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FDI remains a work in progress

THE TIMES KUWAIT REPORT

Amid relief at reassuring news on the health front and growing angst over the smoldering political scene, news about Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA) presenting its sixth annual report on foreign direct investments (FDI) garnered very little media attention. Despite the laxness from most mainstream media, the report is of concern to everyone who has a stake in the continued welfare and sustainability of Kuwait and its economy, even if its import appears to be lost on those elected and selected to run the country.

The Sixth Annual KDIPA report for the fiscal year 2020 /2021 was submitted to His Highness the Crown Prince, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and to His Highness the Prime Minister, Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah by the

Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Chairman of the Board of Directors of KDIPA, Sheikh Dr. Ahmed Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Also in attendance at the report launch held at Bayan Palace on 15 February, were the Director General of KDIPA, Sheikh Dr. Meshaal Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and the Deputy Chairman of the Board of Directors of KDIPA Wafaa AlQatami.

The executive summary to the report notes that despite the unprecedented COVID-19 health crisis and the resulting overall dire situation in the country and globally, KDIPA maintained its resilience and acted in a concerted and agile manner that enabled it to accomplish several milestone achievements during the report period. The report shows that despite the pandemic, FDI into the Kuwait market increased, with KDIPA attracting KD163,298,898 of new approved direct investments during the review period. Together with the new investments, the cumulative



approved direct investments from the start of operations by KDIPA in 2015 to the end of March 2021 totalled KD1,203,680,745. The cumulative investments were made by 59 different entities from 23 countries, with investments from Europe taking a lead with a share of (67.17%), followed by Asia (22.25%), North

America (10.41%), and the remaining (0.17%) from Oceania.

The report also reveals that sector-wise the cumulative approved direct investments comprised 99.6 percent in the services sector, with the remaining investments being in the industrial sector. Information technology services represented the

leading share (33.3%) in the services sector, followed by oil & gas services (27.05%), construction (18.09%), and health services (5.02%). Health services assumed an important part for the first time attracting inward direct investments as a response to the repercussions brought on by the pandemic, which necessitated placing priority on health and food security.

Sadly, though the KDIPA has received loud vocal endorsement from repeated governments, its activities have for the most part been conferred with only cursory attention and support from different governments. Since 2015, when KDIPA began its operations; and even after 2017, when the revised New Kuwait development plan was outlined, supportive measures from the authorities were largely absent. For most of the past decade, various government iterations in office have been engrossed with, and entangled in, political wheeling-dealings to survive and stay afloat.

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Cabinet scraps COVID-19 restrictions



During its weekly meeting on Monday, the Council of Ministers decided to remove most of the restrictions related to the COVID-19 health crisis, effective as of Sunday 20 February. The decision signals the official start to the return of normalcy in the social, economic and cultural life of the country.

The decision follows a presentation from the Higher Council on Coronavirus Emergency that recommended the scrapping of most restrictions based on assessment of the latest epidemiological situation in the country with regard to the number of daily infections, hospitalizations, recoveries and fatalities, as well as increase in number of vaccinated people, as reported by the coronavirus epidemiology monitoring committee at the Ministry of Health.

Accordingly, the cabinet, headed by His Highness the Premier Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, agreed on canceling social distancing rules in mosques, public transport, cinemas, theaters, and banquet

halls. It also ended the ban on in-person events such as conferences, training courses, weddings, funerals and others, according to a statement read out by Foreign Minister and Minister of Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr. Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah following the cabinet meeting. The statement also noted that though the cabinet decision is effective as of 20 February, public sector offices will return to full work capacity only as of Sunday, 13 March.

The cabinet also scrapped the restrictions that did not allow unvaccinated people to travel abroad, or enter malls and shopping centers, as well as canceled the need for weekly PCR tests for unvaccinated under 16-years-old students wishing to attend classes in person. It also restricted quarantine requirement only for students whose PCR test came positive or those who showed virus symptoms.

The cabinet also removed the requirement for pre-departure, post-arrival PCR test and home quarantine requirements for arrivals who got three shots of the Kuwaiti-authorized vaccines. Moreover, those who arrive in Kuwait after receiving two doses of the vaccine, will need to quarantine only for seven days after entering the country, and they can end the quarantine at any time if they present a negative PCR test.

However, unimmunized arrivals will have to submit a certificate of a negative PCR test conducted within 72 hours before the departure and must quarantine at home for seven days and conduct a PCR test after the end of the quarantine period affirming that they are not infected. Unvaccinated young

arrivals, who are under 16 years old, are exempted from these tests and quarantine measures.

The cabinet encouraged arrivals to get rapid antigens tests after entering the country if they had symptoms. If the result was positive they would have to conduct a PCR test. The new decision also divides vaccinated people into two groups: fully vaccinated and not-fully vaccinated people: fully vaccinated people are those who took

three shots of one of vaccines authorized in Kuwait; those who took the second shot less than nine months ago; and those who recovered from an infection in the past three months.

Not fully vaccinated people are those two who received two doses of the vaccine more than nine months ago. The cabinet decision also identifies unvaccinated people as those who did not take two shots of the vaccines authorized in Kuwait.

Citizens head to Riyadh to celebrate Kuwait national holidays

In what is considered a condemnation of the continued lack of entertainment opportunities in the country, and a deafening denunciation of the hardline attitude of some lawmakers to the staging of recreational events in Kuwait, citizens and residents are making a beeline out of the country to enjoy the upcoming extended holidays celebrating National and Liberation days.

Neighboring countries have promptly seized the opportunity arising from the mass exit of people from Kuwait and are offering a string of entertainment events and festivities themed to celebrate the two national holidays of Kuwait.

Last week, head of the Public Authority for Entertainment in Saudi Arabia, Counselor Turki Al-Sheikh, announced that a special concert will be held on 25 February in Riyadh featuring Kuwaiti artistes, to celebrate Kuwait's National Day.

In a statement issued by the Saudi Entertainment Authority, Al-Sheikh revealed that the celebration of the national holidays of Kuwait will be organized, under the umbrella of the Riyadh season, under the title 'A Night in the Love of Kuwait'. Among the celebrity Kuwaiti artistes participating in the event are Abdullah Al-Ruwaisheed, Nawal, Nabil Shuaib, Mutref Al-Mutref and Musaed Al-Balushi, as well as Hayat Al-Fahd, Saad Al-Faraj, and Suad Abdullah who will be engaging in the festive event.

Meanwhile, airlines and travel agencies have reported that there is a significant increase in the number of citizens traveling to Riyadh and Jeddah during the national holidays. All airlines are flying 7 flights per day to Riyadh, and the number is expected to reach 30 flights on 24 and 25 of this month, coinciding with the Riyadh concert. Airline ticket prices to Riyadh and nearby



destinations are reported to have soared by 20 to 30 percent in anticipation of the mass exodus.

In his statement, Al-Sheikh extended an invitation to all Kuwaitis to attend the event, saying, "We celebrate together a historic night for Kuwaiti art in the Riyadh season. Could anything be more ironic than Saudi Arabia arranging a concert of Kuwaiti artistes in Riyadh for Kuwaitis to celebrate their national holidays? Nothing is also more emblematic of the prevailing dismal situation with regard to entertainment in Kuwait.

While countries around the region are opening up their economies and capitalizing on luring tourism to their shores, Kuwait appears doggedly determined to drive away visitors. The restrictive visit visa rules, the low priority accorded to developing tourism infrastructure and attracting tourists, as well as a government that kowtows to the hardline stance adopted some opposition parliamentarians to staging any entertainment and recreational events in the country, have all contributed to people fleeing the country at every opportunity they get to relax and enjoy time with their family and friends.

Campaign to celebrate National and Liberation days launched

A national campaign to celebrate the 61st Anniversary of National Day on 25 February and the 31st anniversary of Liberation Day on 26 February, began in earnest on Tuesday, 15 February with illumination, flags, bunting and other decorations adorning buildings and streets in Kuwait.

The upcoming national day celebrations are being held in an atmosphere of joy and excitement, after the suspension of these events during the past two years due to the COVID-19 crisis. The sense of freedom and celebratory vigor is likely to be further enhanced this year, following the decision last week by the Cabinet to scrap most of the restrictions, including restrictions on public gatherings in indoor and outdoor spaces, which were introduced during the pandemic to protect people and curtail the spread of infections.

For its part, the Ministry of Information announced through its official account on the Twitter social networking platform that the



official launch of the national campaign will be held under the theme of 'Paradise for All of Us'. In its meeting last week, the committee in charge of the national celebrations urged participants and organizers that despite the canceling of restrictions everyone should adhere to personal preventive health measures during the celebrations.



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Municipal Council proposes new entertainment, sports city



LuLu Hypermarket marks National Day with unique display

LuLu Hypermarket, the leading retail chain in the region, has always attracted shoppers to its various outlets in the country for the wide variety of products offered at competitive prices, and for the range of promotions and celebrations held throughout the year. Now, in what is undoubtedly a first time, huge crowds of shoppers and visitors are heading to the Al-Qurain outlet of LuLu Hypermarket to witness a stunning display of creative ingenuity.

As part of celebrations to mark the 61st anniversary of Kuwait's National Day and the 31st anniversary of Liberation Day, LuLu Hypermarket has displayed a unique recreation of the three structures that comprise the iconic Kuwait Towers. The towering display, made from more than 17,000 individual milk and fruit juice packets from local firm Kuwait Danish Dairy (KDD), is attracting hordes of people eager to see the display first-hand, and to pose for 'selfies' before the artistic creation.

The spectacular creative display, crafted from stacking and balancing the small dairy and juice tetra packets from KDD to a height of nearly six meters high, has around 88 layers of packets stacked one above the other. Amazing is a word that barely does justice in describing this stupendous creativity in what is described as a record and a first in Kuwait.

LuLu Hypermarket, which has long prided itself on offering customers an exciting shopping experience has certainly outdone itself with this dramatic display of dexterity and creativity.

Citizens in Sabah Al-Ahmad complain of insect-infested swamps

Minister of Public Works, Eng. Ali Al-Mousa is reported to have responded promptly to requests by citizens of Sabah Al-Ahmad City to spray waterlogged areas near the suburb with pesticides to get rid of mosquitoes and insects breeding in the swamp-like conditions.

Head of the Sabah Al-Ahmad City People's Committee Turki Al-Osaimi said the minister had asked the Public Authority for Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR) to spray 100 liters of pesticides using four-wheel-drive vehicles belonging to PAAAFR in all sewers and rainwater collection areas in the vicinity of the city.

In other news related to housing in Kuwait, statistics from Public Authority for Housing Welfare shows that demand for housing in the country has increased by a third during 2021 relative to a year earlier. The figures show that there were 8,424 housing requests from citizens in 2021, compared to 5,634 such requests in 2020, marking an increase in demand of over 33 percent.

The statistics also show that in terms of numbers, the value of the monthly rent allowance for citizens who are entitled for residential care will cross KD14 million annually.

During a regular session of the Municipal Council last week members have called on the council to provide land to develop a new entertainment and sports city complex in the south of the country.

In a proposal forwarded to Council Chairman Osama Al-Otaibi, council member Abdullah Al-Roumi, called for establishing an entertainment and sports city complex integrated with a commercial market that could include various kinds of entertainment and recreational facilities for citizens and residents in the south of the country.

