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## Redefining democracy in Kuwait



THE TIMES KUWAIT REPORT

Kuwait has a relatively long history of democratic traditions, including consultative governments and participatory politics. The country's egalitarian leanings could be traced back to the 1930s when a reform movement swept through Kuwait and resulted in the first legislative council being formed in 1938. Shortly after independence from Great Britain in 1961, the then ruler and first Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah adopted a constitution, established the National Assembly and ordered the first general elections in 1963.

Six decades of constitutionalism, where the government's authority is derived, defined and determined by the constitution, has helped uphold a balance of power between relevant groups within Kuwait's polity. It has also ensured a measure of non-interference in individual rights by establishing protections through separation of powers between the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, overseen by a constitution. The country's written constitution, which is often regarded as

the embodiment of the collective spirit of the nation, has remained inviolable, at least so far.

Proponents of democracy say Kuwait's political and economic development, cultural and literary heritage, as well as ethnic and religious diversity owes much to the country's

democratic underpinnings, including its choice of constitutionalism and parliamentary style of governance. Detractors point out that these same democratic choices, in particular the parliamentary form of government, account for many of the shortcomings and backsliding that

the country has witnessed over the years in its social, political and economic spheres.

The social and political diversity that prevails in Kuwait is in sharp contrast to the monolithic nature of the economy, where state-owned hydrocarbon resources account for nearly 90 percent of total exports and two-third of total fiscal revenues, as well as around half the country's GDP.

Moreover, with more than three-quarter of the national labor force employed in the government sector, the economy is overwhelmingly dominated by the state.

This statist development model is also at the core of the structural imbalance that exists in the country's economy. Recurring five-year national development plans outlined by the Supreme Council for Planning and Development (SPCD) have acknowledged that the economy faces two main structural imbalances.

The first one lies in the preponderance of the oil sector which overshadows developments in other sectors; and the second is related to the overwhelming dominance of the public sector, which discourages innovation, entrepreneurship and growth of the private sector.

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# KPC top brand, NBK strongest brand, in Kuwait

**K**uwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), the umbrella organization for all upstream and downstream oil operations in Kuwait and abroad, and one of the top ten global oil energy conglomerates, is the most valuable brand in the country for 2022. Meanwhile, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), which dropped to fourth spot in this year's brand value evaluation, remains the country's strongest brand, according to a newly released report.

Brand value is understood as the net economic benefit that a brand owner would achieve by licensing the brand in the open market; while, Brand strength is the efficacy of a brand's performance on intangible measures relative to its competitors.

The Brand Finance Kuwait report, compiled by Brand Finance, one of the leading brand valuation consultancies in the world, notes that KPC, which is valued for the first time at US\$4.0 billion, is also ranked as the ninth most valuable brand across the broader Middle-East region.

The report reveals that KPC remained



a valuable brand through the pandemic, despite the significant reduction in oil demand during the second half of 2020 and much of 2021. Other KPC-owned subsidiary brands that featured among the top ten brands in Kuwait in this year's analysis include, Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) in third spot; Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) in sixth place; and Kuwait Foreign Petroleum Exploration Company (KUFPEC) in 7th place.

Zain, a regional leader in telecommunication, is Kuwait's second most valuable brand with its value rising by 8 percent to \$2.4 bil-



lion. Zain is also the country's fastest-growing brand among Kuwait's top-10 most valuable brands. Zain continues to consolidate its presence in its current markets with a strong position in Kuwait, Jordan, Iraq, Bahrain and Sudan.

Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) is the third most valued brand in Kuwait with a brand value estimated at \$1.9 billion. KOC has been seeking to manage production expansion in an environmentally and socially responsible manner, and has been recognized within Kuwait for its responsible approach to

recovering from COVID-19.

NBK, which lost brand value in this year's evaluation, remains Kuwait's strongest brand. In addition to brand value, Brand Finance consultancy also determines the relative strength of brands through a balanced scorecard of metrics evaluating marketing investment, stakeholder equity, and business performance. According to these criteria, NBK (brand value down 12% to US\$1.2

Kuwait Finance House (KFH), which saw its brand value rise by 3 percent to \$936 million is the fifth leading brand in terms of value in Kuwait, and way ahead of smaller bank brands such as Gulf Bank (9th rank) which saw its brand value rise by 6 percent to \$199 million, and Boubyan Bank in 10th spot with its brand value rising by 7 percent to \$192 million.

Agility Logistics, a leading provider of supply chain services, innovation and investment, which develops and operates logistics parks across the Middle East, Africa and South Asia, came in as the 8th top brand in Kuwait with a brand value of \$200 million.



## Tens of thousands aged 60 and over leave Kuwait

**T**he controversial decision taken earlier by the Public Authority of Manpower (PAM) to deny work permit renewal to undergraduates aged 60 and over, resulted in thousands of expatriate workers falling in this age group deciding to leave the country in 2021, due to the then prevailing uncertainty surrounding their future.

Official labor data shows that during the nine-month period from 1 January to 30 September 2021, the total number of workers in the public and private sectors declined by

13,520, dropping from 81,500 at the start of last year to 67,980 by the end of September.

Sector-wise, the number of expatriates 60 years and above in the government sector fell from 6,065 at the start of 2021 to 5,040 by the end of nine months — a drop by 1,025 or 17 percent. During the same period, the number of workers in the private sector who fell in this age group also decreased by 17 percent, or 12,510 workers — falling from 75,450 to 62,940 workers over the nine-month period.

