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Corruption, Human Rights, and pursuit of Democracy

THE TIMES KUWAIT REPORT

Back-to-back commemoration of the International Anti-Corruption Day on 9 December, and the global Human Rights Day on 10 December may be coincidental, but nevertheless it underscores the intricate ties that intertwine the prevalence of corruption and the dearth of human rights in a society, as well as the importance of these two causes to the development of democracy in a country. The two days in December also provided an opportunity to raise awareness on the critical need to improve probity and weed out corruption in public and private life, so as to enhance human rights among all sections of society and ensure progress of the country.

The vicious cycle linking corruption, human rights and democracy can be gauged in how



corruption corrodes democratic institutions making them unable or unwilling to curb corruption. Besides undermining the functioning

and legitimacy of democratic institutions and processes, impairing the rule of law, and eroding the growth and development of the State,

corruption also has a devastating effect on the availability, quality and accessibility of products and services related to human rights, especially for the most vulnerable sections of society.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), corruption is a transnational phenomenon that exists in all countries, in both public and private spheres and irrespective of the economic or political system, or their level of development. Figures show that over US\$1 trillion is paid in bribes while an estimated \$2.6 trillion are stolen through corruption every year worldwide, which is equivalent to more than 5 percent of the global GDP. Disadvantaged groups and persons suffer disproportionately from corruption. They are more reliant on public goods and services and have limited means to look for alternative private services, as well as lack resources to defend themselves and seek reparations.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



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New mechanism for granting driving license to expatriates



With no end in sight to the perennial traffic woes on Kuwait streets, the Ministry of Interior (Mol) is said to be studying a new mechanism to limit and streamline the granting of driving licenses to expatriates.

A senior-level meeting of officials from the traffic-department chaired by the Undersecretary of Mol, Lieutenant-General Sheikh Faisal Al-Nawaf, discussed various steps to control and reduce traffic congestion on the roads, especially the main arterial roads during peak rush hours.

The meeting reportedly looked at various proposals to remove bottlenecks in traffic flows and traffic density by introducing a new and advanced mechanism to grant driving licenses to expatriates.

The Undersecretary affirmed that Kuwait aims to develop the latest and best traffic system and with this goal in mind several observations and suggestions were made at the meeting to ameliorate the country's traffic problem.

He also conveyed the greetings of the Minister of Interior Sheikh Thamer Al-Ali, and praised the efforts exerted by the traffic men to ensure the safety of road users, and the smooth flow of traffic on the roads.

MoCI calls for governance system on unlisted companies

Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) is set to join the Central Bank and the Capital Markets Authority (CMA) in setting rules and implementing the governance system on companies listed on the Kuwait Boursa or stock exchange.

In addition, the MoCI is also said to be studying the prospects of implementing a governance system on unlisted companies, especially those companies that have annual revenues exceeding KD100 million. The aim is to ensure proper functioning of these companies, and to confirm the integrity

of the administration to fulfill the obligations and commitments, as well as ensure that these establishments achieve their objectives in a sound legal and economic manner. The sources indicated the 'governance' which the Commerce officials aim to apply to unlisted companies includes almost all the standards that the CMA applies to companies listed on the Kuwait Stock Exchange, including protecting employees who report on any suspicion of corruption in the company. This will facilitate more transparency on the part of these companies and ensure their commitment to take responsibility.

The implementation of governance will include unlisted 'closed' and 'limited liability' companies, as well as holding companies that group investment, industrial and service companies and their activities. The new system will also oblige family-owned companies to implement governance procedures.

Other rules to be imposed on targeted unlisted companies include them being obliged to appoint an external auditor, and to ensure its independence and



integrity by appointing an independent board member among its board of directors. Having a proper governance system in place is one of the most important processes to increase investor confidence, because the rules of governance guarantee the protection of their rights.

The ministry's moves to manage, direct, monitor and regulate the targeted unlisted companies comes as part of broader efforts exerted by MoCI to increase transparency in the corporate sector, enhance efficiency, and balance the interests of all stakeholders, in order to improve the local business environment.

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IWG hosts dinner to mark spirit of season

To celebrate the spirit of the season and the coming New Year, the International Women's Group- Kuwait (IWG), held its annual Seasonal Dinner for members and guests on 5 December at Crowne Plaza hotel, where Santa was waiting to give out gifts and to take pictures with attendees.

Cristiana Baldozzi, wife of the Ambassador of Italy to Kuwait, and current President of IWG welcomed members and guests that included ambassadors of Kenya, Argentina, Tanzania, Canada and the United States, and wished everyone the very best for the season and the new year ahead. She also expressed her gratitude to the Honorary President of IWG, Sheikha Hanouf Badr Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah, for her continued support of the group.

To commence the festivities, Rima Khalidi, wife of the Ambassador of Palestine, presented a beautiful video of Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem. This was followed by a musical performance by the Scouts from the Orthodox Church in Kuwait, which then led to Santa leading Christmas games and lucky draws. A raffle was conducted with many wonderful items, which also included special prizes offered by the embassy of Palestine and the embassy of Armenia. Shireen Hattar, an IWG member, then delighted her fellow members with a medley of seasonal songs. A magnificent dinner was followed by a raffle and a stunning Lebanese Dabke performance.

In closing Mrs. Balducci thanked the IWG Board for their fabulous work in organizing the event, the many generous sponsors, and all the talented performers who provided entertainment for the evening.



Pent-up demand leads to surge in car sales

Car dealerships witnessed a surge in sales during the first ten months of the year, with the threat of COVID-19 receding and an easing of restrictions by the authorities. Industry analysts say the automobile sector, which was relatively less scathed by pandemic-related repercussions than many other sectors, has been able to bounce back very quickly.

The jump in auto sales witnessed during the year could be attributed to pent-up demand that accumulated during last year, as well as an increase in disposable income due to limited spending venues, restrictions

on travel, and the government's decision to postpone repayment of loan installments for citizens for a further six months.

Data on car sales from car dealerships across Kuwait reveals that a total of 71,106 new cars were sold in the January to October 2021. This not only marked a growth of 34.6 percent over the 52,828 vehicles sold during the same period in 2020, it was also an increase of 4 percent from the 68,389 new cars sold during the 12 months of last year.

According to the available figures, the majority of new cars sold were Japanese brands (47.9%), followed by US brands

(16.3%), Chinese (12%), Korean (10.8%) and European brands (10.4%). British brands that mainly sell luxury brands trailed the list with a sales of 2.4 percent.

The Asian brands continued to dominate sales, as the Japanese, Korean and Chinese cars alone accounted for 50,273 vehicles (71%), followed by the 11,593 units from US brands, and 7,444 from European marques. During the period only a total of 1,752 British brands were sold in the local market.

The figures also showed that 353 luxury cars were sold during the first ten months of the year, accounting for 0.49 percent of total



auto sales, which on its own was a slight uptick from the 321 cars sold in 2020.



Non-vaccinators urged to get vaccinated

Council of Ministers' Corona Emergency Committee, in coordination with the other concerned authorities, is urging those who have refused to be vaccinated to receive the shots at the earliest so as to improve the epidemiological situation in the country with regard to the COVID-19 virus, and to protect people from the new Omicron variant of the virus.

Figures indicate that around 18 percent of the population who are in the eligible age group have still not been vaccinated, mainly because of their continued

refusal to take the vaccination. The authorities are said to be attempting to change the perceptions about vaccination, among the non-vaccinators.

Meanwhile, around 230,000 residents and citizens have so far been administered the third booster dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. The concerned authorities are said to be redoubling efforts to speed up the pace of booster dose with the aim of further enhancing societal immunity in light of the spread of the Omicron variant of the virus in several countries. The Corona Emergency Committee is reported to be sending SMS to citizens and residents reminding them that they are eligible to receive the third dose if they have completed six months after taking the second dose of vaccination.

In the meantime, Kuwait continues to take preventive measures at the Kuwait International Airport and border crossings, as the Ministry of Health and field teams tighten control and follow-up operations in complexes and public places, to ensure health requirements are adhered to.

There is also a greater interest among the public to adhere to health safety protocols following reports of infections from the new Omicron variant in several countries around the world. People have once again begun social distancing, even though the government has not introduced any new rules in this regard. Pharmacies and supermarkets are also reporting an increase in sales of virus preventive and protective products, including face masks, gloves and sanitizers.

Education of 'stateless' borne by state

Central Agency for Remedying the Status of Illegal Residents (Bedouin) in Kuwait, has categorically denied recent allegations that appeared on social media platforms that Kuwait was not providing proper access to education for bedouin children in the country.

Laying out statistics and numbers, the agency said that in the academic year 2020-21, the State paid the school expenses of over 33,700 stateless children, this included 20,373 studying in public schools and 13,327 students in private schools. The agency further clarified that the expenses were paid by the two charity funds that were established by the government through Cabinet Resolution No 655 dated 7 September 2003. One fund was dedicated to providing education, while the second fund was for providing health services to this category of residents.

The agency added that the malicious allegations spread on social media not only ignore the efforts exerted by the state to ensure illegal residents have proper access to education, it is also designed to "offend Kuwait's image abroad and distort the great humanitarian role that distinguishes Kuwait's government and people."

The agency has called on everyone to check the accuracy of reports before publishing them, especially reports which affect the reputation of Kuwait and put a dent in its image abroad.



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MoH rolls out new health app, Q8Seha



Minister of Health Sheikh Dr. Basel Al-Humoud Al-Sabah declared on Sunday, 5 December, the launch of a new mobile application labeled Q8Seha to provide online health services to citizens and residents.

The app delivers health-related data

of individuals, as well as their laboratory test results and radiology reports, from the country's public healthcare sector, in a quick, reliable and safe manner, said the health minister. The new app is available for free download for Android devices from Google Play Store and for IOS smartphones from Apple's App Store.

The health minister added that currently around 70 percent of test results and reports are available on the app, and that the remaining 30 percent will follow in the coming months. Speaking about the security and privacy aspects of the app, Minister Dr. Basel Al-Humoud said that the app is being launched in collaboration with the Kuwait Mobile ID application, so as to assure users that their identity and their health-related data remains private, safe

and secure. The minister was speaking following the inauguration of the Finaitees Primary Health Center, which is designed to provide health services to residents in and around the area.

He noted that with the launch of the new center, the total number of primary health centers in the country will reach 107. The new center includes several types of clinics, a laboratory, a workshop, gender-segregated nursing rooms and administration. The minister disclosed that several more such primary health centers are planned to be launched in the coming months, including one more center in Finaitees.