The proposal is said to include plans for all kinds of recreational activities for all age groups, in addition to providing venues and facilities for water games, sports and games arena, restaurants, cafes, creches and nurseries for children under five years of age, as well as several other entertainment facilities. Al-Otaibi said that his proposal came out of an interest in reviving tourism and making Kuwait a financial, commercial, and recreational center.

Meanwhile, municipal members Hamdi Al-Azmi, Ali bin Sayer and Abdullah Al-Roumi also submitted a joint proposal to allocate a site for the establishment of an integrated medical city in the south of the country.



In their proposal, the members demanded that the city include several specialized hospitals that would attract international specialist doctors for all diseases to treat citizens without the need for them to travel abroad for such medical care.

The proposal also calls for the medical city to contain residential villas for doctors, in addition to establishing housing for the nursing and other related medical staff, and providing services to meet the residents needs, as well as setting up designated places for restaurants, cafes, and parks.

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Thought for the week

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Tim Jackson
British Ecological Economist

How to handle menstrual cramps

Ask Mira : Eating Right to Live Happy & Healthy



Many women have to deal with menstrual pain that can range from mild to severe, but for some, the pain is really unbearable. Changing some food choices and introducing other healthier ones can help a lot to decrease or prevent this frustrating pain. The changes should be made before or during your menstrual cycle. Here are some tips to handle menstrual pain.

Eat healthy: Keep a healthy diet that includes more fruits and vegetables, 72 hours prior to your periods. You need to have fiber from fruits and veggies to clean your body of the excess of estrogen which has been linked to heavier and painful periods.

Increase your intake of calcium, vitamin D and magnesium: These minerals are known for proper muscle function. They will relax your muscle cramps, and in turn relax your body. So before the start of your cycle, increase the consumption of dairy products (milk, cheese, and yogurt), nuts, spinach and beans. Most

Leafy greens, in particular, are one of the best vegetables to eat on your period, specifically spinach, kale, collard greens and swiss chard. This is because they are filled with iron, which helps to replenish the iron lost when you are menstruating.

Eat bananas: This fruit is rich in potassium and vitamin B6, which reduces muscle cramps as well. It also helps to reduce your estrogen level during your cycle.

Avocados and olive oil: These are excellent for you due to the presence of vitamin E, which helps to minimize pain and anxiety.

Reduce your salt intake: Salt can likely cause water retention and bloating that may magnify your cramps.

Go for pumpkin seeds: They contain a natural relaxant. Start eating a cup of these seeds two days before your periods and you will be pain free.

Use pickle juice as a remedy: Drain the juice from the pickle bottle and drink it. This remedy works very well for

women with menstrual cramps.

Omega-3 prevents cramps: It also contains natural anti-inflammatories that ease your pain. Include more fish, salmon, oysters and nuts in your diet before and during the menstrual cycle.

Some dietary changes can be really worth it to help you lead a more fulfilling life, and avoid discomfort. Another tip is to spend some time doing regular exercises which can be very helpful for you. Walking and swimming for 20 minutes during periods have shown to decrease pain in some women.

Hello Mam, I enjoy your column a lot. Could you tell me what are liquid calories, and how they can affect your diet? - Anonymous

Liquid calories are the calories you are taking from drinking liquids like protein shakes, juices, yogurt and so. Not only can liquid calories make you gain weight, just like calories from food, they do not make you feel full for long either. So, you end up eating more calories in addition to what you have already had to drink.

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

RECIPE

Crispy Sesame Bar



Crispy sesame bars are made during winter months in India, as it is both nutritious and warming to the body. Sesame seeds and the jaggery used to provide the sugar content in the bars also have iron and other minerals that are beneficial to health. Depending on availability, you can replace the sesame seeds with peanuts, gram dal and other nuts for a different take on the same nutritious bar.

Total time: 15 minutes.
Serving: 15 to 20 pieces.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup sesame seeds
- 1 cup grated jaggery
- 1 tsp ghee for greasing

Directions:

- Place sesame seeds in a non-stick pan and dry roast on a medium flame for 5 to 6 minutes and set aside
- Melt jaggery in a pan over low flame and cook for 3 to 5 minutes, stirring constantly until the mixture turns a golden brown syrupy form. Turn off the flame.
- Check whether the syrup is the right consistency by adding a small drop of it in a bowl of cold water. If it turns into a solid drop that is crisp and easy to break, then the syrup has the correct consistency required. Otherwise, cook for a few more minutes and again check the consistency using the same method
- When syrup is of right consistency add the roasted sesame seeds and mix thoroughly until all the sesame seeds are well coated with the syrup
- Stir together the mixture quickly as the syrup will harden very rapidly
- Transfer the sesame-syrup mixture to a greased worktop or plate
- Spread evenly using a greased rolling pin
- Mark the spread into square bars with a sharp knife and set aside to cool
- Store the cut pieces in an airtight container so it stays good for 3-4 weeks.



Chef Chhaya Thakker

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

Serbian Embassy marks Statehood Day

Minister Counselor/Chargé d' Affaires at the Serbian Embassy in Kuwait, Sanja Vidakovic, speaking in an exclusive interview with The Times Kuwait on the occasion of celebrating her country's Statehood Day, highlighted and praised the deep and friendly ties that exist between Serbia and Kuwait.

She pointed out that the small Serbian community in Kuwait, mainly professionals including doctors, engineers, and sport coaches, are highly regarded in their professions and respect Kuwait laws. "They enjoy the well-

Known Kuwaiti hospitality, which reflects the deep roots and close long-lasting friendship between the two countries and people," said the diplomat.

The Serbian diplomat took the opportunity to convey, on behalf of the Embassy of Serbia, sincere felicitations to the leadership and friendly people of Kuwait on the upcoming celebrations of Kuwait's 61st anniversary of Independence and the 28th anniversary of Liberation. She also extended best wishes for a peaceful and prosperous future for Kuwait under the wise leadership of His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Amir of the State of Kuwait.

Explaining the significance of Serbian Statehood Day that is celebrated each year on 15 February, Mrs. Vidakovic said the day commemorates the First Serbian Uprising in 1804, which evolved into the Serbian Revolution against Ottoman rule. The revolution ultimately resulted in the recognition of Serbian nationality by the Ottoman Empire (formally in 1817, de jure in 1835). On the same day in 1835, during the rule of Miloš Obrenović, the first modern Serbian constitution was adopted in the town of Kragujevac. This date was taken as the beginning of the creation of the modern Serbian state and has been celebrated as a national holiday since 2001.

Elaborating on the bilateral relations between the two countries, Mrs. Vidakovic said that her country is proud of the rich history of relationship with Kuwait, pointing out that the friendship of our peoples and countries, begun decades ago, way back in 1963. She reiterated the commitment of Serbia to strengthen and develop overall relations with Kuwait, especially in the field of economic cooperation, in order to return it to its former exceptional level. She stressed that Kuwait can count on the solidarity and support of Serbia in all activities carried out for the purpose of progress and development, especially when

it comes to security, and regional and world peace.

She added that the recent visit to Serbia by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for the Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr. Ahmed Nasser Al Muhammad in October 2021 and his meetings with Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić, the Prime Minister Ana Brnabić and Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikola Selaković, laid down the road map for further strengthening excellent relations existing between the two friendly countries, especially in economic, commercial and investment fields.

She highlighted the importance of following up the implementation of the bilateral road map agreed upon, in order to turn it into reality, and based on the interest of citizens in both countries. "I look forward to more high-level meetings and exchange of visits between Kuwaiti and Serbian officials and experts as well as a meeting of the relevant Joint committee," said the diplomat.



“ Explaining the significance of Serbian Statehood Day that is celebrated each year on 15 February, Mrs. Vidakovic said the day commemorates the First Serbian Uprising in 1804, which evolved into the Serbian Revolution against Ottoman rule. ”

Mrs. Vidakovic pointed out that the meetings were held on the sideline of the high-level commemorative conference marking the 60th Anniversary of the Non-Aligned movement that was held in Belgrade on 11 and 12 October, 2021, in cooperation with the Republic of Azerbaijan. The desire was to pay tribute to the first conference of the Non-Aligned in Belgrade, which was

held in 1961, during the bloc divisions, and which gave great historical significance to the creation of a different vision of the world.

She added that during the commemorative conference, the president, prime minister and foreign minister of Serbia received separately representatives of 120 countries including Kuwait. Mrs. Vidakovic also added that the visit of Sheikh Dr. Ahmad Nasser Al Muhammad to Serbia was the first visit of that level from Kuwait since the breakup of Yugoslavia, before quickly clarifying the Serbian and Kuwaiti ministers of foreign affairs had also met earlier on the sideline of the 76th United Nations General Assembly in New York.

"Serbia, as the legal successor of Yugoslavia, and a founding member of the UN and the Non-Aligned Movement, is a proud promoter of the policy of multilateralism and respect for international legal norms. Belgrade, as a centuries-old symbol of a crossroad of cultures and religions, has always worked to encourage dialogue and build new bridges of cooperation with countries around the world," said Mrs. Vidakovic.

On the subject of tourism to Serbia, the diplomat confirmed that since June 2015 Kuwaiti citizens are not required to obtain a visa to enter Serbia, as a way of strengthening the bond between the citizens in both countries. She also called for launching direct flights between Kuwait and Belgrade for further developing the commercial exchange and tourism, and to return to their status before the COVID-19 crisis. Mrs. Vidakovic also took the opportunity and invited Kuwaiti citizens to visit Serbia where she said they can enjoy fantastic landmarks, good food and extraordinary Serbian hospitality which is well-known. It is worth mentioning that Novi Sad in Serbia gained the cultural title of 'European Capital of Culture for 2022' of the European Union.

Speaking about COVID-19 crisis, she praised the efforts exerted by Kuwait authorities in overcoming the crisis and pointed out that Kuwait managed to successfully vaccinate more than 80 percent of citizens and residents. The diplomat also highlighted the extraordinary efforts of the Serbian president and government in combating the coronavirus, noting that in the early stage of Corona crises, Serbia provided almost all different kinds of vaccines to all its citizens, and went as far as offering vaccinations to all foreign diplomats in Belgrade and opening the borders for the citizens of neighboring countries to get vaccinated for free. She also noted that despite the health crisis, Serbia



achieved a high ranking among European countries in terms of economic growth that reached 6.5 percent.

A graduate of Oriental Studies at Belgrade University, Mrs. Vidakovic asserted that she has devoted her professional career to cooperation with Arab countries. Talking about her tenure as head of the diplomatic mission of her country to Tunisia from 2002 to 2005, deputy ambassador of the Embassy of Serbia to Cairo and her five year service at the Embassy of Serbia in Kuwait from 2011 to 2016, when she was deputy ambassador, she expressed happiness over the return to Kuwait. The Serbian diplomat is fluent in Arabic, and fond of Arab culture.

She concluded by inviting the Kuwaiti journalists to cover and observe closely the next Serbian presidential elections and early parliamentary elections scheduled for April 2022.

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Amendments to real estate investment could boost sector

Reports indicate the government, in coordination with international specialized agencies, is studying the prospect of reviving the real estate industry, especially the investment sector, with the aim of rectifying existing shortcomings and attracting more investments to the real estate sphere through several new amendments.