## ABC-K-AmCham Kuwait hosts webinar on 'GCC-Regional Arbitration Updates'

**A**BCK-AmCham Kuwait, a non-profit organization held a webinar recently in collaboration with Al Tamimi & Company on the topic of 'GCC-Regional Arbitration Updates' with the support of AmCham Abu Dhabi and AmCham Bahrain.

The webinar, which covered the crucial role that international arbitration plays in resolving cross-border commercial disputes for companies operating in Kuwait and the broader Middle East, was opened by Partner and Head of Arbitration at Al Tamimi & Company, Thomas R. Snider.

He began by explaining that arbitration is a form of dispute resolution based on consent among all disputing parties to resolve disagreements through mediation of neutral, non-governmental decision-makers chosen by or for the parties. Arbitration produces a binding award, which is capable of international enforcement through national courts and is more readily enforceable internationally than a court judgment.

This was followed by Partner and Head of Kuwait Office at Al Tamimi & Company, Philip Kotsis, speaking about Kuwait's specific considerations, noted that as a signatory, Kuwait courts regularly enforce the agreement of the parties to arbitrate



and Kuwait courts retain jurisdiction under certain circumstances. However, agreeing to arbitration was not considered a normal act/decision under the Kuwait Companies Law, and that proper corporate authorization had to be obtained to include an arbitration clause. He added that Kuwait would recognize and enforce arbitration awards only if the procedural requirements were met.

The webinar closed with a Q&A session between the participants and the speakers.

## Kalyan Jewellers unveils digital campaign marking International Women's Day



**K**alyan Jewellers, one of India's largest and most preferred jewelry brands, recently launched the #IAmMoreThanEnough digital campaign to mark International Women's Day on 8 March. The campaign video features Ritabhari Chakraborty, Wamiqa Gabbi, Pooja Sawant and Kinjal Rajpriya, regional ambassadors of the brand, in unique and distinctive avatars.

With a strong narrative to support the video, the campaign communicates that today's modern woman is smart enough to recognise that being branded as 'too much' is just society's way of trying to hold her back. She challenges social narratives and societal constructs to boldly claim her place in the world,



while embracing her individuality and her unique sense of style. The video asserts that a woman should be appreciated, respected and celebrated for herself, her work, her passion, her strength, her persona and her talent.

The #IAmMoreThanEnough campaign, created along the lines of the International Women's Day 2022 theme #BreakTheBias, crushes many established notions. The high decibel campaign encourages women to compete with herself, while overlooking biases that hamper her growth — because she is more than enough.

The campaign is promoted digitally, and can be viewed here: <https://bit.ly/3syN60u>

## CSC to begin paying indemnities to retrenched expats

**T**he Civil Service Commission (CSC) is to soon begin paying out indemnities to expatriates in the public sector, who either resigned or were retrenched due to the ongoing Kuwaitization process over the past year.

Reports indicate that the Ministry of Finance has now transferred sufficient funds to the CSC, to begin paying out end-of-service benefits to expatriates who resigned or were terminated from various ministries and other government entities in 2021, on a priority basis starting from the oldest to the most recent retrenched employee.

Expatriate workers who were previously employed in the government sector, some of them working for decades in ministries and eligible to receive substantial indemnities, had been waiting patiently over the past several months for CSC to begin disbursing their dues.

The delay in disbursement has been attributed to insufficient funds with the CSC to cover the indemnities for all those who resigned or were retrenched in 2021, due to rapid pace at which the Kuwaitization process was implemented by several government entities which led to a sharp increase in the number of employees being terminated, disrupting all the budgetary figures provided for the fiscal year by the CSC to the finance ministry.

As a result of this miscalculation, the CSC reportedly had to request the finance ministry for additional funds to pay out the pending indemnities, as well as ask all government entities to provide more accurate figures on their planned retrenchments in future, so that the commission could estimate more precisely the budget for 2022-2023 and in line with a new circular to this effect from the Ministry of Finance.

# Vietnam ready to once again welcome visitors



**Ngo Minh Duc**

Chairman of the Board of HG Holdings, a market leader in hospitality in Indochina

**A**fter two years of fighting the COVID-19 pandemic and the extended closure of Viet Nam's borders to international tourists, the country is today better prepared than ever and eager to welcome visitors.

Viet Nam offers visitors from Kuwait a new and relatively uncharted destination for their holidays and events. With Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Danang, Viet Nam boasts modern cities full of charm and with state-of-the-art hotels such as Four Seasons, Six Senses, Intercontinental, JW Marriott, and Park Hyatt, as well as multiple luxury shopping destinations with all famous brands and local brands and a variety of local seafood and halal food options.

From the comfort of their 5-star accommodation, travellers also have the possibility to travel in style to surrounding attractions and cultural sites. From Hanoi,

for example, one can hop on a private seaplane and head for a once-in-a-lifetime scenic flight over the legendary seascape of Halong Bay. Or, departing from Ho Chi Minh City, curious travellers can sit back in a private and comfortable speedboat for a memorable journey to the famous Cu Chi Tunnels or to the Mekong delta.