Speaking on the occasion, Director of Al-Ahmadi medical area Dr. Ahmad Al-Shatti stated that Fnaitees Medical Center

is the 30th in Al-Ahmadi area and eighth in Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governorate. He clarified that in the initial phase, the center will only be open during the morning period and will begin full-time operations later. He added that currently the center will offer primary medical care, three clinics and dressing rooms for children, women and men, as well as a pharmacy. Expansions in the near future will extend the health services with more specialized clinics catering to the care of diabetes, chronic illness, maternity and pediatric care, as well as laboratories. Dr. Al-Shatti added that in the upcoming stage, a dentistry unit will also be appended to the center, which is said would lead to the primary health center being able to provide comprehensive medical care to residents in the area.

Consumer app to prevent price manipulation in coops



launch of an online 'Consumer' application, aimed at protecting consumers from price manipulation by cooperative societies.

"The application allows consumers to compare prices and report any unjustified rise, to help the ministry take the necessary action," said the minister at the launch of the new app.

For his part, the head of the Consumer Protection Department, Mishaal Al-Manea clarified that the application gives a price comparison of commodities for sale in various cooperative societies, whereby the consumer can know the difference in prices.

Consumers can file a complaint with the Consumer Protection Society if they note any price discrepancies by sending a photograph of the product along with the price mentioned on it.

Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy and Minister of Social Affairs and Community Development, Dr. Mishaan Al-Otaibi, announced the

Kalyan Jewellers among Top-500 Fortune India companies



Kalyan Jewellers, one of India's most trusted and leading jewelry brands, has marked its debut on the prestigious Fortune India 500 list. Following its successful listing on the National Stock Exchange in March 2021, Kalyan Jewellers has been ranked by Fortune India at 164th position in the overall list, and in 3rd spot among the public-listed companies from Kerala.

The annual Fortune India 500 List is a definitive ranking that rates public-listed companies in India on the basis of a detailed analysis of sales and gross revenue figures. Highlighting the growing dominance of the brand in India and West Asia, Kalyan Jewellers has been awarded the 2nd position in the gems and jewelry category by Fortune India.

On a related note, Kalyan Jewellers was featured in Deloitte's Top 100 Global Powers of Luxury Goods list for fiscal year 2020. The brand was ranked in 37th spot globally, having

risen six spots from its ranking a year earlier, and was placed 2nd among the four Indian luxury brands to make it to the list in 2020.

Kalyan Jewellers, which was founded in the year 1993, has been catering to a diverse range of customers from different parts of the country. With its presence across 21 states in India, Kalyan Jewellers has consistently strengthened its brand footprint with 120 showrooms in India and 30 showrooms across West Asia. Apart from completing 28 years in the Indian jewelry industry, the company is India's only jewelry brand to have over 100 company-owned showrooms in India.

For more information on the brand, its collections and offers, visit <https://www.kalyanjewellers.net/>

LuLu Hypermarket launches mega US food promotion



LuLu Hypermarket, the market-leader in hypermarket retailing in the region, showcased the best of American foods with the mega-promotion titled 'Discover America with a Fork & Road 2021' that opened on 6 December at all outlets of the hypermarket in Kuwait.

The week-long promotion was inaugurated at the Al-Qurain branch of LuLu Hypermarket by Mr. Patrick L. Chow Counselor for Economic Affairs, US Embassy to Kuwait, in the presence of LuLu Hypermarket management in Kuwait and a gathering of shoppers and patrons of the hypermarket. A spectacular cultural program that highlighted traditional and modern aspects of American culture and art, also accompanied the striking opening ceremony.

The inaugural event and the cultural activities that followed, as well as the subsequent seven-day long promotion are being held in full adherence to prevailing health and safety protocols. The promotion presents shoppers

with the unique opportunity to avail of food products from popular well-known US brands, as well as discover products and food lines of other American brands. Special food counters and sampling stations that allow shoppers to taste, and buy, freshly prepared well-known US delicacies, are also an enticing addition to the promotion. The 'Discover America with a



Fork & Road 2021', which celebrates the best of American foods available in Kuwait, also highlights the history, tradition and culture of this vast country through several large cutout replicas and images of historical, cultural and tourism-related sites in the United States that are prominently displayed across the hypermarket's outlets.

Visitors and shoppers to the US food festival can also avail the occasion to click selfies of themselves or their loved ones against backdrop images of iconic sites and monuments in the United States

Special offers on all US-branded products are a major draw of the promotion, with special prices on popular branded products such as: Alexia, Bolthouse, Bragg, Duncan Hines, General Mills, Gerber, Heinz Imp, Herra, Jif, Kellogg's Imp, Kraft Imp, Nestle Imp, Pillsbury, Post, Quaker Imp, Ragu, Sargento, Shullsburg, and Walden Farms, to name a few.

The 'Discover America with a Fork & Road 2021' promotion, is a continuation of LuLu Hypermarket's endeavor to bring the best the world has to offer in food products and other goods to shoppers in Kuwait, at some of the most competitive prices. It is no wonder then that the hypermarket continues to live up to its slogan of 'Where the world comes to shop'.

PAM resumes hunt for residence law violators

Following a hiatus of nearly two months, due to overcrowding in the deportation centers, the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM), is reported to have resumed its operations against residence law violators, especially those who work with sponsors other than their original employer.

Inspection committees at PAM entrusted with regulating the labor market and

controlling residence law violating marginal workers, are said to have once again begun the search for those in violation of labor laws.

Deputy Director for Manpower Protection Affairs at PAM, Dr. Mubarak Al-Azmi is reported to have instructed the labor inspectors to cover all areas of the country, especially Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Shuwaikh Industrial Area which are crowded with marginal workers.



Over the past two months hundreds of labor law violators, including those found working for other sponsors, as well as those reported absconding by their sponsors, have been deported from the country. In the case of domestic workers found working for other sponsors, the PAM authorities notify the Ministry of Interior officials who then proceed with legal action against both the worker and the sponsor.

Toyota redefines compact SUV segment with Raize

Marking the entry of an exceptionally practical vehicle that is set to redefine the compact SUV segment, Mohamed Naser Al Sayer & Sons and Toyota have launched the brand-new Raize in Kuwait. Pairing outstanding fuel efficiency and maneuverability with distinctive design and ample interior space, the new vehicle highlights Toyota's focus on catering to the needs of the brand's most discerning customers and comes equipped with a host of convenient features.

Equally suited to weekend leisure trips and everyday use, the Raize was developed to be active, practical, and compact and provides world-class mobility for customers in every scenario. All aspects of the vehicle, including its platform and powertrain unit, have been newly developed to deliver performance, comfort, safety, and peace of mind.

Yuichi Imamura, Chief Engineer in charge of development, said: "With the new Toyota Raize, our vision was to differentiate the vehicle from every other SUV on the market by combining an amazingly spacious interior and distinctive styling with a confidence-inspiring balance of maneuverability, safety, and stability. Raize's new platform ensures world-class handling, stability, and ride comfort together with a host of carefully considered features to meet the needs of our discerning customers in the region."

Commenting on the vehicle's launch, Kei Fujita, Chief Representative, Middle East and Central Asia Representative Office, Toyota Motor Corporation, said, "We are excited to introduce the new Toyota Raize in the Middle East. This vehicle opens a totally new genre in the compact SUV market, and reflects Toyota's commitment to developing diverse mobility solutions, while offering the space,



practicality, and comfort demanded by today's active lifestyle. I would like to extend our gratitude to our customers for their constant support and inspiration, which continue to motivate us to create 'ever-better' cars that exceed their expectations," Fujita added.

The brand-new Raize is available with a choice of two engine options. The 1-liter three-cylinder turbocharged engine produces 97 hp and 140 nm of torque, while the 1.2-liter three-cylinder engine option delivers an optimal balance of power and fuel economy and produces 87 hp and 113 nm of torque. Both engines come paired with Continuously Variable Transmission (CVT), which simulates a seven-speed sequential shift transmission to deliver powerful, smooth acceleration from start-off and at low speeds, and quiet and efficient transmission at higher speeds. A newly developed lightweight, highly rigid body and suspension contribute to outstanding handling, stability, and ride comfort.

The new Toyota Raize stands out in the segment with a bold, distinctive design that combines the powerful style of an SUV with the

form factor of a small passenger car. The interior offers comfort and convenience, with high-quality details, while the spacious luggage compartment features a movable deck board that can be adjusted to provide numerous convenient storage solutions for a wide variety of customer needs. When the deck board is in its low position, the vehicle boasts a class-leading luggage capacity of 369 liters.

As with any other Toyota model, safety remains a top priority for the new Raize, which comes with a comprehensive array of safety features, including dual front SRS airbags, Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), Hill-start Assist Control (HAC), Rear fog lamps, and Tire Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS), among many others.

A choice of seven exciting exterior hues adds to the new Raize's striking visual appeal. The new Toyota Raize also comes with a choice of 16-inch or 17-inch alloy wheels in two intricate designs, with the 17-inch version featuring a special machine-finished black color for an advanced look.

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Thought for the week

“ Don't worry about what people say behind your back. They are the people who are finding faults in your life instead of fixing their own.

- Unknown



Cook with a can of soup

You generally think of using canned soup for one thing and one thing only — soup. Pour it into a bowl, heat it up, grab a spoon, and you are done, right? Not so fast. While those cans are ideal for a quick-and-easy meal (especially when you dress them up), soup is actually great for adding flavor and keeping proteins from drying out.

Read on for five of your favorite dishes that benefit from a can of soup.



Meatloaf: Add Vegetable Soup

Condensed vegetable soup is a great way to add flavor (and extra veggies) to meatloaf. Use it instead of milk to soak the breadcrumbs, then mix with your usual meatloaf ingredients, like diced onion, lean ground beef, egg, and seasonings. Bonus: It is dairy-free.

Sloppy Joes: Add Tomato Soup

Instead of ketchup or a combo of tomato sauce and paste, use that can of condensed tomato soup. Just add to a skillet of cooked ground beef, onion, celery, and your



favorite sloppy Joe spices, and let simmer uncovered for about 20 minutes. You can serve it as-is, on buns, on nachos, or stuffed in bell peppers and topped with cheese.

Dip: Add Chicken Tortilla Soup

A can of thick chicken tortilla soup can easily be transformed into a delicious, crowd-pleasing dip. Just add it to your slow cooker with some cream cheese and shredded cheese, and let it cook until thickened and bubbly.