Among the amendments being studied by the authorities are ending the ban on foreign ownership of real estate investment units,

and allowing long-term residence visas to special categories of investors. Neighboring countries have profited immensely from introducing more relaxed investment and residence rules for expatriates and Kuwait is apparently aiming to emulate these successes. Another proposal reportedly being examined by the government is the establishment of a public real estate authority with sufficient autonomy to attract global investors, improve the real estate investment climate and retain investments of



citizens in the country.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis in January 2020, the real estate industry in Kuwait has suffered heavy losses. Over the past two years many foreigners have chosen to return to their own countries, or send their families back home, because of increasing cost of living, decline in economic activity, and loss of jobs, both in public sector from the Kuwaitization drive, and in the private sector from retrenchments during the economic downturn.



Al Muzaini Exchange opens 121st branch in Al Surra

Al Muzaini Exchange, the leading exchange house in Kuwait celebrated its 80 years with the latest opening of its 121st branch in Al Surra, Kuwait on 13 February by General Manager Hugh Fernandes and Al Muzaini Management.

Hugh Fernandes, General Manager of Al Muzaini Exchange said: 'Today we are delighted to introduce our latest opening that brings Al Muzaini near to our customers in Al Surra. We

continually invest in our product to ensure leading excellence of remittances and we know that customer expects fantastic service when it comes to money transfers and foreign exchanges. Our commitment is delivering a great customer experience every time and it is our number one priority. I would also like to congratulate all the winners and thank them for their trust'.

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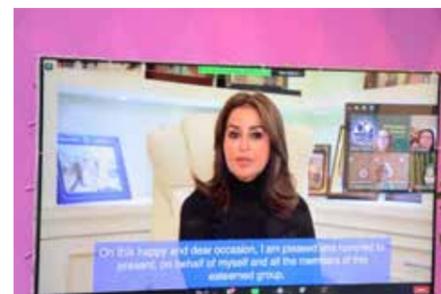
IWG celebrates virtual National, Liberation days online

International Women's Group (IWG) celebrated Kuwait National and Liberation Day 2022 with a festive and informative Zoom event covering Kuwait's history and an array of Kuwait's traditions and customs.

President of IWG Cristiana Baldocci welcomed members and guests by saying that National and Liberation Day represents the spirit of Kuwait and its people, built on the fundamental pillars of defending freedom, solidarity, and generosity, and respect for human values.

Mrs. Baldocci then thanked the Honorary President of IWG, Sheikha Hanouf Bader Al Muhamad Al Sabah for her video address which mentioned the following: "Today we celebrate 61st National Day, marking the independence of the State of Kuwait, as well as the 31st anniversary of our liberation from the brutal Iraqi occupation. In another respect we also celebrate decades of achievements and national progress filled with pride and honor, the result of which has succeeded in elevating Kuwait, to have its flag fly high among nations of the world." She added, "On this happy and dear occasion, I am pleased and honored to present, on behalf of myself and all the members of this esteemed group, my most sincere and best wishes, and my congratulations and blessings to His Highness Sheik Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Amir of the State of Kuwait, and His Highness Sheik Mishaal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Crown Prince of the State of Kuwait, and to the people of Kuwait and all those who reside in this wonderful nation."

The event then continued with a presentation from Kefah Al-Mutawa, who spoke on the courage shown and sacrifices made, during the dark days of the invasion; recounting his experiences during the occupation of Kuwait and captivity in Iraq. The event continued with a moving musical Oud recording by Abdullah Al Mulla. Then Aisha



Al Saleh, a researcher on Kuwait's heritage, entertained the audience with many of the beautiful Kuwaiti celebratory traditions and customs of the past from Burgaa to Boushiya to swaying girl's hair at weddings.

The event continued with a traditional dance performed by British School of Kuwait (BSK) students and was followed by BSK musicians who took the stage to perform Kuwait's National Anthem, entralling the audience.

The final segment of the event was an informative documentary on modern Kuwait, its present and future; sufficient evidence of the Nation's unparalleled recovery and proof of an outstanding future ahead.

In closing, Mrs. Baldocci thanked the participants, members of the board, and all the members and honored guests for joining IWG's National and Liberation Day celebrations.



Promoting Economic diplomacy between Indonesia and Kuwait

Her Excellency Lena Maryana
Ambassador to Kuwait of the Republic of Indonesia

RICKY LAXA
STAFF WRITER

On 22 December 2022, the new Ambassador of Indonesia to Kuwait H.E. Lena Maryana presented her credentials to His Highness the Crown Prince of Kuwait Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Ambassador Maryana, the first female envoy from Asia to Kuwait, recently held a brief interview with The Times Kuwait (TTK). During the meeting, Ambassador Maryana shared relevant information on Indonesia's foreign policies and its vital role globally, in the region, and in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

TTK: What would be your main advocates during your tenure to further better the relationship with your country and Kuwait?

Ambassador Maryana: Indonesia's foreign policy priorities are to improve economic diplomacy, protection of diplomacy, sovereignty and nationality and enhance Indonesia's vital role in the region and globally.

TTK: What are your top priorities in terms of promoting Indonesia in Kuwait?

Ambassador Maryana: Economic diplomacy will focus on the enhancement of domestic and traditional markets, promotion of trade, and integrated investment along with outbound investment encouragement

The main key for protection diplomacy improvement is the presence of the state in protecting its citizens abroad. To follow up the country's success in revolutionizing the mindset about protection and innovation, MOFA set three objectives: 'one single data' for Indonesian citizens abroad to facilitate protection; reconstruction of migration governance for safe, orderly and regular migration; and building focus on preventive actions for crises through education and community empowerment.

TTK: How is Indonesia's relation with ASEAN?

Ambassador Maryana: Indonesia's contribution and leadership in the region and the world will be carried out in various forums. In 2022 Indonesia will hold the presidency

of the G 20. Further, in 2023 Indonesia will be the Chair of ASEAN. Indonesia's priorities in international fora are to put forward regional and global cooperation for the promotion and protection of human rights; and building the capacity of developing countries in respecting, promoting and protecting human rights through international cooperation.

TTK: How important is Indonesia to the ASEAN and the country's contribution to ASEAN?

Ambassador Maryana: Association of (ASEAN) is a regional organization that is located in Southeast Asia. ASEAN was established on 8 August 1967 with five states as its founding



Indonesia's foreign policy priorities: improve the economic diplomacy, protection of diplomacy, sovereignty and nationality, and Indonesia's vital role in the region and globally.

members: Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and Philippines and now ASEAN has 10 member states. The goal of ASEAN's founding fathers is to improve the lives of its people that is reflected in Southeast Asia's economic and cultural development, social progress and regional peace and security. ASEAN, is arguably the most durable and successful regional grouping in the developing world.

TTK: Indonesia is currently chair to ACK, what are expected in terms of diplomatic missions, policies and especially activities?

Ambassador Maryana: ASEAN Community Kuwait (ACK) was formed on 31 December 2015, based on three pillars, which are ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, ASEAN Political-Security Community and ASEAN Economic Community. Currently, Indonesia is the chairman of the ACK and will hold the chairmanship for six months. In this short period of time, we hope that Indonesia, supported by all ASEAN representatives, will be able to carry out several activities which highlight our togetherness as a big family of ASEAN.

TTK: How many Indonesians do we have in Kuwait now and their current job statuses?

Ambassador Maryana: The number of Indonesians in Kuwait is approximately 6,000. This number is still dominated by domestic workers. We are grateful that the government of Indonesia has stopped sending domestic workers to the MENA region. The second largest profession for Indonesians in Kuwait is as nurses. Currently we are still in the process of sending health workers from Indonesia to work in Kuwait. Other Indonesians work as professionals in the oil sector and hospitality sectors.

TTK: How large was the impact of COVID-19 on Indonesians employed in Kuwait?

Ambassador Maryana: The pandemic had a negative effect on many countries, including Kuwait. In 2020 when the pandemic broke out violently, many Indonesian workers returned to their homeland. However, currently workers (some are new workers) from Indonesia have started coming back to Kuwait. Regarding the number of Indonesians exposed to COVID-19, since the beginning of the pandemic until today, there have been 348 people affected by COVID, some of whom were exposed more than once. The latest conditions are: 5 persons are undergoing self-quarantine, 329 have recovered and 14 have succumbed to the virus.

TTK: Will Indonesia open new job sections for its nationals in Kuwait?

Ambassador Maryana: We hope that soon



there will be more Indonesians coming and working in Kuwait as professional workers, or at least as semi-skilled workers.

Ambassador Maryana was born in Jakarta, and is married with three children. She was a lecturer from 1989-1991 at the Faculty of Tarbiyah, IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta. In 1991 - 1996 She was a Senior Management Administrator, The World Bank Projects, Directorate-General of Regional Development, Ministry of Home Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. In 1996-2001, Resource Assistant, The World Bank Projects, Directorate-General of Regional Development, Ministry of Home Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. In 1997-1999: Representative/Member, People's Consultative Assembly of the Republic of Indonesia. In 2001 - 2004 Advisor to the Minister, Ministry of Cooperatives and Small and Medium Enterprises of the Republic of Indonesia and from 2006 till 2018 Representative / Member of Parliament, Commission I, House Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia. Ambassador Maryana is a political appointee ambassador to Kuwait.

Kuwait provides specialized treatment for eye cancer in children

A team of doctors in Kuwait are now successfully providing specialized diagnosis and treatment for Retinoblastoma, a type of cancer affecting children's retina — the layer of tissue at the back of the eye that senses light and sends images to your brain. The diagnosis and treatment for retinoblastoma, which was previously available only abroad for patients in Kuwait, became challenging with the emergence of COVID-19 global pandemic in 2020 that made traveling abroad for treatment difficult for children in the country.

In response to the situation a team of eye-care specialist doctors at Al-Bahar Eye Center in Kuwait began to hone their skills and training in equipment to offer the same diagnosis and treatment in the country. Speaking about the new treatment, Chief of Al-Bahar Eye Center, Dr. Abdullah Al-Baghli, a consultant ophthalmologist, said that the formation of such a medical team is considered an unprecedented and noteworthy event and a remarkable achievement for the health ministry.

He commended the magnanimous efforts

of the specialized team members as they have successfully managed to reduce the number of patients traveling abroad to receive medical care for this rare form of childhood retinal cancer.

Adding his comments, the Team leader Dr. Adnan Al-Wayel, explained the team of specialists from Al-Bahar Eye Center and other centers. The specialist team consisted of doctors, radiologists, and genealogists who worked together closely to diagnose and treat new cases, as well as monitor patients who have already received treatment abroad prior to the pandemic. He added that diagnosis is done within 48 hours maximum and according to protocol that adheres to the highest medical standards.

For her part, Dr. Alaa Al-Ali, who is assigned to the monitoring team, stated that Retinoblastoma is considered one of the most lethal cancers affecting children's retinas, as the tumor grows quite rapidly. Indicating that early diagnosis and treatment could save a child's life, she added that the team diagnosed and treated 10 children aged between three months to two years, as

well as continued the treatment process with children who received care abroad, all of whom were in advanced stages of treatment.