Viet Nam, with its long and beautiful coastline, excellent hospitality and top-class services, brand-new resorts, including international and local brands, offers rejuvenation and wellness packages with first-class services and facilities right by the sandy beaches.

The guests can indulge themselves with exclusive yacht and catamaran service, and a private concierge service to make sure every single need is catered for in the most attentive and unique way, such as personal tailors to make silk suits for the men and Vietnamese traditional dress (Ao Dai) for the ladies. There are also several private classes for the family with young kids to experience Vietnamese cooking class, lantern making

and pottery making. Over the past 15 years, tourism in Viet Nam has developed at an incredible pace to become today one of the preferred and best-rated holiday destinations for couples and families with kids, willing to experience something different and unique while soaking in luxury and comfort.

Viet Nam has recently added several theme parks and water parks with a record

holding cable-car system and an array of exciting entertainment and recreational activities. Some of the theme parks provide exhilarating adventures as well as hundreds of games and impressive architectural constructions. Viet Nam is also a central hub with plenty of regional connections to other incredible destinations, making it an ideal location for multi-centre vacations enthusiasts.

## Kuwait imports medicine, medical supplies worth \$2.7 billion to contain pandemic

**K**uwait spent about 831 million dinars (equivalent to \$2.7 billion) on medical and pharmaceutical products during the Corona crisis. Official data shows in 2020 Kuwait spent 465.3 million dinars, and during the first 9 months of 2021 365.7 million dinars. It recorded the highest levels in the first quarter of 2021, reaching 133.67 million dinars, and



120.68 million dinars from April 1 until June end 2021 and from the beginning of July until the end of September Kuwait imported worth 111.4 million dinars medicine.

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# Thought for the week

You need Power, only when you want to do something Harmful, Otherwise Love is Enough to get everything done.

- Charlie Chaplin



## Go beyond breadcrumbs, A template to preparing Chicken Cutlets

**F**ried chicken cutlets are a surprisingly fast and easy weeknight dinner. The basic technique involves dipping a pounded-thin piece of meat in flour and eggs, followed by a crunchy coating and frying. The result spans seasons and cultures, and appeals to diners of all ages. The best part about this method, however, is how adaptable it is to a wide range of flavors and textures. You do not have to stick with just breadcrumbs as the coating — ground nuts, seeds, crushed snack foods or cereal, cornmeal, and more can be used to create your own personal favorite crispy chicken cutlet. Even better, you do not need a specific recipe to make it work.

Any kind of thinly pounded meat or chicken can be cooked in this manner, but in this template we are using boneless skinless chicken breast. Once you master the technique, try it with boneless skinless chicken thighs, or even steak. No matter what kind of meat or poultry you use,



it is a satisfying dinner that you can get on the table in about half an hour. Here is how to prepare chicken cutlets:

**Pound that chicken:** You can start with either a whole boneless skinless chicken breast or you can cut it in half for smaller servings. You can also buy thinly sliced chicken breasts which will need even less pounding. Whichever you start with, place it between two layers of plastic wrap or inside a large resealable plastic bag and gently but firmly pound it with a meat mallet until it is about 1cm thick, or a bit thinner even. You can opt for a freezer bag because the sturdier plastic does not break under the pressure of pounding. You can also skip this step entirely by buying thinly pounded chicken breasts from your butcher.

**Pick your crust:** This is where you get to choose your own adventure. What do you want the crust on your chicken to taste like? You can keep it simple

with breadcrumbs or panko straight out of the box, or grind up something else in the food processor to use instead. Ground nuts such as pecans, pistachios, almonds, or hazelnuts all work, as do sesame seeds or pumpkin seeds. Look for options in your snack drawer too: you can grind up chips, crackers, or pretzels for a crunchy chicken crust. Unsweetened cereals such as corn flakes work too, as will cornmeal.

Whatever you choose for your crust, grind up or pour out a bit more than you think you will need to coat all your pounded chicken. Put it in a wide shallow bowl and then make it taste good: add some salt and any spices, herbs, or citrus zest you think will complement your crust. Jazz up plain breadcrumbs with lots of finely chopped fresh parsley and thyme. Add a pinch of cumin and a little bit of orange zest to ground pistachios. Toss those crushed pretzels with smoked paprika. This bowl is where all the flavor for your chicken is going to come from, so add salt and spices according to your taste.

**Dredge and dip:** Fill a second wide shallow bowl with some all-purpose flour and then fill a third wide shallow bowl with a couple of beaten eggs. (You can always add more eggs and flour if you run out, so do not worry about how much you start with.)

Season your pounded chicken breasts with a bit of salt on both sides, and then start the three-bowl dunk: first, coat a piece of chicken in flour, and shake off any excess. Then dip it in the eggs until it is thoroughly coated. Then dredge it through your bowl of crust ingredients, pressing to make sure it fully adheres, and shake off any excess. Place breaded cutlet on a plate or sheet pan. Repeat until all your cutlets are coated and ready to fry.

**Fry it up:** You do not need to use a lot of oil to fry your chicken cutlets. You just need your pan to be generously coated in oil, and to have the bottle at the ready to add more between batches, or if the pan starts looking too dry. Canola or grapeseed oil works well, but any neutral, high-heat oil will be fine. Heat oil in skillet (any size you have will work — but the larger the skillet the more chicken you can cook at once) over medium-high until the oil is shimmering. Working in batches and making sure not to crowd the pan, fry your breaded cutlets until golden brown on both sides, which should take about two to three minutes per side. Add a fresh swirl of oil and repeat until all your cutlets are cooked to a golden-brown crisp.