Taco Skillet: Add Tomato Soup

If your taco night is feeling a little less-than-flavorful, add a can of condensed tomato soup along with a half cup salsa and some taco seasoning to cooked ground beef or turkey and sliced bell peppers. Let cook until bubbly, top with cheese, and you've got yourself a 15-minute skillet dinner that packs a punch.



Burritos or Tacos: Add Black Bean Soup

If you've got a can of black bean soup you are not sure what to do with, use it inside your burritos and tacos. The black bean soup is already seasoned, so you won't have to add much to it, unlike with a regular can of black beans. Simply put it in a skillet with a can of spicy chopped chipotle peppers in adobo and let simmer until thickened.

RECIPE

Baked Zaatar and Fresh Cottage Cheese Fingers



Zaatar and fresh cottage cheese (paneer) fingers recipe is a Lebanese-inspired oven-baked appetizer that is savory, crunchy and incredibly easy to make with cottage cheese. If you enjoy paneer, then you must try this recipe.

Ingredients:

- 200g Fresh cottage cheese (paneer) block
- 12 to 15 square medium size spring roll sheets
- 1/2 cup zaatar powder
- Small bowl of water for sealing edges
- Olive oil for brushing
- Labneh yogurt cheese for serving (optional)

Directions:

- Preheat the oven on 180 degrees C for 10 minutes. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
- Cut the cottage cheese block into slices about the size of your index finger
- Arrange the spring roll sheets on a dry cutting board or other working surface and position them at an angle so that the corner of each sheet is closest to you.
- Place a slice of the cottage cheese at an angle in the lower third of each spring roll sheet, and sprinkle some zaatar powder.
- Fold the edges inward along the way.
- Roll the sheet shut, adding a dab of extra water if needed. Press lightly to seal the edges together.
- Place the stuffed spring rolls seal side down on the prepared baking dish.
- Repeat with the remaining sheets until complete.
- Brush the fingers lightly with olive oil.
- Bake in the preheated oven until they are golden brown and crisped on the outside, about 10 minutes.
- Take it out and again brush some olive oil and sprinkle some zaatar onto it.



Chef Chhaya Thakker



Serve hot.

I usually serve it with Roasted Red bell pepper (couli) sauce and labneh yogurt cheese. You can also freeze the spring rolls before or after cooking them.

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

Death rate in Kuwait from COVID-19 lowest in region



Improvements in the epidemiological situation in the country, following a fall in infections, decrease in fatality numbers, and an increase in vaccinations, has allowed the health authorities to look back on the year gone by with pride at the achievements they have realized in the fight against COVID-19.

Looking back on the low death rate from the virus in recent months, the health authorities note that Kuwait has recorded only 4 deaths as a result of complications from the virus in November, compared to 12 cases in October, 30 during September and 99 cases in August. There were 355 deaths in July, 194 cases in June, 203 cases during May, 244 deaths in April, 228 in March, 124 deaths during February, and 23 in January this year.

Since the first cases appeared in late

February 2020, the total number of deaths attributed to COVID-19 in Kuwait reached 2,465 out of a total of 413,491 infections. This shows that the death rate in Kuwait was around 0.6 percent, which is the lowest among the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. In comparison, the death rate in Saudi Arabia was 1.6 percent with 8,842 deaths from 549,877 infections. The number of deaths in the UAE due to complications from the virus was 2,148 cases out of 74,214 infections, at a rate of 0.2 percent, and in the Sultanate of Oman it was 1.3 percent with 4,113 deaths out of 304,581 infections. In Bahrain, where 1,394 out of 277,803 people infected died, the death rate was 0.5 percent, and in Qatar the total deaths from the virus was 611 cases from 244,071 infections or 0.2 percent.

Health sources attributed the reason for the low death rate from COVID-19 virus in the GCC states in general and Kuwait in particular, to the high percentage of middle-aged and young people, as well as the high rate of anti-virus vaccinations, compared to other countries around the world. In addition, the Gulf health authorities applied the latest safe treatments and technical protocols used by the most advanced health systems in the world.



General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has affirmed that no new restrictions on travel have been imposed in the wake of the Omicron variant reported in several countries. The DGCA also noted that nearly 70 percent of operations at Kuwait International Airport had been restored and it was slowly edging towards full-scale operations.

Meanwhile, travel agencies and airline offices are reporting a brisk pace in sales of tickets and hotel reservations to many popular destinations, with only few, if any, cancellations of previous bookings. People apparently believe that there is no cause for worry as most people in the country have already received two doses of the vaccinations. Moreover, there is growing confidence in the capability of health authorities to handle any emergence of the Omicron variant, as they have gained the necessary valuable experience in dealing with the virus over the past year.

Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Federation of Travel and Tourism Offices, Muhammad Al-Mutairi, said that there has been a marked increase in reservations, especially given that ticket prices remain moderate to the most preferred destinations such as London, Turkey, Riyadh, Jeddah and Dubai.

Impact of Omicron on travel plans negligible

Despite the very real threat of infection from the new variant of COVID-19 virus that has spread in many countries, it does not appear to have raised any additional fears among travelers in Kuwait.

Plans for travel to various destinations during the upcoming Christmas and New Year celebrations are going ahead unhampered. For its part, Directorate-

Indonesian cuisine impresses participants in ASEAN cook Fest 2021



RICKY LAXA
STAFF WRITER

Indonesian cuisines impressed participants with flavorful and delightful traditional dishes during Saturday's Cook Fest 2021 held at the International Culinary Arts and organized by CEE Network Kuwait. A full house attendance and invited guests were treated to a sumptuous lunch and were served with authentic Indonesian dishes.

Spouse of the Charges D' Affaires at the Indonesian Embassy in Kuwait Yoke Malinda Adi delivered a welcome remarks to open the event. Chef Hamzah F, Rasyadi then gave a quick background of the dishes and the ingredients. Chef Asri Sulastri, who runs a catering service, managed and supervised the whole process from preparation of ingredients, cooking and presentations of the dishes. A remarkable display of ingredients and finished products were laid out on the table for the participants to better understand the process.

"The event was very impressive and very informative, aside from the dishes being tasteful and appetizing as we prepared them. I hope they extend one more day for us to learn more about the cuisines from Indonesia and I won't miss it for anything," said Jack Angelo Ricafort, a service staff. "I have been to so many food and cooking exhibitions as a chef but how the Embassy of Indonesia did it was just astonishing.

The ingredients were neatly laid out and distributed and the assistants who tirelessly

went around to help the participants, made the preparation easier and enabled capturing the authentic tastes of the dishes. "Should there be another class from Indonesia I definitely will attend," commented Chef Mariefe Torio, a popular Filipino Pastry chef. Sandrine Meulien, French national and student chef added that the chicken soup was very delightful and the aroma was just appetizing. "I can't wait for my family to taste these dishes," added Meulien. Vlogger Gracia Amor added that after trying out the dishes, she definitely will visit Indonesia to discover more of their culture, tradition and food.

Each participant's table was well decorated and the food was plated nicely. Indonesian nationals also came to visit the event and were also served with the dishes. "I thank the Embassy of Indonesia for their hospitality. I was passing by the event and wanted to know more of the classes and I was invited to taste the food.

It was my first time to try their dishes and I am impressed," stated Joanna, a Barista. A set of chef uniforms was presented by ICA Owner Olivia Ferrer to Chef Hamza. Participants were grateful for the tireless effort of the Embassy of Indonesia and those who shared their time to come up with such a successful event.

Madame Adi thanked CEE Network for organizing the event and Dhadabai Travel and Al Muzaini for sponsoring the event. "We are glad to be one of the sponsors to be able to help promote the ASEAN community in Kuwait and we look forward to more collaboration in the future," stated Paulita Lundang, Manager of Dadabhai Travel in Salmiya.

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Kenya-Kuwait relations on the rise

Her Excellency Halima Mohamud, Ambassador of Kenya

THE TIMES KUWAIT REPORT

In an exclusive interview with The Times Kuwait on the occasion of Kenya's upcoming National Day on 12 December, the country's Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Kuwait, Her Excellency Halima Mohamud spoke at length about the strong bilateral relations existing between the two countries, and the potential to further enhance and cement these ties in all fields going forward.

Ambassador Mohamud, who took over ambassadorial duties in November 2019, is her country's third envoy to Kuwait. Following a long career in leadership roles that began in her university days as a student leader, the ambassador was also involved in leading several civil rights and good governance engagements in her country, especially after the promulgation of the 2010 Kenyan Constitution.

The new constitution, considered by many to be among the most progressive constitutions in the world, brought about several changes on various fronts, including in the ending of gender discrimination and the creation of an Upper House of Parliament, the Senate. Between 2013-2017, Ambassador



and traded along the Swahili coast calling on ports in Mombasa and Zanzibar. In the wake of Kenyan independence, Kuwait was the first Arab country to open a diplomatic mission in Nairobi.

"This year, Kenya National Day on 12 December, will mark the 58th year since Kenya gained independence from British Rule. Fifty-eight years on, today, Kenya stands proud as a sovereign nation and a vibrant democracy that is widely considered as the gateway to east and central Africa.

"Relations between Kenya and Kuwait are cordial and the two countries have mutually beneficial engagements on both the bilateral and multilateral arena. This has resulted in expansion and deepening of our relations to greater heights. Several key cooperation frameworks have been signed and others are still under negotiation, which underscore the importance of this relationship.

"In addition, and thankfully, Kuwait funds several development projects in Kenya through the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, some of which have been completed and others are still ongoing. I am optimistic that the Kenya-Kuwait relations will continue to grow from strength to strength."

Speaking about the economic cooperation and investment opportunities in her country, the ambassador noted: "Kenya is one of the largest economies in Africa and is considered as the gateway to east and central Africa. Its major exports include tea, flowers, coffee and horticulture, besides being a major global tourist destination.

"As a developing nation, there are a wide range of investment opportunities, especially in those aligned to the President's clarion call on the Big 4 Agenda. These include investments in infrastructure, manufacturing, housing and construction sector, health sector and agricultural sector for food security. Other potential areas of investment include the hospitality industry, the blue economy, mining and oil exploration, telecommunication and services sector. I encourage Kuwait companies and individuals interested in investing in Kenya to pay a visit to the Embassy for detailed discussions."

Expanding on cooperation in educational and health sectors, the Kenyan envoy said: "Kuwait University has an ongoing scholarship programme for Kenyan students, from which many students from my country have benefitted.