She stressed on the importance of creating awareness and raising attention of parents to early signs of this disease, such as whitening of eye pupils, eyes that do not appear to look in the same directions, as well as less common symptoms including eye reddening and bulging of eyes. Elaborating on the treatment methods, Dr. Al-Ali named several ways including laser treatment, chemotherapy, cauterization, indicating that radiology and examination are done under full anesthesia, adding that eye excision might be necessary for advanced cases, so cancerous cells do not spread to the child's brain.

Adding his voice to the benefits of radiology, Head of C unit in radiology and tumors department at the Kuwait Cancer Control Center, Dr. Ahmad Bushehri pointed out that much progress has been made in radiotherapy in recent years, and noted that most cases that require it are advanced cancer cases that are not responsive to traditional



surgery or chemotherapy.

For her part, Pediatric Neuro-radiologist at Ibn Sina hospital, Dr. Fatima Dashti, noted that children are diagnosed for retinoblastoma through the use of MRI, not CT scans, so children are not unnecessarily exposed to radiation. Dr. Dashti added that after treatment, the radiology department conducts periodic examinations every six months to monitor the child's responsiveness to the treatment.

IOM launches strategy for Gulf Countries 2021-2024

International Organization for Migration (IOM) launched its 2021-2024 Strategy for the Gulf countries, through a virtual conference on 17 February. The strategy, designed to guide its work with governments and stakeholders in the region, aims to enhance migration governance to harness the benefits of migration for everyone.

The strategy outlines nine objectives built around three strategic pillars: governance, mobility and resilience. Through these pillars, IOM seeks to support Gulf countries in managing migration priorities and reforming migration governance, ensuring safe and dignified mobility pathways for migrants, addressing human trafficking, and forecasting migration drivers for safer, more regular and orderly migration movements.

IOM's strategy for Gulf Countries stands as complementary to the 'Regional Strategy for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region 2020-2024', which was formally launched last year.

"IOM Strategy for the Gulf Countries is launched at a critical time to enhance IOM's expanding efforts in the Gulf countries

to ensure that migration is safe, orderly, and regular and is guided by national programming," said IOM's Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, Carmela Godeau. The strategy puts forward IOM's vision for continued collaboration with Gulf governments and stakeholders on key migration priorities. It comes in alignment with national development agendas, visions, Gulf countries' commitment to the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG), while being responsive to the context and specificities of each country.

The strategy embraces cross-cutting priorities that focus on youth, gender, and disability inclusion, evidence and research-based programming and policy development, and building partnerships and alliances with governments, private sector, UN agencies, civil society, migrant organizations, academia, the media, and other important stakeholders.

Through the strategy, IOM reiterates its capacity to work with Gulf governments and stakeholders in new areas, as well as encourages inter-state consultation mechanisms between

Gulf countries and countries of origin and transit in Asia and Africa.

The IOM Strategy for the Gulf Countries is an essential reflection of IOM's ongoing commitment to work in and with Gulf countries on critical migration issues. IOM has been expanding its footprint in the Gulf countries for several decades," said Hassan Mostafa Abdel-Moneim, the special advisor to IOM's director-general for the Gulf.

"We look forward to continuing engagements with our partners in the Gulf aiming to establish a shared vision on migration governance priorities while ensuring that the rights, dignity, and safety of all people are maintained," he added.

IOM established its presence in the Gulf in 1991 when it opened its office in Kuwait. During the past several decades, IOM continued to play a growing role in the Gulf and has more recently expanded its activities in a number of countries in the region.

Currently, IOM has missions in Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar. IOM also has an active presence and programmes in Saudi Arabia and the UAE and provides direct assistance to



migrant workers and their families and Victims of Trafficking in Oman.

The United Nations Networks on Migration (UNNM) have been established in five Gulf countries. IOM is co-leading these networks in partnership with other UN sister agencies to prioritize important cross-cutting migration issues and support governments in achieving GCM objectives and the SDGs.

In 2020, more than 30 million international migrants were living in the Gulf countries, according to UN data.

British Ambassador visits Dasman Diabetes Institute

British Ambassador to Kuwait, H.E. Belinda Lewis, paid a field visit to Dasman Diabetes Institute (DDI), which was established by the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences. Ambassador Lewis was received by Dr. Qais Saleh Al-Duwairi, Director-General, and Tarek Abdullah Alerian, Director of Public Relations and Media at DDI.

The purpose of the ambassador's visit to the Institute was to get to know more about the important scientific role that the institution plays in Kuwait and to explore means of enhancing scientific cooperation. During the visit, the ambassador learned more about the many scientific research topics that the institute focuses on, and discussed issues of common interest between the two sides.

For his part, Dr. Al-Duwairi briefed the ambassador about the institute's scientific progress, its importance, and its role in the



service of scientific research in Kuwait, and discussed ways to enhance joint research and scientific cooperation. In turn, Ambassador Lewis praised the institute's impressive developments and achievements.

Tens of thousands in detention awaiting legal process

Latest figures on detention at police stations indicate that tens of thousands of people are being held in detention awaiting further legal proceedings against them.

Statistics issued by the Public Security Sector at the Ministry of Interior (MoI) for 2021 revealed that a total of 19,478 people are being detained in police stations. Of this number, 3,484 are hardened criminals and people wanted in connection with civil cases. In addition the figures show that there are 2,583 residence law violators, 358 detained in connection with trading or consuming alcohol, and 3,089 for trading and consuming drugs. There are also 1,041 people being detained as they were reported as absconding and 7,301 for not holding proper identification documents.

Other figures from the MoI were with regard

to traffic violations, with a total of 66,284 miscellaneous traffic citations issued, 32,326 traffic accidents recorded, and 1,657 vehicles, wanted by law were seized. In addition, 799 vehicles were impounded for various other reasons and 103 violations were issued for parking in places reserved for people with disabilities.

The statistics also revealed that the Capital Governorate ranked first in the number of misdemeanor cases registered during the past year with 4,532 misdemeanors, followed by Hawalli Governorate with 3,895 cases.

Meanwhile, Farwaniya Governorate ranked first in the number of criminal cases with 976 cases, followed by the Jahra Governorate with felony cases 732 cases. According to the statistics, 414 money felony cases and 661 cheque misdemeanors were also registered in the previous year.

Digital banks help Kuwait keep pace with global trends

The Central Bank of Kuwait's recent decision to open the door for the establishment of digital banks signaled a new milestone in the state financial regulator's drive for digitization and keeping abreast with the latest trends in global financial services, Kuwaiti banking officials and experts have concurred.

In separate interviews with local media, they argued that the move was also driven by growing needs from a tech-savvy young generation who are searching for easy-to-access financial services. Executive Director of the Supervision Sector at the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) Waleed Al-Awadhi told KUNA that the digital banks will have no branches and will offer all banking services through digital channels. This tech-based model saves cost and time, he clarified, adding that these banks do not have the paperwork complications of the traditional counterparts. Al-Awadhi unveiled that the Central Bank of Kuwait had worked intensively in recent years, especially during the coronavirus pandemic for achieving digital transformation, boosting cybersecurity and encouraging innovation.

He noted that most local banks have great capabilities in digital banking services. What is

new about the new banking license which was recently announced by the Central Bank is that it allows the establishment of a standalone digital bank, which can provide all banking services through online only, he explained.

Digital banks will be able to use the latest financial technologies to offer creative financial solutions at low costs, he envisaged.

Al-Awadhi stated that the existing traditional banks also have the ability and the required infrastructures to provide digital services. The existing banks can also apply for a license to open digital units or a new digital bank in partnership with a shareholding company, he pointed out. Financial shareholding companies can also apply to get a license for establishing a digital bank, he said.

He stressed that the regulatory requirements, guidelines, instructions and controls applicable to traditional and digital banks are the same, indicating that the capital required to establish a digital bank in Kuwait would be KD 75 million (about USD 247.5 million), the same amount required for a traditional bank. He indicated that the CBK receives applications for digital bank license until June 30, 2022. It will study all applications and give initial approvals before the end of the year. The CBK will also set a deadline for

those who got licenses to complete procedures and start operation, he said. For his part, Manager of the Off-Site Supervision Department at Central Bank of Kuwait Dr. Mohammed Al-Khamis said that the CBK's decision on February 2, 2022 started with collecting applications for digital bank license. He added that it was taken after the development of the digital banking framework and studying of relevant best practices of more than 25 central banks and experiences of 40 digital banks worldwide.

Al-Khamis added that the framework in Kuwait allows the provision of digital banking services according to three models: a unit within a traditional bank, or through a partnership between such bank and a digital institution or the establishment of a standalone digital bank. For his part, Managing Partner for the Newbury Economic Consultancy Issam Al-Tawari said that granting licenses for digital banks in Kuwait has become a necessity due to the great development in this field in various countries and the growing international competition.

Al-Tawari cautioned that the opening of this (large) number of digital banks in the world could attract a large segment of Kuwaiti young investors to banking markets that do not subject to the CBK supervision, especially as



65 percent of the Kuwaiti population is young, and the behavior of this category is completely linked to non-traditional digital services. He suggested that the prevailing global trend of the banking sector is the transition to digital banks, which offer a wide scope for innovation and entrepreneurship.

Al-Tawari, however, ruled out the possibility of Kuwaiti youth applying for digital bank licenses taking into account the announced requirements and conditions. Unless they come up with innovative services and establish a shareholding company, they will not be able to apply for digital bank licenses, he pointed out.

Kuwait falls 27 spots in Index of Economic Freedom

Kuwait has fallen 27 places on the annual Index of Economic Freedom for 2022, to rank in the 101 position, dropping from the 74 spot it occupied in 2021. The index, which measures and ranks the prevailing economic freedom in each of 177 countries worldwide, is a collaborative endeavor between Heritage Foundation, the US-based conservative think-tank, and the Wall Street Journal.

Economic freedom is defined as the right to work and live without government interference. Greater economic freedom is a vital stepping stone to democracy, and the best way to fulfill the aspirations associated with economic and human rights, notes the Heritage Foundation.

The index ranks countries based on metrics from four main factors as well as several sub-indices. The main elements in the index are the Rule of law, Government size, Regulatory efficiency, and Market openness. The Rule of law includes property rights, judicial effectiveness, and government integrity. The Government size index measures tax burden, government spending and fiscal health. Regulatory efficiency takes into account business, labor and monetary freedoms. Market openness examines trade,

investment and financial freedoms.

The index, which categorizes countries on their economic freedom from 'Repressed' to 'Free', classified Kuwait's economy under the 'Mostly unfree' category, with the country scoring an overall 58.3 out of 100 points for 2022, which is higher than the regional average but lower than the global average.

The UAE, which received a ranking of 33 and fell in the 'Mostly free' category held on to its top place among the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) bloc. Qatar in the 44 slot and Bahrain in 74 were placed in the 'Moderately free' category. Along with Kuwait, Oman (108) and Saudi Arabia (118) were slotted into the 'Mostly unfree' category.

Kuwait has recorded a total loss of 6.8 points in economic freedom since 2017, dropping from the 'Moderately free' category to the 'Mostly unfree' category. Heritage added that the fiscal soundness is strong, but government spending is weighing on the economy.