Transfer the cooked cutlets to a paper towel-lined plate or a baking sheet fitted with a cooling rack until ready to serve, or pop them in a low oven to keep them warm if desired. Enjoy the delicious crispy chicken cutlet feast.

## RECIPE

### MINI BAKLAVA CUPS



Total time: 30 minutes  
Yield: 12 to 15

Baklava, a popular dessert in the Middle East and Central Asia is said to have originated in Ottoman Turkey. Made from multiple layers of unleavened filo dough, filled with chopped nuts and sweetened with syrup or honey, this delicious and attractive pastry can be enjoyed any time of the day and on any celebratory occasion.

#### INGREDIENTS:

1 box phillo sheets  
1 cup mix nuts (almonds, walnuts, pistachios) roughly chopped.  
5-6 tbsp honey  
1 tbsp brown sugar  
1 tsp Orange Zest  
4-5 Dry apricots  
1 tsp cinnamon powder  
1/2 cup pistachio powder  
200 gm.butter(melted)

#### \*FOR GARNISHING:

Rose petal (dry)  
Chocolate (melted)



Chef Chhaya Thakker

#### INSTRUCTIONS:

##### \*For filling:

- First, in a bowl mix nuts and finely chopped dry apricots.
- Then add brown sugar, cinnamon powder, orange zest and 1 tsp butter and mix well.
- Now on 1 phyllo sheet apply melted butter evenly.
- Sprinkle pistachio powder and put phyllo sheet on it again. Apply butter again and sprinkle pistachio powder and put 1 phyllo sheet again. (3 layers)
- Now cut it into small square pieces with scissors and arrange the 2/3 layers on top of each other oddly place the layers in a small muff



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](mailto:editortimeskuwait@gmail.com)



# Splendors of India showcases cultural diversity of India



## STAFF REPORT

**S**plendors of India, a day-long festival highlighting the cultural diversity of India was held at the prestigious Dar al-Athar Al-Islamiyyah Museum at Yarmouk Cultural Center, on 12 March.

The culture festival, organized by the Embassy of India in coordination with the Indian Cultural Network, and in collaboration with Kuwait's National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL), was part of the embassy's year-long initiatives planned to mark the 60th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Kuwait, and the 75th anniversary of the Independence of India.

In his speech at the inauguration of the festival, Indian Ambassador H.E. Sibi George, said: "Despite the many challenges of COVID-19 pandemic, we have been celebrating in Kuwait, Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav, the 75th anniversary

year of India's independence and 60th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between our two countries for almost a year now."

He added, "To overcome the testing times of the global pandemic, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi launched the Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan (Self-reliant India) that promotes local economy, while closely working with our international partners. 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' is about transforming India from being just a passive market to an active manufacturing hub at the heart of global value chains. Our endeavor here is to contribute to this Abhiyan through the promotion of 3 Ts – Trade, Technology and Tourism with our partners and friends in Kuwait."

Ambassador George explained that the Splendors of India festival "being held today celebrates India's rich and varied cultural diversity and also showcases our 'Made in India' products in Kuwait. This is part of our Aatmanirbhar India and 3 Ts series of events we organize regularly at



the Embassy. I am confident that today's festival will further help build our partnership with Kuwait at both economic and cultural levels, and will further inspire our Kuwaiti friends to make India as their next tourism destination."

The ambassador concluded his speech by dedicating the festival "to our school children,

over fifty thousand of whom are studying in various Indian schools in Kuwait". He added, "Let's make all our children an integral part of our India celebrations in Kuwait, imbuing in them the spirit of India's civilizational ethos."

Besides the Made in India exhibition that included a trade and commerce section and a tea-appreciation seminar, the Splendors of India festival had separate events dedicated to various aspects of Indian culture. Among the festivities were a book festival, a festival highlighting yoga, and a food festival showcasing the multiplicity of Indian cuisines, as well as the screening of a couple of Indian movies with Arabic subtitling. A mega cultural performance replete with music and dance by artists in dazzling colorful costumes drew the Splendors of India festival to a close.

The day-long event witnessed thousands of Kuwaitis, foreigners and Indian nationals visiting the venue and experiencing and enjoying various aspects of Indian culture at its best.

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# Exhibition marks historic visit to Kuwait by Queen Elizabeth II

National Museum was the venue recently of an exhibition held to mark the 70th year (Platinum Jubilee) of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II reign as the British monarch, and the 43rd anniversary of Her Majesty's historic visit to Kuwait in 1979.

The exhibition, which was organized by the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) in collaboration with the British Embassy in Kuwait, is also part of the year-long celebrations being held by the British Embassy to mark the 120th anniversary of the Anglo-Kuwaiti Agreement of 1899 under which Britain pledged to protect Kuwait's territorial integrity.

The exhibition displays rare photos, souvenirs and memorabilia collected during the Queen's visit to Kuwait by historian and researcher in Kuwait-British relations, Issa Yahya Dashti. The photographs displayed depict the world's longest-reigning monarch, alongside her late husband Prince Philip, visiting Kuwait Towers mere days before the iconic site's official opening.