Kuwaiti students also visit Kenyan educational institutions for various collaborations, including as attachments at the United Nations Office in Nairobi

(UNoN). Moreover, a cooperation framework in the field of education is expected to be concluded soon which will further expand the bilateral cooperation.

There are currently five Kenyan students in Kuwait universities, and we working towards increasing this number through ongoing bilateral negotiations. Student exchange programs do play an important role in fostering understanding and cross-cultural exchange.

"In terms of health, Kenya is privileged to have a young and qualified workforce (Human Capital Surplus) in the health sector covering medics, nurses and technicians that Kuwait can tap into. It is anticipated that with the conclusion of an agreement in the health sector, Kenya will provide an ample workforce to Kuwait in the critically important health sector."

Regarding trade between the two countries, Ambassador Mohamud noted that in 2020 the total trade between the two countries showed an upward trajectory in terms of both volume and value compared to 2019. "Today, there are increasingly more Kenya products on the shelves of Kuwait market, such as meat, fruits, vegetables, tea, coffee and flowers, whereas Kuwait products in Kenya have also increased. Volume of bilateral trade has grown more than two fold year on year since 2019."

Expanding on the potential for Kenya to attract more tourists from Kuwait, the envoy stated: "Kuwaitis have long enjoyed Kenya's scenic tourist attractions and it is our wish that Kenya will become the most

preferred tourist destination in Africa for more Kuwaitis."

Clarifying about the health protocols in place for visitors to Kenya, and the current COVID-19 situation in her country, the ambassador explained: "Like any other country, Kenya has been adversely affected by the Corona virus pandemic. The tourism and aviation sectors were in particular the most affected, as tourism figures dipped drastically. The Coronavirus put a strain on the health care system. The current public health focus is to get as many people as possible vaccinated. At the moment, there are no travel restrictions to travel to Kenya except for the need for a PCR test."

On relations in the social and cultural front, she noted that there has been strong interaction between people of the two countries. "Kenyan athletes have competed and won several marathons in Kuwait. We would also like to explore opportunities where Kuwaiti athletes could train in Kenya, particularly in long distance athletics.

"Also, though currently there are no Kenyan domestic workers engaged in Kuwait, the two countries are negotiating a Bilateral Labor Agreement that will in the near future enable Kenyan domestic workers to work in the State of Kuwait."

Revealing future plans in the year ahead, Ambassador Mohamud said: "We are looking forward to receiving our Foreign Affairs Minister, Amb. Raychelle Omamo, who is due to visit the State of Kuwait early next year. During the visit, she is expected to inaugurate the first session of the Joint Commission of Cooperation between the Republic of Kenya and the State of Kuwait.

"We also highly appreciate the role of Kuwait in promoting peace and stability in the region and beyond. Kuwait is a model state that is well known for its peace and humanitarian efforts across the globe. The government of Kuwait has reached out to so many needy people across the world and intervened to make their lives better. Further, Kuwait's diplomacy is anchored on neutrality and the peaceful resolutions to conflict and therefore it is a shining beacon and champion of peace and stability in the region and beyond. This also reinforces Kenya's eight point agenda, since it is currently serving at the UN Security Council (2021/22) and aspires to enhance global peace and stability."

The ambassador concluded by wishing Kuwait, its leadership and the people the very best in the years ahead.



Mohamud served as Senator in the newly created Senate; and in 2019, when she was appointed as her country's ambassador to Kuwait, she was a part of the largest cohort of female ambassadors to be appointed in Kenya's history.

At the onset of the interview, the ambassador expanded on the strength of existing ties between Kenya and Kuwait. "Relations between our two countries have existed long before the formal start of bilateral relations in 1965. It has been reported that Kuwaiti merchants have historically ferried

US ambassador Alina Romanowski nominated as ambassador to Iraq



A statement from the White House on 8 December announced that US President Joe Biden has nominated the current US Ambassador to Kuwait, H.E. Alina Romanowski as the new envoy to Iraq. A new ambassador to Kuwait is yet to be announced.

Other ambassadorial nominations made by the US President last Wednesday include that of former Hewlett Packard CEO Margaret Whitman as the new US ambassador to Kenya, and the nomination of businesswoman Constance Milstein as ambassador to Malta.

Namaste Kuwait cultural extravaganza dazzles audience

A Kuwait-India cultural festival titled 'Namaste Kuwait' got off to a glittering start at the National Museum of Kuwait on 7 December. The festival, a unique blend of music and dance of both India and Kuwait, was inaugurated jointly by Assistant Secretary-General of the National Council of Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) | Dr. Bader Al-Duwaish and Indian Ambassador H.E. Sibi George, in the presence of National Museum of Kuwait Director (NCCAL's Museums and Antiquities Department) Salman A. Boland.

The cultural festival, jointly organized by the Indian Embassy and NCCAL, celebrates the vibrant and dynamic partnership between India and Kuwait, as the year 2021-22 marks the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

"Namaste Kuwait is an important event as it is held on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between Kuwait and India," Al-Duwaish said in his remarks following the inaugural ceremony. Events such as 'Namaste Kuwait' will further enrich the cultural interaction between the two friendly countries, he said, adding that he envisaged more cooperation in the fields of art and culture between the two countries in the future.

"It is my honor to present to you 'Namaste Kuwait', bringing alive the cultural heritage of



the majestic land that India is and connecting the cultures and peoples of our two friendly countries," said Ambassador George in his inaugural remarks. This is another effort by the two countries to further broaden the rich canvas of cultural engagement and further strengthen the close civilizational affinities and linkages, the ambassador stated.

"Our ties are time-tested. They have been built over strong foundations by our peoples over centuries based on mutual trust and respect. I am confident that this relationship will continue to prosper and evolve into a new age. The New India-New Kuwait partnership connects the visions of the leadership of our two

friendly countries for mutual development and progress of the peoples of our two countries," said the ambassador.

The ambassador pointed out the year 2021-22 bears a remarkable significance for both countries. "This year, we celebrate a unique confluence of important milestones. This is an important milestone in our shared journey towards a shared history of sustainable progress, development and prosperity of the peoples of our two friendly countries. And this year, we, in India, celebrate the 75th anniversary of Independence of India."

The ambassador thanked Kamel Abdul Jalil, Secretary General of NCCAL, and his team for being in the forefront of taking the cultural relations of the two countries to a new higher level of partnership. He also thanked the leadership of the National Museum.

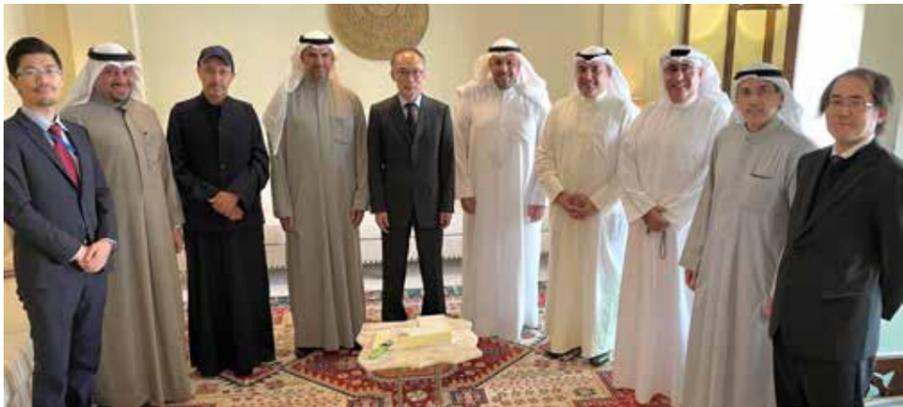
The cultural festival commenced with a traditional Indian classical dance performance by the students of Srishti School of Dance, followed by a musical segment led by well-

known Kuwaiti singer Mubarak Al-Rashed. Mubarak enthralled the audience with his Bollywood favorites and evergreen Hindi hits such as 'Papa Kehte Hai' and 'Tum Paas Aaye'. Asharupa Barman, Master Rohit Shyam (Arabic), Upasana and Nabeel also rendered a variety of songs.

'Advanced Vinyasa Yoga' presented by 'Kuwait Yoga Meet' was received with a big round of applause. The dance segment presented by Anjali School of Dance, Taal Dance Studio, Nritta Dhyana, Dancing Divas, Shivadham School of Dance, Break House and Nandanam School of Dance consisted of a rare mix of India's folk and classical dance forms.

Dhol Beats Bhangra Boys came with a bang and took the audience by storm with their traditional Punjabi 'bhangra' dance. The 'Namaste Kuwait' celebrations scheduled for yesterday evening at the National Museum were cancelled in view of a tragic incident in India in which India's top defense chief and 12 others lost their lives.

Ambassador of Japan pays farewell visit to Reconnaissance Research



Ambassador of Japan H.E. Masato TAKAOKA paid a special visit to Reconnaissance Research to say his goodbyes and bid them farewell as he is leaving Kuwait and retiring after serving more than 40 years in the foreign service of his country.



Abdulla Najeeb Almulla with Japanese ambassador H.E. Masato Takaoka

The Japanese ambassador was accompanied by Counsellor Ota Takeshi and Second Secretary Tatsumi Ararat. The meeting was attended by the CEO and deputy CEO of Reconnaissance Research, selected members of the advisory board, as well as the Chairman of the Japan-Kuwait business committee, Abdulla Najeeb Almulla and deputy editor in chief of Annahar newspaper, Sami Alnusif.

Despite the ceremonial occasion, the meeting was an opportunity to further discuss current developments, as well as the future potentials and requirements of Japan and Kuwait.

"I wish to thank Reconnaissance Research for their dedication during the last two years in being an added value through their intellectual support and quality research output," said the Japanese ambassador.

He added, "I was also happy by the great friendships that I made through them. It has been a pleasure working with Reconnaissance Research. And I'm sure that my successor Ambassador Yasunari Morino will see the value and importance of this respectable and truly independent Kuwaiti policy institute."

The founder and CEO of Reconnaissance Research, Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri said: "His excellency is a great ambassador, who invested heavily in building strong bridges of communication with Kuwait. And worked tirelessly to identify common interests of mutual benefit."

He added, "I was pleased to work with such a great man, whom I'm privileged to call a friend and a mentor. His positive representation of Japan will have a lasting impact on many Kuwaitis. I wish him all the best."



