the United Kingdom, and the US should immediately share an additional 250 million doses — less than one-quarter of their collective surplus — through COVAX by the end of September, with a clear schedule for providing an additional one billion doses by early 2022.

Third, beyond vaccine equity, there is an urgent need to strengthen health systems, not just through the provision of medical oxygen, which is in critically short supply, therapeutics, and diagnostic equipment, but also by investing in the health workers and infrastructure needed to get vaccines into arms. The current gap between funds pledged and funds allocated for this purpose is around $16.6 billion.

Our ability to save lives, restore hope, and rebuild economies shattered by the pandemic is constrained not by a shortage of vaccines or financing, but also by a deficit of justice and international cooperation. The governments of rich countries often recite the mantra that ‘no one is safe until everyone is safe.’ Their leaders must now act like they believe it.
The Colonial Trap

IAN BURUMA
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On 20 February, 1947, Clement Attlee, the socialist British prime minister, informed parliament that India would become independent no later than June 1948. Attlee could not wait for the British to withdraw from a country whose leaders, Muslim and Hindu, had long been clamoring for independence. But India was seething with violent unrest. Muslim leaders were afraid of Hindu dominance. Worried that a civil war might land the British in an uncontrollable situation, Attlee decided to end the British Raj even earlier. Indian independence began on 14 August, 1947. Pakistan broke away. Horrendous violence between Hindus and Muslims claimed a half-million lives. Many more lost their homes. The wounds of partition are yet to heal.

Attlee was widely blamed for getting out too soon and leaving the former colony in chaos. If only a better police force had been organized. If only the army could have kept order. If only the British could have left once the country was stable.

US President Joe Biden now finds himself in the same situation. American troops have left Afghanistan in a bloody mess. Critics of Biden’s decision to withdraw claim that the United States should have stayed longer. In the opinion of Robert Kagan, a well-known American promotor of robust military policies, the US should have promised to stay at least 20 years, instead of being non-committal. After all, the US military presence was minimal and could easily be afforded. But in that case, why just 20 years? Why not 40? Why not forever?

The question is whether Attlee, or Biden, could ever have left India or Afghanistan in a stable condition. At least Attlee knew that India, and even Pakistan, would be governed by responsible, mostly moderate men. Jawaharlal Nehru and Mohammed Ali Jinnah were nothing like the Taliban. Both were widely regarded as legitimate leaders — and still there was a civil war. Biden did not even have the luxury of leaving Afghanistan in capable hands.

It is easy to blame Attlee and Biden for the violence that followed their decisions. Perhaps they made mistakes. In hindsight, it may be possible to see how they could have mitigated some of the damage. But both leaders were caught in the same colonial trap that ensnared so many other imperial powers. Once you make local elites dependent on the power and money of a foreign occupier, it becomes almost impossible to leave without causing mayhem. And the longer the foreign power stays, the worse the mayhem often becomes.

The colonial elites have no legitimacy in the eyes of their compatriots. Rebels and revolutionaries may have more, but only know how to rule by force. The imperial power is trapped. Leaving is almost always bad. Staying is worse.

Harold Macmillan, the Conservative prime minister who, sensing “the wind of change” blowing through colonial Africa in 1960, managed the withdrawal of British rule, was once asked by the very conservative American journalist William F. Buckley Jr. whether Africans were ready to rule themselves. Macmillan did not think so. But he added that this was all the more reason why they should be free to try. These were their countries. They had to learn how to govern by force. For the British to hang on and throw the best and brightest anti-colonial activists in prison would only make that harder.

Empires are rarely established by design. Most European empires started as trading posts. Local rulers were cultivated, bribed, and set against one another. For a long time, great chunks of India were ruled by a British trading company. Colonial governments then took over to protect the commercial interests of the home countries. Imperial rule was often justified by Christian missionary zeal, or, very late in the game, around the very end of the nineteenth century, by high-minded ideals of educating native elites to mimic the West.

The US has been more half-hearted about its colonial enterprises. After all, Americans are supposed to be against imperialism. Their stated justification for fighting communism in Vietnam, or dictatorships in Iraq or Afghanistan, has been to enlighten the benighted populations through free-market capitalism and democratic government, often with disastrous consequences.

Whatever the justification for foreign intervention, the results are the same. Local elites, such as the Afghans who governed Kabul and other cities, might do well. But dependency — not just on another state, but on NGOs and other well-meaning institutions that do what governments should be doing — fuels corruption. Money flows too easily into ever deeper pockets. And the very presence of foreign military forces and political tutors, who may have little understanding of how things work in the countries they occupy, makes it ever harder for the local people to rule themselves.

The colonial elites, bloated with free money, have no legitimacy in the eyes of their compatriots. Rebels and revolutionaries may have more, but only know how to rule by force. The imperial power is trapped. Leaving is almost always bad. Staying is worse.

Attlee and Biden understood this. That is why they wanted to get out. Biden is accused of naivety and seen as a hapless old man who had no idea what he was unleashing. This is unlikely. I think he decided it was time to leave without delay precisely because he knew it would be a big mess; better to get it over with than become further ensnared by the colonial trap.

This might seem callous. But Biden cannot be blamed for the rise of the Taliban, or the fragile state of a country that has seen far too many wars and invasions. The US should not have been there in the first place, but that is a lesson that great powers never seem to learn.
Drinking water beneficial to heart health

The principle of a healthy heart is that it needs to pump enough blood to the body and return it to the heart to get oxygen and nutrients. One of the factors that can influence the heart’s ability to pump effectively is the water intake. The heart is a pump that needs water to function properly. It is important to stay hydrated to ensure that the heart is working efficiently.