Speaking on the occasion, the British Ambassador to Kuwait, H.E. Belinda Lewis, referencing a press statement that was released during Her Majesty the Queen's visit to the Kuwait Towers back in February 1979,



said that the Queen and her late husband Prince Philip made a guided tour of the venue, before the official opening of the towers to the public. She noted the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh were the first official guests to visit the Towers and during the visit, they enjoyed performances and traditional music presented by Kuwaiti artists.

For her part, Sheikha Hala Bader Al-Mohammed Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, head of the Diplomatic Women's Committee described the Kuwaiti-British relations as distinguished and strong between the two countries, the two peoples, and the two ruling families. She also considered this relationship as an example to be followed in bilateral relations between countries.

Pointing to the visit by Queen Elizabeth II

countries. Returning to an explanation of his exhibition, Dashti noted that it displays 30 photos of Queen Elizabeth II and the royal consort, the late Prince Philip that were clicked during the royal couple's visit to Kuwait. He added that the exhibits also include original collectibles related to the visit such as newspapers, magazines, souvenirs and official programs released by the Amiri Diwan at that time.

Stressing on the distinctiveness of the visit, Dashti noted that Queen Elizabeth II arrived at Kuwait airport on board the legendary British Airways Concorde aircraft and was welcomed by then Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and senior political leaders. The visit also marked the first time that the royal guests stayed aboard the Royal Yacht Britannia that was anchored at Shuaikh Port during their trip. And, following the royal visit, the Queen was seen off at Shuaikh seaport, becoming also the first foreign royalty to leave the country through this port.

During her first and only historic visit to Kuwait, Queen Elizabeth II visited Al-Seef and Al-Salam palaces, Al-Ahmadi City, the display center of Kuwait Oil Company, the British Embassy in Dasman area and the iconic Kuwait Towers.

## Seamen without land address unable to renew Civil ID

A programming incongruity in the Public Authority for Civil Information's (PACI) data system is preventing fishermen, who live aboard trawlers and work only seasonally in Kuwait, from being able to renew their Civil IDs, which prevents them from being able to conduct any official transaction.



The fishermen were previously using the address of Fishermen's Union headquarters located in Sharq, and the union's office in Fahaheel, as their residential address to obtain their Civil ID and conduct all other official transactions. However, a programming anomaly in the PACI computer system no longer accepts multiple entries from the same residential

address, thereby preventing the seamen from renewing their Civil IDs.

Expounding on the issue, head of the Kuwaiti Federation of Fishermen, Dhaher Al-Suwayan said that a previous agreement with the authorities at PACI had allowed the fishermen to use the union buildings as their residential address. He further clarified that trawler-workers do not have, or need, a permanent land address as they lived on board their trawlers, and work only seasonally during shrimp and other specific fishing seasons, after which they leave for their home countries.

Pointing out that many fishermen had to now pay hefty fines for the delay in renewing their Civil ID, caused in the first place by the fault of the data system at PACI, Al-Suwayan urged officials at the Authority to do the needful to address this address problem urgently, as many fishermen needed to leave for their home countries.

He also noted that the Kuwaiti Federation of Fishermen had sent a letter on this issue to the Director General of the Public Authority for Civil Information on 17 February, but failed to receive a response and the problem remains unresolved.

Al-Suwayan added that the federation is doing everything it can to overcome the challenges faced by the fishermen, and stressed the importance of concerted efforts on the part of everyone in the best interests of the public.

## Global Ilocanos in Kuwait holds induction of new officers

RICKY LAXA  
STAFF WRITER

The organization of Global Ilocanos in Kuwait held its annual induction of officers and hand-over ceremony on 11 March at the Inn and Go Hotel in Kuwait. Philippine Vice Consul Aeron Lozada, Labor Attaché Nasser Mustafa and Assistant Labor Attaché Cathy Duladul were present to grace the occasion, along with members of the Philippine media who covered the function.

The event commenced with prayer invocations by Cherry Basilio and Aisha AlBakit followed by Kuwait and Philippine National Anthems. Edison Abajero gave a brief opening remark and a background of how the group was formed. New set of officers were presented by Jojet Basilio on stage, which was followed by the official oath-taking ceremony officiated by Vice Consul Lozada. Philippine Labor Attaché Mustafa and Assistant Labor Attaché Duladul delivered congratulatory speeches to the new set of officers. Ceremonial handing-over of responsibilities from the organization's former Vice President Alvin Factura to new President Rico Duran followed.

Plaques of appreciation were given to sponsors, guests and media by Omar Jacalne and Jolens Laguan. Jacalne delivered a brief inspirational message and the event ended



Max Torres, Adelin Talledo, Jhuliet Azurin and Tea Acacio. Area Coordinators: Alvin Facture, Chelsie Pagulayan, Kristoffer Duran, Medardo Garcia, Bing Reyes, Stanley Barroga Jr., Ferdinand Manzano, Maria Aiza Apilas and Rowena Tamayo. Advisers: Danilo Narag Jr. and Trinidad Mariam AlZankawi. The event was hosted by Omar Jacalne, Jolens Laguan and Mark Sulio.

# Increasing murders, violence point to social, moral failures

The grisly murder last week of a mother by her own two daughters in the suburb of Doha, and the murder of a family of three by an Indian in Ardhiya, have set alarm bells ringing on the increasing frequency with which people appear to resort to murder to resolve differences and disputes or settle scores.