Greening campaign promotes environmental awareness

The ongoing Kuwait Planting campaign, which aims to plant over 1,000 trees in Alabdaliya oasis, promotes environmental awareness among the public and encourages sustainable development. The project, which was launched in 2019, in cooperation with the Kuwait Oil Company, has been making great headway despite the intervening year of COVID-19.

Disclosing this during the afforestation campaign launched last week by UN-Habitat, Head of the UN Human Settlement Program (UN-Habitat) Kuwait and the GCC, Dr. Ameera Al-Hassan, added that the campaign aims to 'green' areas to resist the impact of global climate change, confront desertification and reduce the severity of climate change caused by high temperature and lack of rains.

All the trees that will be planted are desert trees, resistant to heat and water shortages and help improve the general health of the population, as they are an important element in the natural cycle, noted Al-Hassan.

In addition, the participation of more than 50 ambassadors in the campaign aims to raise awareness about the importance of steps being



taken to improve the climate and reduce the repercussion of climate change in Kuwait

For his part, Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and Ambassador of the Republic of Tajikistan Dr. Zubaydzoda Najot, said that participating in the campaign is the best way to get rid of global environmental and climatic problems, which lies in adhering to initiatives aimed at protecting the environment, rationalizing the use of natural resources, giving priority to green energy and developing the green economy.

He said that in the interest of strengthening ties between Tajikistan and Kuwait, several seedlings of ornamental and fruitful trees were brought from Tajikistan for the campaign.



Sixties on temporary visa will lose residency on exit



Troubles and relief for the 'Sixties' appear to ebb and flow. With the Public Authority of Manpower continuing to reject requests to renew work permits of non-graduates aged 60

and above, until the issue is resolved by the government, it was left to the Ministry of Interior to grant temporary work permits to expatriates who fall in this category.

Minister of Interior and the Undersecretary at the ministry have issued directives to Residency Departments to grant temporary residency permits of one to three months duration to non-graduate expats aged 60 and over, on humanitarian grounds and until the matter is finally decided upon by the Cabinet.

However, a new clause to these temporary permits was announced last week, which stated that anyone on temporary residency permits under this category, who chooses to travel outside the country for whatever reason, would not be able to reenter the country using their temporary residency permit.

CSC urges government entities to ensure Kuwaitization by 2022

In a notification to all ministries and other government entities, the Civil Service Commission (CSC) has said that there would be "no exceptions in implementing the Kuwaitization plan", and that all government institutions would have to comply with the rules and procedures outlined by the Commission's Resolution 11 of 2017 by the end of 2022.

The 2017 resolution had set a five-year timeframe for enacting Kuwaitization in the public sector, which draws to a close by the end of 2022. The CSC plan of replacing expatriates in most public sector jobs with national workforce, is part of measures being undertaken by the government to address the demographic imbalance in the country and the distorted labor market employment levels that currently prevail.



Though some government entities had submitted requests to the CSC to exclude some of their staff from the Kuwaitization plan, and to reconsider the number of employees to be replaced annually, the Commission has refused to budge and has said it is determined to implement its resolution of 2017 in full and without any exemption.

Cultural extravaganzas to mark 60 years of Italy-Kuwait relations

From 11 to 15 December, the Embassy of Italy will celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of Italy's recognition of the independence of the State of Kuwait in 1961, said the Italian Ambassador H.E. Carlo Baldocci.

He noted that every day of the week there will be events and initiatives in various sectors, aimed at emphasizing the importance and extraordinary quality of the relationship that exists between the two countries, and which has grown stronger over the years, reaching the current levels of excellence. The relationship between Italy and Kuwait is a friendship that has also been consolidated through the common will to contribute to regional and international stability and security. A friendship that has developed over the years, tempered by closeness in difficult moments, which are always those in which the meaning of friendship itself is truly measured.



In this regard, the Italian Foreign Minister, Hon. Luigi Di Maio, writing the preface to a volume titled 'Bilateral relations between Italy and Kuwait' published by the Embassy of Italy on the occasion, noted: "Our civil societies generously contribute to these profitable dynamics, whose mutual solidarity and closeness has never failed. So it was thirty years ago for Italy in favor of the liberation of Kuwait; so it was in 2020 for Kuwait, in support and in aid of Italy, hit first and, at least initially, more than others during the most acute phase of the pandemic emergency. We look very confidently, with sentiments of friendship and respect, to our common future!"

To celebrate this important moment of bilateral relations, the 'Quartetto Indaco' (Indigo Quartet) will hold two concerts on 11 and 12 December, the first organized by the Embassy of Italy together with the International Women's Group (IWG) at the Auditorium of the National Library of Kuwait, the second by the Embassy at the Yarmouk Cultural Center Theater.

Ambassador Baldocci said he was happy for these two events, which will be held in full compliance with health rules, as

they represent among other things a live reopening of the country to the great Italian musical tradition, after difficult months marked worldwide by the pandemic closures. He added: "I am pleased that this takes place in close collaboration with the Accademia Chigiana, which has already been here twice, in November 2019 and in February 2020, with the Bel Canto and the Duo Federiciano, events that had recorded an important success among the public and critics. I would like to underline that these two concerts, besides celebrating an important anniversary in the history of bilateral relations, open the 2021-2022 musical season of Italy in Kuwait, which the Italian Embassy is currently defining and which will include next year up to six appointments between Ensembles, Soloists and Singing in Kuwait."

In the immediately following days, the extraordinariness of the relations between Italy and Kuwait, will be further enhanced through the delivery of the first two Typhoon aircraft to the Kuwaiti Air Force, as part of the Eurofighter Program signed with Italian aerospace company Leonardo. "A very important moment of the extraordinary collaboration between our two Countries," Ambassador Baldocci specified.

The inauguration of two important exhibitions, respectively on 14 and 15 December, the first on 'Islamic Art, from the Bargello of Florence to Kuwait' at the Amricani Cultural Center, presented by the curator Professor Giovanni Curatola and the second on 'Italian Urban Planning in Kuwait', presented by the Prof. Bico Belgiojoso, of the Studio BPPR of Milan, will be organized by the Embassy of Italy. The Exhibition from the Bargello at Amricani represents an important opportunity to enhance the dialogue between the Islamic Art collections of the two countries, thus continuing the long series of initiatives that on several occasions have brought the Al-Sabah Collection to Italy, from Florence, to Milan and finally to Rome. Thus making objects testify to a world of contacts and relationships, exchanges, mutual learning and influences. The Exhibition on Italian urban planning in Kuwait, which will take place at 'Spazio Italia - Kuwait' — the area of the Embassy, dedicated to strengthening the people-to-people dimension of the bilateral relations — tells a journey of suggestions and intense work from 1969 to 1990, which contributed to the urban development of a part of Kuwait City.

"It is also on the basis of these extraordinary successes that we look with confidence and optimism to the next sixty years of the great friendship between Italy and Kuwait", concluded Ambassador Baldocci.

Opposing views on how housing prices could go in 2022

Some real estate experts predict that 2022 will witness housing prices continuing to remain high, while others maintain that prices are likely to fall sharply by as much as 20 to 40 percent, depending on the region and residential area.

The two diametrically opposed views arise from different expectations and calculations based on what are, at best, only assumptions. The high price adherents say that citizens are flush with excess funds, due to postponement of their loan installments to banks and other financial institutions, as well as the prevailing low interest rates offered by banks which makes it more lucrative to invest in private housing than depositing it in banks. Also among the reasons cited by the 'higher price' group, is the low short-term prospects for the State to release any more land for housing projects. This has encouraged speculators to switch from the investment sector to the residential sector as it is likely to bring in quick returns.

On the other hand, those who say prices are likely to fall, point to the principle of supply and demand. They note that an abundance of



housing properties are set to come online in the coming months, and this could result in an appreciable fall in housing prices in 2022.

Besides the two opposing price predictions based on assumptions, what remains a fact is that 2021 witnessed a hike in prices of private housing. Prices in some areas went up by approximately 30-40 percent, especially in areas with high demand such as in the fifth phase of Sabah Al-Ahmad Marine City, while it was lower in other areas, in which the increase was estimated between 20 to 30 percent, and those prices vary according to the region and location.

Future national labor pool to have more women than men

Women students continue to dominate their male counterparts in several faculties at Kuwait University, which foretells that in future the pool of nationals in the labor market is likely to be dominated by women.

Figures from the first semester of the current academic year show that the number of female students increased by 73 percent while the number of male students went up by only 27 percent. When it comes to medical specialization courses, the gender difference is even more skewed, with 90 percent of those attending these courses being women.

A breakup of admissions to various medical courses reveal that the percentage of female students in the faculties of allied medical sciences and pharmacy is 94 percent, and in dentistry it is 93 percent, while men form only a minuscule 6 and 7 percent respectively of those studying these courses.

Women also dominate in the College of Public Health, with the percentage of female students being 91 percent, and a similar high



78 percent engaged in medicine courses. Female students also form a majority in the Architecture faculty.

These figures are expected to reflect on the labor market in the years ahead, as it is apparent from the data available that female workforce will be a majority in several professions and specializations, such as pharmacy, dentistry, and medical technical specializations, in addition to a large number of women in teaching and architecture professions.

Coops rake in profits despite COVID-19 crisis

Cooperative societies in Kuwait have been a resounding success, not only in terms of providing essential food supplies to citizens and residents at affordable prices, but also for the huge profits they have been accruing despite the COVID-19 crisis.

Figures show that from January to September 2021, the 68 cooperative societies in the country along with their 270 branches

made profits equivalent to 1.6 times the profitability of banks, and 1.2 times the profits of the 158 listed companies on Boursa Kuwait.

The coops, which are reported to have billions of dinars in sales annually, have outperformed 158 companies listed on the stock exchange. The listed companies reported around KD800 million in profits for the first nine months of 2021. This does not include the profits accrued by the mega

logistics company, Agility.

As the annual sales of cooperative societies approach over KD1 billion, with cash flow sometimes crossing KD400 million, the pertinent question that one should be asking as a stakeholder in the cooperative society is whether these entities apply the rules of governance to protect their system and the interests of their shareholders?



Legal for non-Kuwaiti families to reside in model areas

Clarifying reports about the Municipality clamping down on non-Kuwaitis living in model areas, the Director of the legal department in the Kuwait Municipality, Counselor Raja'an Al-Gharib, said that this was with regard to bachelors and not non-Kuwaiti families. He added that based on current Municipality legislation and regulations, there is nothing that prevents non-Kuwaiti families from residing in private and model housing areas.