Kuwait's rating declined in most of the sub-indices, with the exception of the tax burden, financial soundness, freedom of investment, and financial freedom, which remained the same compared to the

previous year's rating.

The report stated that after accelerating from 2017 to 2018 and slowing down in 2019 the Kuwaiti economy contracted in 2020 and then rebounded in 2021, however, during the same period, the weakness of economic freedom in general worsened.

The government's response to the COVID-19 crisis ranked 99th among the countries included in this indicator in terms of strictness, while the economy contracted by 8.1 percent during 2020.

As for the size of government in Kuwait, the report indicated that no individual income taxes are imposed in Kuwait, while in contrast, foreign-owned companies and joint ventures are subject to a corporate income tax of 15 percent, and the total tax burden is 1.4 percent of total domestic income. On the efficiency of the regulatory environment, Heritage indicated that slow bureaucracy and restrictive economic policies impede the growth of the private sector, noting that many Kuwaitis prefer government jobs and are not accustomed to working in the private sector.

With regard to open markets, the report said that the average trade-weighted tariff rate is 4.7 percent, and there are 57 non-



customs measures in effect, adding that the Kuwaiti economy benefits from openness to foreign investment, although some sectors are not open. The modern financial regulator facilitates and welcomes portfolio investments, the banking sector is still well-capitalized, and a more dynamic capital market is developing.

The most liberal economies in the world were found to be Singapore, Switzerland, Ireland, New Zealand, Luxembourg, Taiwan, and Estonia. The most repressed economies were Zimbabwe, Sudan, Cuba, Venezuela and North Korea. Unavailability of data prevented Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Liechtenstein, Somalia, Syria and Yemen from being listed in the index for 2022.

UK Minister for Investment visits Kuwait



Minister for Investment at the Department for International Trade and the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy of the United Kingdom, Lord Gerry Grimstone visited Kuwait on 16 February, accompanied by Her Majesty's Trade Commissioner for the Middle East, Simon Penney, to further strengthen UK-Kuwait trade and investment cooperation.

During the course of the visit, Lord Grimstone met with Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment Abdulwahab Al-Rushaid, the Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait Dr. Mohammad Y. Al-Hashel, and the Managing Director of Kuwait Investment Authority Ghanem Al-Ghenaiman to discuss ways to further strengthen UK-Kuwait bilateral relations and collaborations in trade and investment, as well as ways to enhance even further this cooperation.

At the end of his visit, Lord Grimstone said: "The UK and Kuwait are strong allies and I

have enjoyed my first visit here as Minister for Investment. I was pleased to meet with the Minister of Finance to discuss ways in which our two nations can trade and invest with each other. I also look forward to our continued partnership as the UK draws closer to starting negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council, of which Kuwait is a key member."



The Director of Farwaniya Hospital stated a letter received by the International Food Safety Network on February 16, 2022 states foreign objects (plastic pieces) were found inside frozen vegetables coming from the Kingdom of Sweden and said these products have already been distributed in Kuwait.

The letter called on the director of the hospital to circulate to report to all concerned departments fearing suspected stomach flu cases due to the consumption of such products and to promptly report any confirmed cases that may be discovered.

'Plastic' pieces inside Swedish 'frozen vegetables' in Kuwait

The Head of the Preventive Health Department at the Farwaniya Hospital said there are reports that frozen products, particularly vegetables, coming from the Kingdom of Sweden contain harmful objects.

Crown Prince praises KDIPA efforts to boost investment

His Highness the Crown Prince, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad, praised the efforts of the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA) to create a competitive economic environment that enhances Kuwait's economic position, growth, and diversification of sources of income.

Commendation from the Crown Prince came while receiving the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs,

and Chairman of KDI-PA's Board of Directors, Sheikh Dr. Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, who presented the Crown Prince with the sixth annual report of the authority for 2020/2021.

His Highness praised all the efforts made by those in charge of the authority to provide investment opportunities and for their diligent efforts to improve the business environment and attract direct investments to enhance growth and development of the country as well as diversify its sources of income.



Digital transformation crucial to improving educational outcomes

Digital transformation in the education process is crucial for improving educational outcomes, was a main takeaway from discussion on the third day of the 'First Education Forum - 2022' conference arranged by the National Center for Education Development. The meeting, which brings together academicians, education specialists, school administrators and teachers, is dedicated to discussing the developments and challenges currently facing the education sector.

Speakers at the conference were unanimous in emphasizing that digital transformation has become a necessity and is no longer an option, and that failing to follow this path will lead to low level outcomes in future.

In his address to the gathering, Deputy Director-General of the Information Sector at the Central Agency for Information Technology, Dr. Ammar Al-Husseini said that technology has now become an integral part of business in every institution and in various fields. He also pointed out that besides introducing digital technology, the transformation process will also require the needed human resources, technological procedures, and data provided to the beneficiary.

Highlighting the prevailing divide between what is needed and what is wanted, Al-Husseini stressed the need to keep pace by qualifying teachers, school administrations and all other stakeholders in the process, through introducing them to digital skills. He also emphasized the need to provide a strategy for



digital transformation, and for education to be an essential part of it.

Pointing to a number of challenges facing digital transformation, including organization, culture, resistance to change, lack of vision and strategy, lack of skills and experience, cyber security challenges and data protection privacy, Al-Husseini noted that 83 percent of digital transformation operations failed due to these challenges, according to a study conducted by global management consulting firm McKinsey.

For his part, the founder and CEO of the Information Age Center for Information Technology Consultations, Dr. Salah Al-Najem said digital transformation helps track faltering students, by providing data analysis with several indicators, to show a clear picture of the student based on the time they spend in the educational process, average grades, and their activity in the learning management system. It also contributes to enhancing the experience of learners, mentors, and graduates.

Kuwait Pavilion holds workshops to promote children's literature

The Kuwait Pavilion Expo 2020 Dubai hosted a series of workshops on children's literature by renowned Kuwaiti author, Hiba Mandani. The workshops aimed to educate children through children's stories that reinforce the curriculum they are taught in school.

The workshop used a diverse selection of children's literature to encourage the children to use their imagination, develop creative skills, develop verbal competencies, and improve their listening skills.

Hiba Mandani is an award-winning

Kuwait children's author. She is known for bringing her own personal experiences to the page through imagination and creativity. She is an ardent advocate for using children's literature to teach children.

Speaking on the importance of children's literature in children's education, Hiba Mandani said, "Children's stories have proven to be an effective method of communicating broader social, scientific and philosophical ideas to children.

Children are more likely to learn and internalize those learnings better when it is



delivered to them in a way that they relate to. We want to use stories that reinforce the same concepts that kids learn in schools in a way that they can understand better."

"Children are the future, and it is very important that we educate them the right way so that they can lead us all into a better



tomorrow," she concluded. The workshops were held from 6 to 11 February at the Kuwait Pavilion in Expo 2020, Dubai.

FDI remains a work in progress

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Given the circumstances, increasing investments or developing a sustainable growth-oriented economy has been of little concern to most governments.

Last week witnessed more of the same political drama in parliament, with the Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, Dr. Sheikh Dr. Ahmed Nasser Al-Mohammad surviving by a narrow margin, a vote of confidence motion brought against him by the opposition on Wednesday. And, on Thursday, both the Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber al-Ali and the Interior Minister Sheikh Ahmed Mansour al-Ahmed tendered their resignation from the cabinet to the prime minister, citing inability to perform their assigned duties due to the turbulent political atmosphere prevailing in parliament.

In a scathing joint statement reflecting the ongoing simmering relations between the executive and some opposition members in parliament, the two former ministers said, "The abuse of constitutional tools [by lawmakers] is what prompted our resignations...". Noting that their attempts to implement effective and sustainable policies and reforms were repeatedly hindered in the National Assembly, they stressed, "Achieving reform has become almost impossible... [even though] the state's executive apparatuses require us to make drastic reforms...". They added, "Interrogations are a constitutional right... but parliamentary practices are hindering us from fulfilling the aspirations of the Kuwaiti people."

Kuwait is the only Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) state with an elected parliament, which enjoys wide legislative powers and can vote ministers out of office. Over the last decade the country has been rattled by repeated disputes between elected lawmakers and appointed governments that have resulted in several cabinet resignations and parliament dissolutions. A new cabinet, the fourth in less than two years, took office only in December 2021, after the last government resigned in November following political gridlock in parliament. Amid these frequent political upheavals, the government has very little time or inclination to bring about meaningful reforms, or engage in efforts to move the economy forward.

However, despite government indifference, the economy has been on a passive growth trend in recent months on the back of higher global oil prices. With oil now poised to flow over the US\$100 per barrel mark, this economic upswing will lead to an increase in revenues and the estimated budget deficit in the current fiscal year is expected to evaporate before the financial year draws to a close on 31 March. This is certainly good news for the country, and for a government that had been struggling with a liquidity crunch ever since oil prices tumbled with the onset of the global pandemic.

There was also good news on the health front, with the government announcing the

scrapping of restrictions that it had introduced in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. The decision followed reports from health authorities of marked improvements in the country's epidemiological situation, including a fall in the number of daily infections, hospitalizations and fatalities, as well as an increase in uptake of vaccination among the public. The decision was also arguably prompted by an overwhelming need among people, and from the market to return the country to normalcy at the earliest.

With the health situation stabilized and the economy beginning to look up, the focus of the government appears to have blurred, and the priority it needs to accord to reforms will likely be once again shelved in acquiescence to political pressures. This shift in focus — from what is important and urgent for the long-term sustainable growth and development of the country, to political matters that appear to be urgent but are unimportant in the long run — is inexplicable and inexcusable. The shift also comes much to the chagrin of all those who have long advocated for implementing much-needed economic, financial and administrative reforms in a country that is overwhelmingly dependent on hydrocarbon revenues.

The fallacy of relying on fickle global oil prices to plan budgets and policies, was once again brought home with the fall in global oil prices following the emergence of the pandemic in 2020. The slide in oil prices, which severely dented the State's revenues, together with the restrictive precautionary measures introduced by the government in response to the health crisis, had an overwhelming negative impact on the country's economy.

In response to the emergence of the global pandemic, the government and the health authorities had initiated several precautionary, preventive and preemptive health and safety measures. Among the steps were border closures, restraining mobility, limiting trade to the supply of essential food and medicines, and the shutting down of businesses, educational and social activities. The authorities also initiated partial or total curfews that were reportedly among the longest worldwide.

The impact of these repercussions on the economy locally and globally were also noted in the sixth annual report of KDIPA. The report, which highlights KDIPA's annual statistics for the fiscal year that started on 1 April 2020 and ended on 31 March 2021, shows that despite the pandemic prevailing during much of the report period, the authority successfully carried out various activities, and initiated several measures to attract new investments and encourage continued investment activity.

The proactive steps taken to encourage investments included reducing fees by 50 percent on all services it offered till 31 December 2020, and granting exceptional tax and customs exemptions to existing and new investment entities. KDIPA also extended the expiry date for investment licenses of companies and branches that expired between 1 April and 23 December 2020, as well as extended the duration for all

operations that were supposed to commence in 2020, till 1 January, 2021. The report also notes that cumulative economic impact from direct investments totaled KD458,180,513, including monies spent on salaries and training for national workers and spending on support for local goods and services.