Heart failure is when the heart is not pumping as well as it should be. When a person has heart failure, the cells in the body do not get enough blood, which can cause fatigue and shortness of breath. To determine if hydrating (measured by the level of serum sodium in the body) could be a predictor of heart failure in later years, researchers looked at 15,972 people between the ages of 44 and 66 years old. The study found that higher serum sodium level concentration in midlife was associated with a 25 percent increased risk of developing heart failure, 25 years later.

The research team, which included a motley crew of virologists, materials engineers and nanoparticle experts, tackled the problem from different aspects and ultimately came up with the nanoparticle-engineered disinfectant that could retain its potency far longer than those currently available in the market. The active ingredient in the disinfectant is an engineered nanostructure called cerium oxide, which is known for its regenerative antioxidant properties. The cerium oxide nanoparticles are modified with small amounts of silver and its regenerative antioxidant properties.

Nearby 20 percent of daily fluid intake is provided by the foods we eat. However, health authorities are quick to point out that this recommended dosage of fluids would need to be modified depending on various factors, such as exercises that make you sweat a lot, or a hot and humid environment that again leads to excess sweating. Other health conditions such as fever, diarrhea or vomiting also lead to fluid losses that need to be replenished through oral rehydration solutions. In addition, other medical conditions such as bladder infections and urinary stones also necessitate increased fluid intake, and a pregnant or breast-feeding woman may also need to take in additional fluids to stay hydrated.

Now researchers at the University of Central Florida in the United States claim to have developed a nano-particle based disinfectant that can retain its protective powers and kill viruses and other pathogens on surfaces for up to seven days. The new development could become a powerful weapon in the fight against the COVID-19 and other emerging pathogenic viruses. The research team, which included a motley crew of virologists, materials engineers and nanoparticle experts, tackled the problem from different aspects and ultimately came up with the nanoparticle-engineered disinfectant that could retain its potency far longer than those currently available in the market. The active ingredient in the disinfectant is an engineered nanostructure called cerium oxide, which is known for its regenerative antioxidant properties. The cerium oxide nanoparticles are modified with small amounts of silver and its regenerative antioxidant properties.
When the Political Levee Breaks

Angela Merkel to Oregon Governor Kate Brown have duly called for accelerating the construction of water infrastructure to reclaim lands across the continent, but consistently failed to achieve permanent security.

At the time, Qing China had acquired global fame for its ability to control Asia’s powerful rivers (a skill that Adam Smith saw as a remarkable source of comparative advantage). And yet, even the Celestial Empire could not avoid recurring natural disasters. The west of the twentieth century, the climate system still ruled the landscape. The only universal form of “climate adaptation” was acceptance.

Then, everything changed. Two world wars and growing political enfranchisement fueled demands for universal welfare. Economic growth – a relatively uninteresting phenomenon to nineteenth-century elites who did not have to share wealth – became the principal preoccupation of politicians answerable to the unemployed and the insecure. Reliable access to water became a political imperative, an instrument in state-building.

Most countries that could afford to do so started transforming their water landscapes in the service of the consumer economy and a widening polity. Reclamation projects added cultivable land and broadened economic opportunity. Then came hydroelectric power, the first source of electricity that could be fully scaled to support industrialization and mass employment. Rivers became blueprints for development.

As cities grew, floods — a tragic fact of life up to that point — became politically intolerable. Unsanitary conditions were swept away by near-universal access to clean water supplies. The shape of the modern landscape slowly changed as it filled with levees, flood defenses, dams, canals, and reservoirs. These were invariably financed by the new economic power of the state and supported by the aspirations of a broadened electorate.

America led the way, delivering some of the twentieth century’s most iconic water projects, from the Hoover and Fort Peck Dams to the Army Corps of Engineers’ management of the Lower Mississippi River and the Tennessee Valley Authority.

Investments in modern water infrastructure spread around the world, driving planetary-scale transformation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, humanity had virtually no water storage and practically no large dams; yet by the 1970s, infrastructure could catch roughly one-fifth of all runoff on the planet. As people remapped the landscape — leaving a wide trail of unintended environmental consequences in their wake — a modernist dream was nurtured: finally, people could be fully insulated from the effects of a difficult climate.

Over time, many of those living in rich countries simply forgot about all the water flowing behind the dams and levees. Having long since been normalized to the uninterrupted rhythm of the consumer economy, Californians and Germans this year were duly stunned by the violent return of nature. The catastrophes they have witnessed had become simply unthinkable for affluent modern societies.

Though floods and droughts routinely afflict hundreds of millions of poor people around the world, these events seldom make the news (the main exceptions being in rich countries, as when Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans’ poor, mainly African-American, Lower Ninth Ward in 2005). In an echo of the Malthusian fallacy that treats poverty as a symptom of moral failure, the disasters that strike developing countries are dismissed as an inevitable consequence of underdevelopment.

But water security is not simply a product of development and political stability. Rather, it contributes to both. Modern economies and stable political institutions were built on the promise of water security and the opportunities that it furnished. Our institutions’ increasingly evident failure to fulfill that promise thus poses a direct threat to the civic compact that binds citizens and the state.

The supposedly permanent solutions of the twentieth century are proving inadequate. This century’s climate disasters are harbinger’s of a new relationship with our environment, raising questions that we have not had to ask for many generations. What do we want our landscape to look like? What risks are we able to tolerate? What should we expect of the state when it comes to our environmental security, and what authority does that entail?

These are not technical questions. They are political ones, and they will increasingly occupy center stage in the twenty-first century.