Elaborating on the issue, Al-Gharib said the proposal of the governor of the capital, Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled, regarding the amendment of Decree Law 125 of 1992 that prohibits non-Kuwaiti families living in private and model housing areas, was applicable only to bachelors and was meant to address the social, security and economic problems arising from single men living in those areas.

Al-Gharib added the proposal to introduce a legislative amendment to prevent non-Kuwaiti families from residing in private and model housing areas, cannot be taken into account because it contradicts the laws and regulations currently in force in the country as it conflicts with the provisions of the right of ownership regulated by the Civil Code, which gives the owner of the property the right to dispose, use and exploit his property within the limits of the applicable regulations.



IWG delegation visits the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development

A delegation from the International Women's Group, led by the group's president, Cristiana Balducci, wife of the Ambassador of the Republic of Italy, visited the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development on Thursday, 09 December 2021, to see the facilities of the fund.

The delegation was received by the engineer advisor of the Fund, Osama Wanes, who accompanied the IWG members and briefed them on the facilities of the Fund, which is considered a masterpiece that includes a large number of decorations that were brought from a number of Arab countries.

The delegation expressed great admiration for what it witnessed, and Eng. Wanes briefed the guests on the nature of the Fund's work and its role in supporting development projects in the Arab countries.

At the end of the tour, the wife of the Ambassador of the Republic of Italy, on behalf of the International Women's Group, presented a commemorative shield for the Director General of the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, Dr. Badr Al-Saad. Engineer Osama Wanes, thanking the delegation accepted the shield on behalf of the Director General.

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Large number of project cancellations in joint oil sector

Around 73 projects that were scheduled to be implemented over the last five years in joint operations at Al-Wafra and Khafji have been cancelled in 2020 for various reasons.

A total of 48 projects in the Wafra area and 25 in Khafji, with a total approved budget of KD400 million by the Kuwait Gulf Oil Company have been shelved. Of these projects, 36 were cancelled as a result of production stoppage and 15 did not have

the approval of the relevant committees and authorities, or because they were considered not viable. In addition, 11 projects were cancelled for various other reasons, including because the oil ministry felt they were no longer needed, budget reasons, modification of the value, lack of coordination between various concerned departments, a change in the scope of work, emergence of alternatives that were less expensive in the long-term, or to merge them within other projects



or re-study them for modernization and reassessment of the need for them.

The sources confirmed that there is an agreement between the partners in the joint operations areas, the Kuwait Gulf Oil Company and the Saudi partner, on the importance of filtering capital projects and classifying them according to priority in line with the targeted production rates and strategic goals through meetings and workshops to agree on their importance and the extent of their need.

Corruption, Human Rights, and pursuit of Democracy

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

In Kuwait, there has been a growing awareness in recent years that in order to ensure sustainable growth and development, and guarantee the continued welfare and human rights of citizens and residents, it is imperative to curb and curtail corruption in public life. As part of this realization, and in compliance with its commitments to the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), to which it is a signatory, Kuwait established 'Nazaha', the Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority in 2016.

Since its inception the authority has been exerting tremendous efforts and working assiduously to implement measures to eliminate corruption, enhance integrity and transparency in government entities and in the services they provide to the public. The authority has also strived to raise awareness in society of the devastating impact that corruption has on the social, economic, and political aspects of life.

However, the continued eruption and revelation of corruption scandals in various government sectors and among high-level state officials, prove that the authority still has a long way to go before attaining its goal of weeding out corruption, establishing transparency and integrity in public life, and in ensuring the realization of good governance and a proper environment for sustainable development of the country, as aspired by both the State and its people. In a recent overview of corruption, human rights, and good governance, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) noted: Good governance includes processes that enable public institutions to provide products and services, manage public resources, and ensure human rights in an equitable, transparent manner essentially free of abuse and corruption, and in line with the rule of law. The true test of 'good' governance, said the OHCHR, lies in the degree to which it delivers on the promise of human rights, including civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights of all people in a society.

Last week, while addressing a regional conference held on the theme, 'Precautions against corruption in the public sector... governance, efficiency and adherence' the Chairman of Nazaha, Abdul Aziz Al-Ibrahim, said that the authority was committed to ensuring good governance. He reiterated that combating corruption, boosting transparency and regulating and auditing the state sectors, were key in ensuring good governance.

Yet another pointer to the importance of transparency and good governance, and its impact on preserving the human rights of both citizens and residents in Kuwait, came in a letter late last year addressed to Kuwait Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr. Ahmed Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah, by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet.

The letter, which followed the 35th session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Working Group of Kuwait held in January 2020, underlined the need to take additional measures to strengthen, protect, and respect human rights in all its aspects, and in accordance with the

international agreements to which Kuwait is a party, as well as in line with international humanitarian laws. The UPR is a periodic review of the human rights records of all UN Member States, undertaken by the Human Rights Commission, which provides an opportunity for all States to declare what actions they have taken to improve the human rights situations in their countries and to overcome challenges to the enjoyment of human rights.

The letter to the foreign minister welcomed the measures initiated by Kuwait in protecting the rights of persons with disabilities, for eliminating all forms of discrimination against women, as outlined by targets set in the National Development Plan, and in improving the status of illegal residents [bedoun] and foreign workers, as well as the steps taken to combat human trafficking.

The High Commissioner also drew attention to several issues that needed attention prior to the next UPR in over four year's time, including ratifying the core human rights treaties to which Kuwait is not yet a party. Among the pending agreements are the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, and the Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons, as well as additional optional protocols to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Political Rights, which would in effect grant more equitable rights to the concerned sections of society.

Adding to the chorus of voices urging and encouraging Kuwait to enhance the practice of human rights equitably among all sectors of society, was the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. In September of this year, the Committee met with a high-level delegation from Kuwait headed by the country's Permanent Representative of Kuwait to the United Nations Office at Geneva, Ambassador Jamal Al-Ghunaim. The meeting reviewed the third periodic report of Kuwait on measures taken to implement the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

During the meeting, UN Committee members posed several questions to the Kuwait delegation with regard to various contentious issues, including combatting racism, the status of illegal residents [Bedoun], gender equality, domestic workers, and on foreign migrants. In his detailed, point-by-point response to most queries raised by Committee members, Ambassador Al-Ghunaim contended:

Racism: Article 29 of Kuwait Constitution sets out the general principles for combating racism. It establishes the rules and frameworks for equality, non-discrimination and upholding human dignity by stipulating that people are equal in human dignity and are equal before the law in public rights and duties and that there is no discrimination on the basis of gender, origin, language or religion.

Bedoun: The ambassador clarified that granting citizenship is a sovereign right that touches upon the supreme interests of the State. It is subject to rules and conditions that

are regulated by Kuwait Nationality Act No.15 of 1959, and its various amendments. He noted that the provisions of that act specify the cases in which the possibility of obtaining nationality may be considered, while the Central Agency [Central System for the Remedy of Situations of Illegal Residents] puts forward the names of persons who fulfil the conditions for obtaining Kuwaiti nationality under the Act. He also revealed that under the road map adopted by the Council of Ministers, 11,087 persons were naturalized between 2012 and 2016.

Gender equality: On the issue of equality between men and women and the discrimination that Kuwaiti women married to non-Kuwaitis faced in conferring nationality to their children, Ambassador Al-Ghunaim appeared to be less forthright. He noted that the delegation agreed with the Committee that the attribution of nationality was a sovereign right. Kuwait was convinced that Kuwaiti women had the right to pass on their nationality to their children; Kuwaiti legislation did not draw distinction between men and women. However, Kuwait had some beliefs, and its own culture.

"Given the respect Kuwait has for Western culture, the delegation asked for a similar respect for Kuwait's culture. Human rights did not mean denigrating a culture which was different from one's own. Gender equality was an important value to Kuwait; in Kuwait society, more women were present in the public sector than men, and had access to high-level posts; there was no discrimination."

In her countering remarks to the ambassador's response, Dr. Heishoo SHIN, Committee Vice-Chair, underscored that the culture or tradition of a country was not a static thing. She pointed out that her own country, South Korea, which was not a Western one, had changed greatly in the last 70 years. Noting that Kuwait had been reviewed by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in 2017, she asked whether there had been any elimination of discrimination against women since then?

Turning to questions about family, she also asked whether marriage with a foreigner was possible only with prior authorization by the Kuwaiti Foreign Marriage Committee? What was the role and function of Kuwait's Supreme Family Council? What was the current minimum wage, was it sufficient to make a living, and did it apply to domestic workers? Which measures were in place to monitor whether foreign workers were actually provided with suitable accommodation, and what were being done in case of violations?

Without directly replying to the points posed by Dr. Heishoo SHIN, the delegation replied that as Kuwait was an oil-dependent country, if all workers went on strike, the economy would collapse. Relations between the employer and the employee were based on contracts, not a Kafala system. Kuwait was keen on drafting model contracts which could guide the relationship between the employer and the employee, in which each of them had rights and obligations. There were institutions monitoring compliance, and Kuwait tried to

ensure a balanced relationship between the two parties.

In response to questions regarding cases of violence against domestic workers, the delegation said that Kuwait authorities monitored the situation on a number of levels, through cooperation with embassies and external employment services. Complaints could be sent on many platforms, including through social media. Domestic workers were required to have a mobile phone and download the application for complaints. Legal education and vocational professional training were promoted in Kuwait to ensure that workers were informed on their rights.

The responses provided by Ambassador Al-Ghunaim on behalf of the attending Kuwait delegation reveals that the country is keen to ensure the human rights of everyone — although with a few reservations on the systemic and social discrimination that exist with regard to the bedouins, women, domestic workers and migrant workers. However, more than reforms or initiatives by the State, what needs to change in order to end human rights abuses and discrimination in Kuwait, is for a change in the state of mind of many people.

Buttressing one's beliefs and social mores by alluding to respect for culture or religion is no longer a tenable excuse for what is clearly an abuse of the human rights of the victims. If the insistence on staying true to the country's culture, and by extension its values, were to be followed to the letter, then all of us would still be living in caves. Everything in nature changes and progress of a civilization is measured by how people, their culture and values evolve and change over time.

Patriarchal traditions, cultural moorings and religious dictates cannot be justifications to oppose equality for women in all spheres of life. Fear of demographic shifts in social balance, or a wariness about dilution of the State's largesse for citizens, cannot be the criteria for continuing to stall an equitable solution to the problem of bedouins. And, the dependence of domestic workers and migrant workers on jobs in Kuwait to sustain their families back home, is no reason to perpetuate abuse of their basic human rights.