The importance of efforts by KDIPA is reflected in the figures of its cumulative achievements over the years. This is especially underlined by its accomplishments during the constraining pandemic period, relative to a year earlier. The KDIPA report for the financial year ending 31 March 2019, shows that since it started operating in 2015, it had approved direct investments worth KD960 million, from 37 investment entities. The difference from less than a billion dinars in approved cumulative investments from 2015 to 2019, and the jump to 1.2 billion dinars by the close of fiscal year in March 2020, as well as the hike in investment entities from 37 to 59, is indeed praiseworthy.

Since its establishment in 2013, the KDIPA has been tasked with attracting value-added foreign direct investment (FDI), and promoting Kuwait as a lucrative destination for global investments, as well as streamlining and enhancing the country's business environment and competitiveness. The report depicts the authority's major achievements in performing the tasks assigned to it in pursuit of the aspirational development goals underscored by the country's national development plan based on Vision 2035.

FDI is considered valuable to a country's economy as it helps stimulate economic development and creates a more conducive environment for companies and the investor, while boosting activities in the local community and economy. FDI also provides new jobs and more opportunities for the local workforce. New companies engaging local workers leads to an increase in income and more purchasing power to locals that result in an overall boost to business activities and the economy.

Direct investments also enhance development of human capital resources, with the skills gained by the workforce through training increasing the overall education and human capital within a country. Foreign direct investment also brings about resource transfers of facilities and equipment as well as the exchanges of knowledge, technologies, and skills. These factors together lead to an increase in productivity of the workforce.

Foreign investments also ease international trade by lowering import tariffs and facilitating exports, while tax incentives provided to foreign investors attract new investments and spur growth and development of existing ventures. FDI also reduces the disparity between revenues and costs, bringing about lower production costs and thereby making products and services more competitive on global markets. Another advantage of foreign direct investment is the increase in the country's income, with more jobs and higher wages resulting in a hike in national income and economic growth promotion.

Notwithstanding the diligent efforts of KDIPA, and its list of achievements in the sixth annual report, foreign direct investment has played only a relatively small role in Kuwait's economy. According to the latest report from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) total FDI stock in Kuwait amounted to about \$15 billion in 2019, equivalent to 10.9 percent of the country's GDP. In comparison, FDI stock represented 78 percent and nearly 30 percent of GDP in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, respectively.

A recent survey carried out by Kuwait's Central Administration of Statistics, shows businesses and investors want procedures and policies to be streamlined to stimulate and encourage investments in Kuwait, especially foreign direct investments. The survey also showed respondents calling for granting permanent residence for a certain segment of investors, and granting long-term residence to other investors, for a period of at least 10 years. The questionnaire also revealed wide support for abolishing the sponsorship system for the investors, and softening the rules and requirements on visitor visas for investors, and overhauling housing and real estate laws to enable foreigners to fully own real estate assets in Kuwait.

While most of the recommendations cannot be considered as innovative or imaginative, the fact that a large segment of respondents want significant changes to investment and real estate laws show that despite the successes notched by KDIPA, it is still a work in progress and much remains to be done to attract and sustain foreign direct investments in Kuwait.

An earlier white paper submitted to the cabinet had also suggested changing the budget structure from a cost budget to a program and performance budget. In a performance budget, the allocation of funds and resources is based on specific goals agreed upon by budget committees and agency heads of services. The input of resources based on output of services is expected to motivate employees and encourage them to produce positive results. Though there are difficulties in its implementation, it is certainly something that the government could pursue if it is serious about improving productivity in its public-sector undertakings.

Experts concur that notwithstanding the current upward trajectory of the economy on the back of higher oil revenues, in the absence of meaningful reforms, the economy could be in for more of the same roller-coaster ride that it has experienced in the past. It is obvious that the government's exhortation of economic diversification away from an overreliance on oil revenue, greater private sector participation in the economy, and creating more job opportunities for national cadre, will continue to ring hollow, unless and until it is willing and able to boldly initiate and implement policies, and undertake painful reforms that put the economy on a sustainable path of growth and development.

Survey reveals jobs and skills sought by employers in 2022

A biannual survey on job opportunities over the near term in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region reveals that nearly three-quarters (73%) of employers in the area are planning to hire new employees over the next 12 months.

With the latest epidemiological figures on the COVID-19 health situation indicating a steady decline in the number of infections, hospitalizations and fatalities from the SARS-CoV-2 virus and its variants, there is increasing optimism that the worst of the health crisis may be over. This buoyancy in sentiment is reflected in the recent Job Index Survey carried out by Bayt.com, the Middle East's leading job site, and YouGov, the global online market research company.

The survey, carried out between December 2021 to 10 January 2022 in the six nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) bloc, as well as countries in north Africa and the Levant reveals job availability, hiring trends, and required skill sets and qualifications that employers are looking for from potential employees, over the next three months, as

well as for the rest of 2022.

Findings from the survey include that most GCC employers are demanding good communication in English and Arabic (67%), followed by being a team player (45%), ability to work under pressure (43%) and good leadership skills (41%) as top skills for their hires.

The top roles for which employers are looking to hire over the short term are Accountant (17%), Mechanical Engineer (16%), Sales Executive (15%) and Sales Manager (15%). In terms of experience required, 35 percent of respondents state that they are looking for candidates with sales and marketing experience, while 34 percent are searching for those with managerial experience and 28 percent want candidates with mid-level experience. In addition, Engineering (30%), Business Management (29%) and Commerce (21%) are the most sought-after academic qualifications amongst GCC employers.

Other findings from the survey include that the top industries looking to hire

new employees in the next three months are Human Resources (68%), Hospitality/ Recreation/ Entertainment (67%) and Banking/ Finance (65%). The outlook looks positive for job seekers in the near future as well. Hospitality/ Recreation/ Entertainment (79%) emerges as the top industry looking to hire in the next one year. This is followed by Business Consultancy/ Business Management/ Management Consulting (78%) and Manufacturing (75%).

Speaking about the survey, Director of Human Resources at Bayt.com, Ola Haddad, said: "The Middle East Job Index survey demonstrates that demand for professionals continues to grow in the MENA region. A fast and effective talent acquisition program, being clear about what the organization stands for, its culture and flexible working conditions are the deciding factors in winning talent during this period of growth."

The survey also found that in the short term, Advertising/ Marketing/ Public Relations (31%), IT/ Internet/ E-commerce (30%), and Real Estate/ Construction/



Property Development (30%) emerge as the industries that attract or retain top talent in the GCC region.

Zafar Shah, Research Director at YouGov said: "The future is bright for job seekers as the MENA starts to see the light at the end of the pandemic tunnel. Thanks to robust vaccine programs and people returning to the office, hiring trends reflect an encouraging recovery as this year's first Job Index tracks, follows and communicates required skill sets."

KCC hosts veteran player Dinesh Karthik

It was a pleasure and honor for Kuwait Cricket Club (KCC) to host veteran cricketer Dinesh Karthik (DK) at the Sulaibiya Cricket Ground and have the national players bowl to him, as part of DK's preparation and practice for the upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL), before he flies back to India.

Dinesh Karthik is the pride of Kuwait as much as he is the pride of India. DK started his cricket in Kuwait playing at school tournaments and junior championships at the KOC grounds in Ahmadi and with immense talent at his disposal from a young age, DK went on to pursue his international cricketing career back in India and became a T20 World Cup winner in 2007 and also led Shah Rukh Khan's KKR from 2018-



2020 successfully at the IPL with match-winning performances and unique leadership.

Dinesh Karthik will now be representing RCB and the entire KCC fraternity wishes him all the best for the upcoming TATA IPL.

Kuwait Cricket Board Member and Head of Kuwaitis Development Mahmoud Bastaki and Director General Sajid Ashraf handed over the national team's training jersey and cap to Dinesh Karthik as a souvenir of recognition and appreciation for his memorable achievements at the highest level for India.



Taiba Market, spearheading a new retail format in Kuwait

Shoppers in Kuwait jaded with the standard fare of retail outlets that range from the neighborhood 'vakala' to humongous hypermarkets, will have a new treat in store for them with the opening of a new store that promises to spearhead a fresh take on retailing in Kuwait.

format, in that it falls mid-way between an express store and a supermarket. When you visit the store during the opening of our first venue in Sulaibikhat, you will see what we have put together there."

An offshoot of Oncost, the leading family market in Kuwait, the new store format is expected to establish a new genre of retailing in the country. "Taiba Market is tailored to cater to the young, modern-day consumer, who is always on the go and looking for easy, quick, simple purchases that greatly simplifies the shopping experience for them," said Al-Tunaib.

He added, "Our focus is not only on Kuwaiti shoppers, but on everyone who considers themselves a modern consumer. The store falls within our context of having smaller format stores that allow modern consumers to get their needed items, from fresh to ultra fresh products to detergents, quickly and effortlessly from one store. We would love to see this brand scale very fast in Kuwait and then be able to cover all the governorates in Kuwait in a very short term."



"Taiba Market, which is slated to open its doors to shoppers in mid-February, is an innovative store format that is homegrown, with the concept for the store conceived, designed and now being implemented in Kuwait, which makes us very proud of this endeavor," said Saleh A-Tunaib, CEO of Taiba Market.

Speaking to the media at a press conference held on 1 February, Al-Tunaib explained, "The new store format could be called a "proximity

Speaking to the media after the press meet, the Chief Operating Officer of Taiba Market, Remesh Anandadas said, "We are very proud of this new store format that allows for a 'go-grab-pay-go-out' shopping experience. We look forward to Taiba Market gaining a strong share in the country's retailing sphere, and welcome everyone to visit our first store in Sulaibikhat, which will be followed shortly by other stores in Surra and Yarmouk."

EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Tapping Global Health Care's Greatest Resource



**MARY BETH POWERS
AND DAVE NEISWANDER**

Mary Beth Powers is CEO of the Catholic Medical Mission Board.

Dave Neiswander is CEO of World Bicycle Relief.



In every phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, community health workers have been indispensable. They have made diagnoses, carried out contact tracing, cared for the sick, and administered vaccinations. And they have performed all these tasks with minimal funding, supervision, and assistance.

The use of community health workers in rural health care has a long track record of success. In the 1960s, China's 'barefoot doctors' helped the country eradicate smallpox and double life expectancy. A

decade later, Bangladesh partly emulated the Chinese initiative when it launched its community health worker program,

which helped the country achieve a majority of the health-related Millennium Development Goals, such as bringing the diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccination rate for rural children from near-zero in the 1980s to more than 90 percent today.

Community health workers are not doctors or nurses. They are local residents with basic medical training who help bridge the gap between health-care facilities and underserved populations. Usually, they are trained by NGOs and receive little or no compensation from their governments. In fact, few governments around the world keep records of community health workers or have a way to communicate with them.

These committed people can be the backbone of the resilient health systems needed to manage the next pandemic. But for that to happen, they need more support.

The challenges faced by community health workers around the world are significant. Many, like Nepal's 50,000 female community health volunteers, are unpaid, even though the value of the free treatment and labor such workers provide worldwide is estimated at US\$1.5 trillion.