Latest statistics from the Ministry of Interior (MoI) show that a total of 30 homicides took place in Kuwait during the 14-month period between January 2021 and the end of February 2022. During the same period, the number of misdemeanors reported rose to 21,000, especially the use of knives in resolving differences which highlights the ease

of obtaining these lethal objects from the local market without supervision.

In addition, figures show that there were about 3,800 various types of felonies recorded during the past year using various types of weapons to settle disputes, commit theft, settle dishonoring or for revenge, as well as due to drug-related issues and other reasons.

The more than two murders on average per month may appear insignificant in comparison to many other countries, but given the social, moral and religious environment prevailing in conservative Kuwait, and the relatively small population of the country, the increasing

number of murders are definitely an alarming situation that needs urgent intervention by the authorities and social workers.

It is to the credit of security personnel that most of the murderers are swiftly apprehended and brought to justice to serve their due punishment under the law. However, as long as the underlying causes on why people resort to the ultimate violence to settle issues, sometimes as minor as a difference of opinion, remains unaddressed, the number of murders and use of violence to settle disputes will keep increasing.

Psychologists and sociologists blame the COVID-19 crisis and measures designed to prevent its spread such as curfews and lockdowns, as one of the reasons that led to an increase in violence. They also blame the widespread use of social media and modern technology with all its violent manifestations around the world, and the extent to which parents fail to



supervise their children and educate them about the danger of violent electronic games and their effects, for the increase in violence.

The experts add that the patterns of education and the moral system play an essential role, and the educational curricula, societal culture, and the extent of awareness, are all challenges that require to be tackled by the entire community.

They added the Interior Ministry alone will not be able to confront the increasing number of crimes and violence which has become rampant

in society. Rather than concentrate on apprehending the criminal, the focus should be on tackling the crime and the roots of its causes.

In addition, jurists pointed out that the entry of the female element into the line of murder is strange and requires a decisive pause, indicating that dozens of girls are accused of crimes of self-aggression. Lawyers confirmed that drug addiction contributed to the spread of crime, noting that recklessness of some young people, lack of legal deterrence, and nepotism have led to bloodshed due to the most trivial of reasons.

The issues that need to be addressed are often deep, but that does not lessen the need to tackle them, including the reasons and motives that prompt people to commit murders, and the absence of social protection mechanisms designed to prevent escalation of disagreements into murder and violence.



## ALSAYER celebrates talents of special needs children

Reinforcing its corporate social responsibility efforts, ALSAYER Holding celebrated Kuwait National and Liberation Day by supporting the 'Our Champion Children with Us' campaign, in partnership with 'Play and Think', a specialized educational and counseling center for differently-abled children.

The spirit of the event was to encourage a human rights-based approach to ensure that the more than 20,000 persons who are differently-abled and have special needs receive equal opportunities for development, learning, social inclusiveness, and welfare. Such initiatives motivate everyone to support the country's Vision 2035, New Kuwait development plan and UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of providing all people with Good Health and Well-Being, Quality Education, Equality, and Partnerships for the Goals.

Speaking on the occasion, Founder of Play and Think, Dr. Awatif Al Rubaian, said that staff at the Center, who are certified in rehabilitation services, offer early, ongoing interventions to improve lifestyle functioning of these children, and help them develop to be independent. He noted that the Center has so far trained around 100 children to identify their skills and enhance it to empower their gifted talents gradually and scientifically. However, he added that this needs to be supported by everyone, including parents, society, authorities, and companies who value it as their responsibility to care.

The event, held at Kuwait Sea Club, was attended by more than 250 communities including 50 special needs children with their families, volunteers, and key delegates, to view the creative activities and fun-filled games for the children to make it memorable for them.

According to Group Manager, Corporate Excellence at AlSayer, Eng. Nehad Al Haj Ali, "ALSAYER welcomes every opportunity to build a social partnership to empower differently-abled individuals. Our aim is to integrate children with special needs and raise awareness about their potential to lead productive and dignified lives. So, we encourage private sectors and voluntary groups to adopt such initiatives to build a change to bring quality human values."



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# Where am I from?

## FROM OUR ARCHIVES

BY ISHWAITA K. MERWAH  
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES KUWAIT

**M**y friend's father turns 70 this year. He has lived in Kuwait for over 50 of those 70 years. Lately, all he says is that he wants to die peacefully in 'his country', Kuwait. Sadly we know that this is not a possibility, because to live or die in Kuwait is not so easy — you need the all important Iqama (residence permit) that all expatriates require to live here, and not many people can legally get it after a certain age. He is deeply saddened and does not want to leave Kuwait to die in a foreign land. Recently he was even told by someone to go back to where he came from, to which he calmly replied that he came from Kuwait.

This got me thinking that I could be in a very similar situation.

People often ask me; where are you from? Kuwait, comes my prompt reply. Confused, they ask again; but where are you really from, where is your family from?

So here is the story of my roots and my family. Maybe you can help me answer where I am really from.