Racism, discrimination, intolerance and xenophobia not only harms those who endure it, but it affects the entire society, due to division, distrust, intolerance and hate it breeds in all strata of life. In order to ensure respect for human rights for everyone, there clearly needs to be a change in the hearts and minds of people. And, this change needs to begin right at home; by teaching our children to respect the values and principles of human rights of everyone.

As social activist, diplomat, former US first lady, and the first chair of the UN Commission on Human Rights, Eleanor Roosevelt, once remarked: "Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress [in human rights] in the larger world."

A New Global Architecture for Health



GORDON BROWN

A former prime minister and chancellor of the exchequer of the United Kingdom, is United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education and Chair of the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity.

The damage caused by COVID-19 — exacerbated by the continued appearance of new variants, most recently Omicron — has been catastrophic. More than five million lives worldwide have already been lost to COVID-19, and with confirmed cases on track to swell from 260 million today to 460 million by next autumn, the World Health Organization estimates that five million more people may die from the disease in the coming months.

When the World Health Assembly (WHA) gathered for a special session from 29 November to 1 December, its task was nothing less than preventing the recurrence of such a tragedy. Specifically, the world now needs an internationally binding agreement to prevent future infectious-disease outbreaks from becoming pandemics.

As Tedros Ghebreyesus, the WHO's director-general, has argued, a new agreement should be underpinned by a high-level commitment to health for all, grounded in equity and solidarity between countries. Everyone, regardless of their wealth or income, should have fair access to what they need to maintain their health, and the international community should ensure the equitable use and distribution of available medical resources. That will require a fully functioning global surveillance system, fast-tracking and sharing support in emergencies, and predictable finance.

Nothing illustrates more clearly the need for such an arrangement than the world's collective failure to ensure the promised equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. Although brilliant science and a strong manufacturing effort mean that we will have produced 12 billion doses by the end of 2021 — enough to vaccinate every adult in the world — 95 percent of adults in low-income countries remain unprotected. This is perhaps the greatest public policy failure of our times.

The WHO's internationally agreed target of vaccinating 40 percent of the adult

population of every country by December 2021 looks set to be missed by 82 countries. On current trends, it will take until next Easter to get close to 40 percent, and even then, dozens of countries may fall short. In fact, since the G7 summit in June, when leaders pledged that the whole world would be vaccinated against COVID-19 by 2022, the gap between the vaccine haves and have-nots has widened rather than diminished.

In high-income countries, vaccination rates have risen from 40 percent in June to roughly 74 percent now, but they have increased at a glacial pace in low-income countries — from 1 percent to less than 5 percent. For every adult now being inoculated in a low-income country, six adults in middle- and high-income countries are receiving their booster shots. And 73 percent of African health workers remain unprotected.

True, important regional initiatives have taken steps to address the inequity gap. The African Union's vaccine-purchasing facility, the African Vaccine Acquisition Trust, has bought 400 million single-shot vaccine doses from Johnson & Johnson and, thanks to the Trust's chair, Strive Masiyiwa, and the US government, a further 110 million doses from Moderna, with 50 million to be delivered by March. But this is still not enough to meet the needs of Africa's 1.3 billion people.

This inequality is not difficult to explain: a recent survey by Airfinity has shown that the world's richest countries have bought 89 percent of all COVID-19 vaccines, and

by December, now expects to deliver just three-quarters of that amount.

Such is the scale of vaccine hoarding in rich countries that Airfinity estimates that by the end of this year, 100 million doses in the G20 stockpile will pass their expiration date and be wasted. For G20 countries to hoard life-saving vaccines and deny them to the poorest countries, while allowing tens of millions of doses to go to waste, is a morally indefensible act of medical and social vandalism that should never be forgotten or forgiven.

Vaccine inequities show why more fundamental changes are needed in the international global public-health architecture of health decision-making. Of course, among international organizations, only the Appellate Body of the World Trade Organization and the International Criminal Court, whose decisions are final, have the freedom and authority to make binding decisions that national governments are obliged to follow. And because of that, these bodies are under assault from a coalition of anti-internationalists. Securing a binding treaty will not be easy.

There is already a global-health treaty to reduce tobacco demand and supply, and a 2011 agreement to ensure that the WHO can commandeer supplies of flu vaccine when needed. But the legally binding international pact necessary to enable global-health authorities to do more to prevent, detect, prepare for, and control a pandemic has so far eluded us. At a time when new variants of COVID-19 are appearing, it is imperative that the special



New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark.

A robust agreement should contain several key elements. First, global-health leaders must have more authority to develop and upgrade health surveillance. Second, we need to build on the pioneering work of the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A) and COVAX, and ensure equitable manufacturing and distribution of personal protective equipment, tests, treatments, and vaccines, so that all countries can protect themselves better against current and future pandemics. Third, we need a global pandemic preparedness board.

But such arrangements will work only if leaders devise a sustainable financing mechanism to address the glaring global inequalities in health provision. Too often in times of global crises, we are reduced to passing the hat or convening ad hoc donor conferences. Ideally, pandemic preparedness should be financed according to a burden-sharing formula that allocates the costs among countries with the greatest capacity to pay. Even now, less than 20 percent of the WHO's budget is covered in this way. The eradication of smallpox in the 1960s and 1970s was historic, not least because the final push was initiated by a cost-sharing agreement among the richest countries.

Failure to meet global COVID-19 vaccination targets could cost \$2.3 trillion in lost GDP by 2025. Given that prospect, the G20 high-level independent panel's proposed \$10 billion annual budget for pandemic prevention and preparedness would offer one of the greatest returns on investment in history. But we must act now — and this week's WHA summit is the place to start.

“ Although the world will produce 12 billion doses by end of 2021 — enough to vaccinate every adult worldwide — 95 percent of adults in low-income countries remain unprotected. This is perhaps the greatest public policy failure of our times. ”

currently retain control of 71 percent of future deliveries. The Global North has fallen short of its pledges to donate vaccines to the Global South. The US has sent only 25 percent of what it promised, while the European Union, the United Kingdom, and Canada have performed even worse, dispatching just 19 percent, 11 percent, and 5 percent, respectively, of their pledged doses. The COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) facility, which had hoped to distribute two billion vaccines

summit launches a process to develop a legally binding agreement under the auspices of the WHO constitution.

Moreover, governments can draw on several important recent reports. These include one by a G20 high-level independent panel, co-chaired by Larry Summers, Tharman Shanmugaratnam, and Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala; the Mario Monti-led report to the WHO European Region; and the WHO review led by former Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and former

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Protecting Civil Society and Democracy

EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT



MICHELLE BACHELET, DARREN WALKER, AND MARK MALLOCH-BROWN

Michelle Bachelet, a former president of Chile, is United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Darren Walker is President of the Ford Foundation. Mark Malloch-Brown is President of the Open Society Foundations.

When global leaders gather virtually on 9-10 December for US President Joe Biden's Summit for Democracy, they ought to be asking themselves a simple question: What can we do to help democracy's bravest advocates, like the protesters who are risking their lives in Sudan?

For months, hundreds of thousands of people have flooded Sudan's streets, demanding an accountable government and the end of military rule, even though Sudanese security forces have met them with bullets. Dozens of protesters have died.

Their courage is not unique. From Belarus to Bolivia, and even in the United Kingdom and the United States, civil-society leaders and organizations are heading bold movements to resist structural oppression, authoritarianism, and injustice.

Sadly, their work could not be more urgent. Threats to civil-society leaders and democratic institutions are increasing around the world. Nationalism, inequality, and political polarization are on the rise worldwide, and pandemic-related restrictions on public gatherings and increasingly advanced surveillance technology have empowered authoritarian regimes. In Colombia, 65 environmental activists were killed in 2020. The Nigerian

government's ban on domestic use of Twitter, imposed in June this year, remains in force. And in August, the Ugandan government suspended the operations of 54 human-rights organizations.

These crackdowns, in democracies and authoritarian states alike, have lasting consequences. By restricting civil liberties, including freedom of the press, assembly, and expression, and attacking the organizations that defend them, states are leaving our rights and institutions defenseless against future attacks.

This is why our civil-society grantees and partners are sounding the alarm bells. Organizations across causes and countries are being targeted by similar strategies, including accusations of "foreign interference" whenever they work with established international organizations and philanthropic institutions like the ones we lead.

“ Global leaders must increase investments in the civil-society organizations that provide a check on state power. And they must commit tangible resources to human-rights defenders, local journalists, social services, and community centers. ”

These attacks must not continue. They threaten not only the lives and livelihoods of thousands of civil-society organizers and activists around the world, but also democracy itself. As authoritarian regimes go about disempowering these essential groups and disrupting their vital work, their cynical representatives call democracy "idealistic" and "naive."

We fundamentally reject this view. We embrace the power of democracy precisely because it requires constant maintenance, protection, and participation. The peace and stability it fosters are won by an inclusive social contract, not an iron fist.

In that spirit, Biden's Summit for Democracy aims to support democratic renewal, civic participation, and multilateral collaboration. The gathering presents an important opportunity for leaders to recommit to the fundamental rights of assembly, association, expression, and information at home, and to promote these rights abroad through strategic diplomacy.

But verbal commitments alone go only so far. As states engage in virtual conversation this week, they must be prepared to move beyond rhetoric and affirm the importance of these rights by matching words with deeds in the fight for civic space.

In the human-rights domain, this means advancing international and national protections for free speech and free assembly, thereby ensuring every individual's right to voice dissent in the face of authoritarianism. In many states, ensuring freedom of expression will require

communities, but also investing in their long-term growth, which is an investment in sustaining an active citizenry prepared to confront future emergencies. For example, democratic leaders should scale up wraparound protection mechanisms that provide at-risk activists with legal, medical, psychosocial, digital-security, and relocation support services, particularly those schemes operating near where regional and national attacks on civil society are taking place. This is one of the surest ways states can support those risking their lives to defend democracy.

Lastly, leaders must unite around the common democratic cause and collaborate closely in multisector, multilateral partnerships. Across government, the philanthropic sector, the private sector, and civil society, we have an opportunity to build on the dialogue at the summit and use our unique strengths to expand civic space. After all, the best protector of civic space is more civic space populated by engaged, connected citizens who have the resources, protections, and power to advocate for their own rights and livelihoods.