But money is only one problem. In Brazil, some community health workers receive only one or two weeks of training before they begin unsupervised work. Community health workers in Ethiopia spend more time traveling than treating patients because of the rural and remote nature of the communities they serve. A survey in Liberia in 2018 and 2019 found that fewer than half of community health workers had stocks of lifesaving zinc or amoxicillin. And just over half had oral rehydration solution and malaria drugs — crucial tools in a country where thousands of people die of diarrhea and malaria each year.

It is little wonder that many community health worker programs experience high levels of attrition and vacancies. In Bangladesh, 15 percent of positions are vacant at any given time. Staff turnover increases costs, because replacements have to be recruited, trained, and deployed. It also reduces the quality of care, as new workers generally have less hands-on experience providing health services.

The pandemic exposed the need for strong, adaptable health systems, particularly in underserved communities.

To build these systems, we must find a way to recruit, train, equip, supervise, and remunerate frontline workers properly.

For starters, groups that operate community health worker programs should review and strive to follow the World Health Organization's recommendations on support for community health workers. Moreover, governments should develop and maintain up-to-date, geo-referenced national registries of community health workers, which can be used to communicate public-health messages, improve links between rural communities and health clinics, and manage crises. Keeping track of community health workers also can help ensure that they are trained and equipped properly.

Lastly, governments and funding partners should look for other ways to assist community health workers. One under-recognized and cost-effective tool is a sturdy bicycle. World Bicycle Relief, working with civil-society organizations like the Catholic Medical Mission Board and health ministries in seven countries, has distributed nearly 175,000 of its specially designed Buffalo Bicycles, allowing community health workers to spend less time in transit and more time with patients.

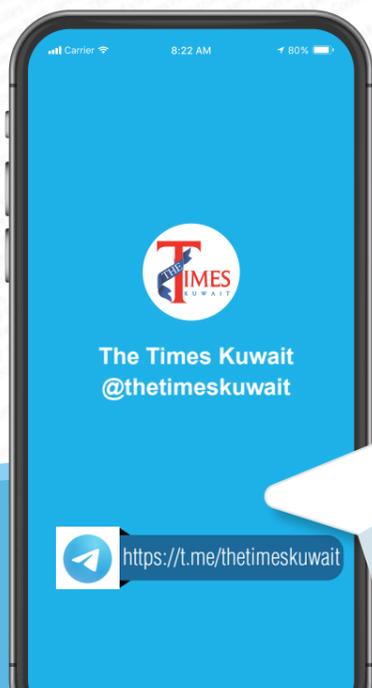
Bicycles have improved health outcomes in several African countries. In Kenya, bike-riding community health workers saw 88 percent more patients and referred 50 percent more patients for tuberculosis screening at a local clinic. Community health workers equipped with bicycles in Zambia quadrupled the frequency of visits to their patients. And in Malawi, they doubled the number of patients they could visit. Surveys show that community health workers who have bicycles are less likely to quit. Likewise, if program supervisors have bicycles, they can provide more guidance to community health workers, leading to better care for patients and more job satisfaction for caregivers.

When the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic comes to an end, it largely will be thanks to the tireless work of community health workers. The best thing the world can do to maximize their effectiveness in future crises is to ensure they are properly trained, equipped, empowered, and even compensated.



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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Europe Must Be Africa's Partner of Choice



JOSEP BORRELL
High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, is Vice President of the European Commission for a Stronger Europe in the World.



After being postponed several times because of the COVID-19 pandemic, this month's European Union-African Union Summit in Brussels (February 17-18) will bring together European and African heads of state and government for the first time since 2017. The EU's objective is to become Africa's partner of choice, a goal set by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen during our first visit to the AU's headquarters in Addis Ababa two years ago.

What will it take to achieve this ambitious goal? First, we must approach the EU-AU partnership with modesty. Africa is a continent as large as the United States, Mexico, China, Japan, India, and much of Europe combined. With 54 countries and some 2,000 languages, and with a diverse range of opportunities as well as problems, the continent cannot be treated as a homogenous entity.

Second, we must be realistic. Between Afro-pessimism and Afro-optimism, I advocate Afro-realism. Before talking about economic growth and trade relations, Europe must show that it can contribute to peace, security, and good governance in African countries. Before talking about the demographic dividend, we must also acknowledge the scale of the difficulties that uncontrolled population growth can create in societies. By 2030, 30 million young people will be entering the African labor market each year. To generate sustainable jobs for them, basic education must be a high priority.

Moreover, in supporting the global transition to green energy and sustainable development, we must help ensure access to basic services on a continent where almost half the population has no electricity and must fight a daily battle for access to water and food. And while helping African countries develop their future vaccine-

production capacity, we also must help accelerate vaccination in the present. Over 90 percent of the continent's population remains unvaccinated against COVID-19.

In thinking about these issues, we Europeans must not make the mistake of believing that we could impose an

agenda on Africa. Nor should we ignore the immediate realities and short-term constraints facing the vast majority of Africans. This is especially true now that the COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated the continent's fragilities. In the Sahel, insecurity is increasing along with political instability. The Horn of Africa, where we saw promising democratic transitions just two years ago, is now deeply destabilized. And several African countries have once

again entered a debt spiral. The pandemic has also moved geopolitical competition in Africa beyond investment and business opportunities to include values and governance models. We find ourselves confronted with other

“ With a population expected to reach 2.5 billion by 2050, Africa is a rising global force. A closer partnership would enable Europe and Africa together to exercise much greater influence on the world stage. ”

agenda on Africa. Nor should we ignore the immediate realities and short-term constraints facing the vast majority of Africans. This is especially true now that the COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated the continent's fragilities. In the Sahel, insecurity is increasing along with political instability. The Horn of Africa, where we saw promising democratic transitions just two years ago, is now deeply destabilized. And several African countries have once

global actors whose methods and agendas are very different from our own. Many of them will not hesitate to use disinformation campaigns and other forms of hybrid warfare to undercut European influence.

Despite these difficulties, we still have compelling reasons for wanting to make Europe Africa's partner of choice. One is that Africa's problems are our problems. Terrorism and insecurity know no borders. The Sahel is not as remote from Europe as

it sometimes seems; and instability in the Horn of Africa threatens one of the world's most important trade routes. Then there is climate change, which will inevitably create new waves of migration as it destroys people's livelihoods and renders their communities uninhabitable.

Our goal is also motivated by the wealth of opportunities across the continent. Africa's economies and societies are young and dynamic. Europe's aging societies will have to rely on them sooner or later. The continent also has an abundance of raw materials and immense potential both to deploy and help produce renewable energy technologies.

Finally, we must think in geopolitical terms. With its population expected to reach 2.5 billion by 2050, Africa is a rising global force. A closer partnership would enable Europe and Africa together to exercise much greater influence on the world stage, giving a boost to the model of multilateralism that both partners support.

To succeed, we will need a positive agenda based on joint priorities. Without sidestepping the difficulties, we must focus on achieving concrete, rapid results. Africa does not need charity or media stunts. It needs cooperation and partnerships that can actually deliver for its people.

To that end, the EU will need to combine the strengths of its member states, financial institutions, development banks, and agencies. The pandemic has given substance to the notion of this 'Team Europe' approach, and this way of working must become a habit to avoid a fragmented strategy and all the problems that come with it.

In Africa, as elsewhere, the EU carries weight only when its constituent parts work together. That includes not just EU institutions and governments; civil society and the private sector also must be better attuned to dynamics on the ground.

Europe's future will be shaped in no small part by Africa's future. There and elsewhere, we must also better defend the European project by demonstrating that the EU's added value exceeds that of other global powers. This month's summit must be the starting point for building a new intercontinental partnership.

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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Climate Accountability Now



MARY ROBINSON

A former President of Ireland and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, is Chair of The Elders.

It has been 30 years since world leaders gathered in Rio de Janeiro and agreed on a set of measures to start the global mobilization against human-caused climate change and to meet the imperative of a more sustainable development model. Their Rio Declaration affirmed that 'human beings are at the center of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.'

Today, tens of millions of people who were not even born in 1992 are suffering the worst of the climate crisis. In a world already plagued by economic inequality and social injustice, COVID-19 has exposed and exacerbated the policy failures of the past three decades. Political leaders have not lived up to their previous commitments.

To overcome inertia, policymakers everywhere would do well to listen to those on the front lines of the climate crisis who are demonstrating real leadership and innovation. Among them are Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr, the mayor of Freetown in Sierra Leone, and young activists like Elizabeth Wanjiru Wathuti from Kenya and Mitzi Jonelle Tan from the Philippines, with whom I discussed future challenges at Project Syndicate's 'Generation Green' event last month.

These intergenerational debates are critical for driving progress and upholding one of the Rio Declaration's central

principles: 'The right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations.'

One of Rio's strongest legacies is the creation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The UNFCCC has been the key multilateral body in the international community's effort to strengthen the political consensus on climate action through annual Conference of the Parties (COP) summits.

At COP26 in Glasgow last November, there was some progress toward strengthening the 2015 Paris climate agreement's nationally determined contributions to emissions reduction, closing the gap in financing for climate adaptation, and ending the use of coal. But these advances were nowhere close to

“ As my fellow Elder Ban Ki-moon told the 'Generation Green' audience, “We all have a part to play in addressing the climate crisis, especially those with the power needed to bring about change.” ”

sufficient, given the existential threat posed by rising emissions and temperatures.

That is why 2022 must be the year of accountability, with all major emitters delivering on the promises of the so-called Glasgow Climate Pact. That declaration maintained a lifeline for limiting global warming to 1.5° Celsius, relative to pre-industrial levels, as agreed in the Paris accord. All countries at COP26 promised to step up their ambitions and revisit their

emissions-reduction targets as soon as this year. In concrete terms, those who still have not set Paris-aligned 2030 targets should do so by COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh this November. While all countries must fast-track implementation of their new commitments, it is particularly important that wealthy G20 economies do so, because they are responsible for most global emissions.

Climate finance remains another critical part of the puzzle. It has been over a decade since rich countries pledged, at COP15 in Copenhagen, to provide \$100 billion annually to support developing countries in their mitigation and adaptation efforts. That target has never been met. In the interests of global trust and goodwill, rich countries must follow through on this commitment this year.

beyond their ability to adapt.

COP26 left unfinished business on L&D, because the United States, backed by the European Union, postponed the creation of a new financial mechanism to rebuild communities in the aftermath of climate-related disasters. Country representatives nonetheless have committed to holding further discussions on the issue, which means that COP27 represents a major opportunity to achieve a breakthrough.

An effective L&D fund is increasingly important for climate-vulnerable states. At COP26, the Scottish government and the Belgian region of Wallonia took the first step by pledging \$2.7 million and \$1 million, respectively, for L&D (with matching funds from philanthropic organizations). But this money currently has nowhere to go.

Another encouraging development is the deal concluded by South Africa, the EU, the United Kingdom, the US, France, and Germany to support South Africa's 'just transition' away from coal. This now needs to be built upon and emulated elsewhere.

The spirit of multilateralism that animated the Rio summit and its outcome remains indispensable today, even though the geopolitical climate is fraught with tensions, mutual suspicion, and weak institutions. As my fellow Elder Ban Ki-moon told the 'Generation Green' audience, "We all have a part to play in addressing the climate crisis, especially those with the power needed to bring about change."