My grandfather came to Kuwait in March 1949, when Kuwait was still under British rule; Indian Rupee was the currency used then, water was distributed every morning on donkeys and there was no electricity. At that time he started and successfully built one of the first canned food businesses and introduced many food brands into Kuwait. In doing this, I believe he made a small contribution in the building and development of Kuwait. My grandmother followed him to Kuwait in 1954 to help him in his business. My father along with his siblings spent his summer holidays in Kuwait in the 1950's until he permanently moved to Kuwait in 1961 to join the business. Later that year when Kuwait gained its independence my grandfather, grandmother and father were all out there parading and celebrating in the streets along with everyone else.

My mother came to Kuwait right after getting married to my father in 1970 at the age of 21. Both my brothers and I were all born in Kuwait. All the stories we heard from our grandparents and parents were in and about their life in Kuwait. My brothers and I grew up here, we went to school here, we dressed up in the Kuwaiti flag colors on National Day and celebrated with everyone else. I always participated in the February 25th program

which used to be telecast on TV. We picnicked and made sand castles on the beach near Kuwait towers, basically we did all the normal and same things like all the other 'Kuwaiti' children did. I wept for our beloved Kuwait as it burnt in the Iraqi invasion in 1990. I prayed and carried the yellow ribbon for our POW's. All my childhood memories and all my sorrows and joys are connected to this land.

In the late 1990's, my nieces and nephews became the second-generation of our family to be born in Kuwait. I went to study in California and came back after completion of my studies because I wanted to come 'Home' and did not want to live in a foreign land. I even got married here because I did not want to get married anywhere else other than in my home country. Lately a lot of acquaintances and friends have been immigrating to other countries to secure their future since they feel they do not have one in Kuwait, as there are no old age facilities here for them. If I am left with no other option I too may have to do that one day but I left the West and came back years ago, (which many people told me was the biggest mistake I made) but this is my home; this is where I was born, where I live, where my roots are. I live here not because I am more successful here than I would be elsewhere; the fact is that I live here in spite of the fact that I could have more opportunities elsewhere.

This is my only home; so where are people like me 'really' from, and where do people like me go from here? A lot of my friends make fun of my passion and patriotism towards a country that is "not mine", but I know many people who feel exactly as I do. Most of us do not want anything from the government, like a pension, medical care or a nationality; though these would be nice. We would just be really grateful for self- or state-sponsored permanent residences so that we are 'allowed' to live and work peacefully in the only country that we call home. It would also be gratifying to see some differentiation in terms of residency laws and benefits for people like me, whose family has lived here for over 63 years and a person who has recently come here on a labor visa. Currently there is no differentiation.

All said and done I do not consider myself an ajnabi (expatriate), In my heart I am as Kuwaiti as anyone with a Kuwaiti passport. Foolish I know, but such are matters of the heart. Four generations of my family have lived in Kuwait. I did not choose to be born here, but I consciously choose to live here because this is the only country and home I know and love.

*• This article was first published in The Times Kuwait on Jan 27, 2013*

## IOM Kuwait celebrates International Women's Day through art



To mark International Women's Day on 8 March, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UN Migration agency in Kuwait, brought together women from different walks of life and organized an art event that allowed them to express themselves through painting.

The event, organized in coordination with the Embassy of Sri Lanka and in partnership with Ooredoo Telecommunication, was held at the IOM premises in Kuwait.

"It is critical to recognize that women, including migrant women, are powerful agents and leaders in their families and communities, as well as at national and international levels, providing resources for their families, facilitating migration, and adapting during displacement," said IOM Kuwait Chief of Mission Mazen Aboulhosn. He added that "expression through arts is an activity that is educational, social and cultural. It can have a positive effect on several aspects of well-being and we are glad to organize this activity in coordination with the Sri Lankan embassy through the Nojoom program of Ooredoo".

"We are honored to work with and celebrate this very important day with the IOM and Ooredoo Telecom," said Ambassador of Sri Lanka H.E. Mohammed Jauhar, "I am pleased to note that, Sri Lankan women, along with men, have been

exercising the universal franchise, since 1931, and access to free education since 1945, which contributed immensely in their empowerment. We, at the Embassy in Kuwait, are very pleased with the contribution of our women in Kuwait as well as in Sri Lanka. We have tirelessly been working with Kuwait authorities and our international partners, in addressing all matters related to women empowerment and we are committed to do more," said Ambassador Jauhar.

For his part, Senior Director, Corporate Communications, Ooredoo Kuwait, Mijbil Alayoub said: "Women empowerment is essential for all-round development of societies and nations as a whole. It falls under our responsibility to support women through equipping them with equal opportunities so they realize their full identity and power in all spheres of life. In Kuwait, one can see a long list of women who have played great roles in society, as leaders, educators, the State of entrepreneurs and business-women, and that is something we take pride in. At Ooredoo Kuwait, we take serious steps that allow all women to work in a safe and caring environment, which allow them to grow at all levels; professionally, personally, socially, emotionally and physically."

IOM takes this opportunity to congratulate Kuwaiti women and all women around the world and wishes them a happy International Women's Day.



## Nazaha refers hundreds of COVID-era corruptions to prosecution

Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) has referred hundreds of cases pertaining to corruption to the Public Prosecution for further legal action.

A new status report by the Authority reveals the corruption that prevailed despite the exceptional circumstances caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic that emerged at the start of 2020. The reported cases show that the health crisis had a clear impact on the form of corruption in terms of their mechanisms and results.