Engaged citizenship can be transformative. In Moldova and Malaysia, for example, civil-society organizations helped to overturn repressive 'state of emergency' laws this year, preventing the dangerous erosion of democratic institutions. And millions of people marched in Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020, forming probably the largest mass movement in US history.

Regardless of the origin of the struggle or the distance it travels, when people come together peacefully to defend their fundamental human rights, they make tremendous progress toward dignity, equity, and justice for all.

From Khartoum to Kuala Lumpur, let us protect and advance that progress in word and deed, and ensure that it holds strong for the next generation.

repealing sedition laws and adopting moratoriums on internet shutdowns. Furthermore, governments should block the export and transfer of surveillance equipment to repressive regimes.

Most urgently, global leaders must substantially increase investments in the civil-society organizations that provide a critical check on state power. And they must commit tangible resources to human-rights defenders, local journalists, social services, and community centers.

This requires not only supporting these organizations in times of crisis, when they are already scrambling to serve their



Extreme heat increases risk of cardiovascular health

The greater frequency and intensity of extreme heat events that have been witnessed in different parts of the world in recent years has been attributed to the growing global warming, which if left unchecked could prove to be an existential threat to all life on Earth. While these extreme heat events are a significant threat to the planet and its people, cardiologists now say there is increasing evidence that these events also pose a threat to human health. A large body of new studies reveal that extreme heat events are associated with greater risk of adverse cardiovascular incidents, especially for adults with pre-existing cardiovascular ailments.

There are strong indications that extreme heat events, such as heatwaves, are likely to increase in frequency, severity and duration in the coming years and decades. There is also a growing pool of evidence that extreme heat poses a risk to human health, increasing the risk of morbidity and mortality. Examples include 70,000 deaths attributed to the European heatwave in 2003, and 55,000 deaths attributed to the 2010 Russian heatwave. Risk factors for heat-related hospitalization include age, chronic illnesses, social isolation, some medications, and lack of access to air conditioning. Among chronic illnesses, cardiovascular diseases are often identified as a risk factor for heat-related

hospitalization and death.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recently reported that global temperatures are rising at a greater rate than previously projected, and that the number of extreme heat days will significantly increase across most land regions. The reasons why people with cardiovascular disease are at greater risk of hospitalizations and death during extreme heat events, is not fully understood. Climate experts and medical specialists in cardiovascular health have called for more in-depth research on how extreme heat affects cardiovascular health, why health professionals should care and what recommendations they can make to minimize consequences.

Recently, cardiologists and researchers at the University of Montreal in Canada conducted a comprehensive review of evidence-based epidemiological studies and noted a consistent association between extreme heat and a greater risk of adverse cardiovascular outcomes. Furthermore, they examined systematic reviews and meta-analyses that considered the effect of extreme heat on adverse cardiovascular outcomes. The review reported that heatwaves significantly increase the risk of death from ischemic heart disease, stroke, and heart failure.

Although the effects of extreme heat on

adverse cardiovascular events have been explained in the context of heatstroke, many events occur without heatstroke, and the mechanisms of these events in the absence of heatstroke remain unclear. It is likely that heat exposure increases myocardial oxygen needs. The reviewers also consider that exposure to extreme heat puts too much strain on the heart for individuals with heart disease, and that heat exposure increases the risk of blood clots forming within the blood vessels that supply the heart.

The authors propose that preventive strategies to minimize cardiovascular risk during extreme heat events should aim to reduce the extent of hyperthermia and dehydration. Developing robust heat-health warning systems could act as a first line of defense by raising awareness of upcoming heat events and recommending strategies to minimize possible heat complications. For example, in Canada, provinces are known to issue heat warnings at least 18-24 hours before a heat event, when ambient temperature is likely to remain above 30 degrees C for a minimum of two days. Public advisories include identifying the signs of heat stress, ensuring people drink adequate amounts of cold fluid or seeking an air-conditioned environment.

Air conditioning is the most effective strategy that can be recommended since it



effectively removes the heat stimulus and minimizes the risk of adverse cardiovascular outcomes. However, only a minuscule number of households around the world have air conditioning. Recent research supports electric fan use, skin wetting and immersing the feet in tap water as simple alternatives to air conditioning to stay cool during extreme heat events

The reviewers note that more research is needed to better understand the reasons why extreme heat is associated with a greater risk of adverse cardiovascular outcomes. They called for further studies on the effect of cardiovascular medication on the human body's physiological responses during heat exposure; the optimal cooling strategies that can be recommended to individuals with heart disease during heatwaves; and safe environmental limits for outdoor exercise in individuals with heart disease.

Brain stimulation improves mental functions

Merging targeted electrical brain stimulation with artificial intelligence (AI) can improve specific human brain functions, says a new study, which opens the door for potential treatment of various mental illnesses.

Researchers at the University of Minnesota Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital in the United States have shown through a pilot study on humans that it is possible to improve self-control and mental flexibility in people by electrically stimulating specific areas of the brain in tandem with AI algorithms

For their research, the scientists conducted a study among 12 patients undergoing brain surgery for epilepsy — a procedure that places hundreds of tiny electrodes throughout the brain to record its activity and identify where seizures originate. They identified a specific brain region — the internal capsule — that improved patients' mental function when stimulated with small amounts of electrical energy.

The internal capsule has been shown to be responsible for cognitive control — the process of shifting from one thought pattern or behavior to another — which is impaired in most mental illnesses. For

instance, a person with depression who has weak cognitive control could find themselves unable to get out of 'stuck' negative thought. Because cognitive control is so central to mental illness, finding a way to improve it could be a powerful new way to treat those illnesses.

The team developed algorithms, so that after stimulation, they could track patients' cognitive control abilities, both from their actions and directly from their brain activity. The controller method provided boosts of stimulation whenever the patients were doing worse on a laboratory test of cognitive control. The AI system could read brain activity, 'decode' from that when a patient is having difficulty, and apply a small burst of electrical stimulation to the brain to boost them past that difficulty. An appropriate analogy would be a person using an electric bicycle. When the person has difficulty pedaling, the bike senses this and augments the ride by supplying electric power to drive the bicycle.

The study is the first to show several factors: One one the study showed that a specific human mental function linked to mental illness can be reliably enhanced using precisely targeted electrical stimulation. The study also revealed that there are specific sub-parts of the internal capsule brain structure that are particularly effective for cognitive enhancement. In addition, the study showed that the closed-loop algorithm used as a controller was twice as effective than manually stimulating at random times.

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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

The Big Issues for 2022



JIM O'NEILL

A former chairman of Goldman Sachs Asset Management and a former UK treasury minister, is a member of the Pan-European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development.

With the calendar year drawing to a close, the parlor game of pretending to know what will happen in the next 12 months has begun. Yet when it comes to 2022 (and beyond), I am not sure whether it is worth even pretending. I cannot recall a previous time when there were so many big question marks looming over so many key economic issues.

This deep uncertainty is especially intriguing with respect to financial markets. Should any of several developments to watch take a negative turn, the implications for today's elevated markets could be dire.

Among the most urgent and topical issues, other than COVID-19, is inflation. Are this year's price increases transient, or do they represent something more ominous? My useless answer is, "I don't know." Although I did suggest at this time last year that inflation would become a bigger issue than weak GDP growth, now, as I look ahead to 2022, I am far less sure.

Much of today's inflationary pressures could still relate to the speed of the recovery in many economies, and, of course, to large, still-persisting supply disruptions. But the supply shortages themselves may be symptoms of bigger problems, such as economic over-stimulation,

ineffective monetary policies, or weak productivity growth. The implications for financial markets would be quite different depending on which of these factors are at work, and to what extent.

Many other big questions for 2022 are related to inflation as well. What is the purpose of monetary policy in today's economy? Should we still worry about government debt levels, or have we discovered (by some fluke) that we never needed to worry about this? I am generally open minded, but I do have some strong suspicions in this particular debate.

On fiscal policy and the idea that government debt becomes problematic at some precise level, the events of 2020-21 have demonstrated that much of the conventional thinking was wrong. Far more important is what the debt is for. Debt incurred to prevent a collapse in economic activity is quite different from debt incurred simply to fund an overly ambitious government's agenda.

On monetary policy, it was clear even before the pandemic that the post-2008 world of endless central-bank generosity had outlived its usefulness. We have long needed to get back to a relationship where inflation-adjusted interest rates bear some resemblance to potential GDP growth rates.

While excuses can be made for a brief suspension to manage a major shock like COVID-19, the persistence of ultra-loose monetary policies seems misplaced. As acolytes of Milton Friedman contend, these policies may even be responsible for the recent surge of inflation. It is rather convenient that after years of struggling to achieve higher inflation rates (near or

above their stated targets), central banks now have chosen to regard inflation as temporary.

In fact, central bankers have no better idea than you or I do about whether inflation will last. But even if it does turn out to be transitory, the justification for a generous monetary policy is increasingly dubious. After all, by creating loose financial conditions, central banks are contributing to the growing suspicion that the fruits of modern capitalism are primarily for those privileged few who own assets.

Quietly looming over these issues is the central question of productivity growth, which has been disappointing across most advanced economies for many years. Do pandemic-driven behavioral changes and innovations herald the long-awaited return of robust productivity gains? I have one foot in the optimistic camp, which is partly why I do not see the need for so much monetary stimulus. But, given the persistent disappointments of the past decade, I cannot confidently plant both feet there. As always, policymakers are touting an intention to do more to boost productivity. One hopes they are more serious now than they have been in the past.

As if these challenges and unknowns were not tricky enough, there is also a long list of non-conventional macro issues to consider. Whether the increasingly important Chinese economy can be better integrated into the global economy remains to be seen. It is anyone's guess what twists and turns the pandemic will take. Will Omicron quickly become the new dominant variant, or will it be supplanted by yet another one?



And what about other major threats such as the silent pandemic of antimicrobial resistance or the risks associated with climate change? As matters stand, it seems unlikely that voters – particularly older cohorts on limited or fixed incomes – will tolerate repeated hikes in energy price, even if they are a necessary feature of the transition to cleaner alternatives. As I recently suggested, policymakers will need to think creatively about how to deal with this problem.

Yet another major issue is global poverty, which has started to increase again over the past two years. Eliminating this scourge would appear to be an even bigger challenge than the energy transition.

Finally, there is the pervasive uncertainty about global governance. Unlike in the 2008-10 period, when the G20 proved so effective, there has been almost no meaningful progress on global economic cooperation in 2020-21. Let us hope that 2022 brings a vast improvement on this front.

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