To honor the legacy of the Rio summit, to meet the needs of those already living with the consequences of the climate crisis, and to limit the repercussions for future generations, we all must strive to go further and faster to protect our shared home. And 2022 must be the turning point.



Quality sleep crucial to overall health, well-being

Volumes of previous research on sleep have shown that getting adequate quality sleep is essential to overall health and well-being. Here we look at some of the benefits of sleep and drawbacks from not getting enough

Extra slumber aids weight loss

Recent studies have revealed that getting an hour of extra sleep each night could reduce calorie intake by an average of 270 kilocalories (kcal) a day and thereby facilitate weight loss.

Earlier research had found that sleep disruptions cause people to eat more and increase the chances of gaining weight over time. Social health experts say the finding that hitting the pillow an hour earlier daily could help with weight reduction could prove to be a game changer in society's battle against the obesity epidemic.

For their study to confirm the beneficial aspects of extra sleep, researchers at the University of Chicago in the United States recruited 80 adults, ages 21 to 40, with obesity who habitually slept fewer than 6.5 hours a night. The participants maintained their normal routines, did not change their diet or exercise habits, and slept in their own beds.

However, they received a customized sleep hygiene counseling session prior to their engagement and were advised to increase their sleep by over an hour on average and to spend at least 8.5 hours each night in their bed. The participants donned wearable devices that tracked their sleep pattern and duration, and their caloric intake and daily energy stores were measured via a urine-based test.

Compared with the control participants, those who increased their sleep reduced their caloric intake, on average, by 270 kcals a day, which translates to a loss of around 12 kilos over a three-year period. The study added credence to prior research that connected sleep deprivation and disruptions to appetite regulation and weight gain.



The researchers postulated that there could be several potential factors and mechanisms to explain why more sleep translates to less caloric intake. For one, sleep is known to impact appetite-regulating hormones. Previous studies have shown that sleep deprivation can increase levels of the stress hormone cortisol and decrease levels of the hormone leptin, which controls appetite, in the body. When the body does not get the signals it is used to receiving in its typical sleep-wake cycle, it can try to compensate in other ways and seek out high calorie foods. Furthermore, sleep can affect circadian rhythm factors and impact when people eat.

Restricting sleep can have serious health consequences and contribute to the development of various health conditions, including obesity. Several studies have found a direct link between short sleep duration and obesity, one of which found that people who slept fewer than 6 hours a night were more likely to have obesity than people who slept more than 7 hours a night.

Besides implicating shorter hours of sleeping as a significant risk factor for weight gain and metabolic disorders, including obesity, and showing that extra sleep could prove beneficial to weight loss, the study also further consolidates the view that adequate sleep each night is a crucial component to overall health and well-being of individuals.

Sleep deprivation and PST

A new study published last month revealed that shorter hours in bed and sleep

deprivation impedes the brain's ability to unlearn fear-related memories. The study was prompted by reports of increased cases of post-traumatic syndrome (PST) disorder among health workers and other frontline personnel involved in fighting the COVID-19 global health crisis.



Many of the frontline workers risked their lives in combating the pandemic and were often under pressure to work longer hours and make-do with fewer hours of sleep each night. The study found that getting only half a night's sleep placed people at greater risk of being diagnosed with conditions such as anxiety or post traumatic stress disorder.

Post-traumatic syndrome disorder, normally associated with war veterans and others involved in traumatic situations, is a condition in which the terrifying memories of a traumatic situation remain embedded in the mind and impedes the brain's natural recovery. It is often described as a 'brain on fire' disorder, characteristic of other psychiatric conditions, such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety disorders, and phobias. In these disorders, key brain regions get flooded with signals that fire persistently. Conversely, 'brain on ice' diseases, such as Alzheimer's or Parkinson's, are characterized by disrupted neuronal networks that gradually degrade over time.

The new study, which provides further novel insights into how sleep deprivation negatively affects brain function, in this case by delaying or disrupting fear extinction, was conducted by a team of researchers at the University of Pittsburgh the Harvard Medical School and the Massachusetts General Hospital in the United States.

The team studied 150 healthy adults in the sleep laboratory, with one-third of participants getting normal sleep, one-third were sleep restricted by being allowed to sleep only the first half the night, and one-third were sleep deprived, so they got no sleep at all. In the morning, all the participants underwent fear conditioning. In the conditioning paradigm, subjects were presented with three colors, two of which were paired with a mild electric shock. Following this fear conditioning, the subjects underwent fear extinction, in which one of the colors was presented without any shocks to learn that it was now 'safe'. That evening, subjects were tested for their reactivity to the three colors, a measure of their fear extinction recall, or how well they had 'unlearned' the threat.

Brain imaging recorded during the tasks showed activation in brain areas associated with emotional regulation, such as the prefrontal cortex, in people who got normal sleep. But the brain activity looked very different in people with restricted sleep; among the three groups, those who had only gotten half a night's sleep showed the most activity in brain regions associated with fear and the least activity in areas associated with control of emotion.

Surprisingly, people who got no sleep lacked brain activation in fear-related areas during fear conditioning and extinction. During the extinction recall 12 hours later, their brain activity looked more similar to those with normal sleep, suggesting that a limited night of sleep may be worse than none at all.

The researchers hypothesize that sleeping only half the night results in a loss of rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, which has been

shown to be important for memory consolidation and usually happens toward the end of a normal sleep period. The findings suggest that partially sleep-deprived individuals might be especially vulnerable to fear-related conditions such as posttraumatic stress disorder.

Disruption to sleep impairs memory recall

Adding to the body of knowledge linking the benefits of sufficient hours of quality sleep each night to overall health benefits, another new study now shows that memory recollection could be boosted with getting uninterrupted sleep.

Researchers at Northwestern University in the US have found that for people who struggle to remember the name of the person even if they recollect the face, the remedy to learning and recollection could be as near as their pillow. The study showed that people's name recall improved significantly when memories of newly learned face-name associations were reactivated while they were napping. Key to this improvement was uninterrupted deep sleep.

The study was conducted on 24 participants, aged 18-31 years old, who were asked to memorize the faces and names of 40 pupils from a hypothetical Latin American history class and another 40 from a Japanese history class. When each face was shown again, they were asked to produce the name that went with it.

After the learning exercise, participants took a nap while the researchers carefully monitored brain activity using EEG measurements, which record electrical activity of the brain through electrodes on the scalp. When participants reached the 'deep sleep' state, some of the names were softly played on a speaker with music that was associated with one of the classes.

When participants woke up, they were retested on recognizing the faces and recalling the name that went with each face. The research team found

that for study participants with EEG measures that indicated disrupted sleep, the memory reactivation did not help and was even detrimental. But in those with uninterrupted sleep during the specific times of sound presentations, the reactivation led to a relative improvement averaging just over 1.5 more names recalled.



The study, which provides new insight into the way information is reactivated during sleep and the relationship between sleep disruption and memory accuracy is noteworthy for several reasons. Previous studies have shown that some sleep disorders like apnea can impair memory, the new study suggests a potential explanation for this — frequent sleep interruptions at night might be degrading memory. While the new line of research allows scientists to address many interesting questions, such as whether sleep disruption is always harmful or whether it could be used to weaken unwanted memories.

One thing abundantly clear from the above studies is that there are an increasing number of good reasons to value getting high-quality sleep of sufficient duration each night.

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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Measuring Poverty Properly



NURUL IZZAH ANWAR
A member of the Malaysian parliament.

The 2019 Oscar-winning film *Parasite* attracted a global audience for its arresting portrayal of South Korea's stark income inequality. The movie's rendering of a low-income household's acute sense of alienation resonated widely, no doubt because similar sentiments are palpable in many other countries. And the gap between the haves and have-nots is growing, thanks to the dual challenges of COVID-19 and climate change.

The poor suffer the most in times of crisis because they lack the social capital that protects those who are better off. To paraphrase Martin Luther King, Jr., 'the arc of inequality bends toward more inequality'. That makes it imperative for policymakers to address the widening divide between rich and poor and craft adequate safety nets for those most in need.

The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which tracks non-income measures of deprivation like education, health, and living standards, is an essential tool in mapping the scope of the problem. My country, Malaysia, joined the global network of countries that use the MPI in 2013, after years of using outdated methods to measure poverty. In 2019, a scathing critique by then-UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights Philip Alston finally led the government to revise its definition.

The MPI continues to play a role in



Malaysia's response to income inequality. In April 2021, Fatimah Kari, an economics professor specializing in poverty at the University of Malaya, led an MPI survey among the bottom 40 percent of income earners in my constituency of Permatang Pauh in Penang. The goal of the survey was to reflect the impact of the pandemic on impoverished households.

Along with the usual measurements, the survey assessed income loss due to the pandemic, relative access to online education for children, and overall well-being in relation to home confinement during lockdowns. The pilot project aimed to test a 'COVID-adjusted' blueprint to measure poverty that could be adopted by Malaysia's federal government for use at the national level.

Six months later, Mustapa Mohamed, a minister in the Prime Minister's Department for Economic Affairs, announced the government's intention to revamp the national MPI methodology in response to the study. The new methodology would

complement the design of more robust safety net programs — news that was welcomed by legislators who have been urging the government to use the MPI to understand and meet the needs of lower-income households.

The change also was timely: in addition to the economic difficulties brought about by the pandemic, the country has been devastated by heavy rains. Officials repeatedly referred to the recent floods as a once-in-a-century phenomenon, but the last major flood happened only eight years ago, displacing almost 300,000 people. The latest disaster affected an estimated 80,000 people across nine states.

In the immediate aftermath, NGOs and community groups stepped in to organize aid distribution. Ordinary Malaysian men and women risked their lives to rescue victims stranded in flood-stricken areas. These efforts contrasted sharply with the government's relative unpreparedness.

The current administration has turned to quick-fix schemes to stave off the economic

impact of the pandemic, with profound consequences for the entire budget. One program allows citizens to withdraw funds early from their retirement savings. It has been reported that a total of RM101 billion (\$24.1 billion) has been withdrawn from Malaysia's Employees Provident Fund (EPF). Over six million members now have less than RM10,000 in their EPF accounts, and more than half of these have less than RM1,000.

In fact, some 22 percent of the government's total pandemic economic stimulus consisted of withdrawals by Malaysians from their own retirement funds. But with more than 15 percent of Malaysia's population expected to be 60 years or above by 2030, the scheme is a formula for disaster. Its loudest proponents include the disgraced former prime minister, Najib Razak, whose conviction for corruption last year has not deterred him from brazen Facebook posts that encourage cash-strapped retirees to deplete their savings further.

As Malaysia tries to recover from the pandemic and the floods, it has a chance to adopt effective policies to improve living standards in vulnerable communities. The development of a realistic MPI is a necessary first step, because it would enable the government to comprehend in detail the main challenges — from lack of sanitation and access to clean water to internet coverage for online education — confronting the poorest Malaysians.

Well-designed MPI studies can bring these important facets of people's lives to policymakers' attention, in addition to measuring the overall gap between the richest and poorest. Equipped with this knowledge, governments, including Malaysia's, can begin to mitigate some of the social tensions so brilliantly rendered in *Parasite*.



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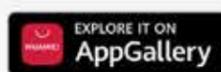
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