Nazaha said in the report that out of the total 810 reports on corruption that it received during the one-year period from January 2020 to January 2021, over half were within its competence and had accordingly referred these

to the Public Prosecution. The Authority noted that the COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase in crimes of corruption and with it increased efforts to combat it.

The Nazaha report also points out that most of the corruption cases were submitted by the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Interior and the Kuwait Oil Company, including crimes of appropriating public money, intentional harm and facilitating the appropriation of public money, and crimes of forgery, profiteering and making illegal gains.

The report also shows that despite the anti-corruption law mandating financial disclosures from public sector officials, a total of 2,777 people failed to submit their financial disclosure over the past four years.



## Kuwait adorns with colors of La Francophonie

**A**mbassadors of the Member States of the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF) represented in Kuwait within the Council for the Promotion of La Francophonie in Kuwait, have announced the launch of a month-long celebrations titled 'Month of the French Language and the Francophonie' in Kuwait.

The Council, created in 2021, supports activities aimed at promoting La Francophonie and enhancing the use of French in Kuwait. In particular, the Council promotes the actions carried out by the International Organization of La Francophonie and French-speaking bodies, such as the Agence universitaire de la Francophonie. It also supports initiatives aimed at introducing Kuwaitis of all ages, but especially the younger generations, to the plural face of La Francophonie. In addition, the Council works to strengthen contact networks in French in Kuwait, and facilitate collaboration between various partners during activities related to the promotion of La Francophonie.

The Council held its third general

meeting last week and launched the program for 'Mois de la Francophonie' (Francophonie Month). During the meeting, the Council members warmly thanked His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Muhammad Al-Sabah, Honorary President of the Council, who supports the importance of the Francophonie and the French language in Kuwait, and the country's commitment to promoting learning this language which contributes to the cultural enrichment of the country and its inhabitants. It recalls the importance of learning French in Kuwait and the need to accompany this educational and pedagogical support with cultural programming in order to promote the exchange and daily practice of French, and to encourage the exchange of ideas, and building relationships between Francophones and Kuwaitis.

Although it is not yet a member of the OIF, and has expressed the wish to be, Kuwait bears witness to an active Francophonie that dates back to the 1960s. French has been taught in Kuwait since 1966. Nearly 500 teachers carry out this mission in nearly 150 public high schools.

With approximately 30,000 learners registered each year, French is today the second foreign language taught in Kuwait, behind English. Kuwait University has a particularly active French Department, up to the master's level. This French-speaking presence is also illustrated by the presence in Kuwait of 44 embassies of member countries of the Francophonie, a French high school (the Lycée français du Koweït), a cultural center (the French Institute of Kuwait - IFK), a research center in archeology and social and human sciences (the French Research Center for the Arabian Peninsula - CEFREPA) and the broadcasting of France 24 and French-language radio RFI.

The Council gives all lovers of the French language and Francophone cultures an appointment on its social networks to find out more about the many events being held during this month of La Francophonie, to participate in these events, and to share your impressions. On Instagram the link is: @francekoweit and @if\_koweit. The celebrations were launched on Monday, 7 March and will be held until 31 March.

The latest edition of the Francophonie Month, with its rich and varied programs, including films, concerts, artistic workshops, sports events, dictations, quizzes and competitions, conferences-debates, market, and other events, aims to introduce everyone to the richness of French-speaking culture and to celebrate this common language.

The month-long festival will also celebrate 10 years of the French Institute in Kuwait, which will host most of the 2022 edition for adults, teenagers and children, and at all levels — beginner, intermediate, advanced. For students wishing to continue their studies in France, the IFK welcomes you to the Espace Campus France; a complete documentation center where you will find advice and assistance to build your university project. The IFK media library provides the public with a general offer of more than 7,000 books, magazines and DVDs, for adults and children. Throughout the year, the Institut français, in collaboration with its local partners, sets up projects in the fields of visual arts, performing arts, music, cinema and literature.

## Cabinet directs humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, Ukraine

In its weekly meeting last week, the Council of Ministers headed by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, announced humanitarian aid to the tune of US\$7 million to help relieve suffering of people from the ongoing turmoil in Ukraine and Afghanistan.

The decision comes in accordance with the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh



Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and in light of humanitarian repercussions arising from the ongoing conflicts. The humanitarian aid amounting to \$5 million for Afghanistan and \$2 million to Ukraine will be directed through the United Nations agencies and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

According to Foreign Minister, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Acting Minister

of Defense Sheikh Dr. Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, the Cabinet was also briefed on the recent visits of Egyptian President Abdelfattah Al-Sisi and Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune to the country, as both held talks with His Highness the Amir on bilateral relations and current regional and international affairs, in addition to issues of mutual interest.

The Cabinet was also briefed with participation of Foreign Minister, State Minister for Cabinet Affairs and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Dr. Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah in the 26th EU-GCC council ministerial meeting, held recently in Brussels. Means to enhance cooperation on regional and global challenges, and issues of common interest that require discussion and exchange of views, including on partnership, trade, education, health, climate change, environment protection, renewable energy resources and cyber security, were discussed among other issues throughout the meeting.

The Cabinet also followed up on latest developments related to the Coronavirus pandemic, listening in this regard to a briefing by Minister of Commerce and Industry and Acting Minister of Health Fahad Al-Shuraiaan. It voiced relief over overall declining numbers.

In addition, the Cabinet during its Monday meeting extended sincere condolences on the passing away of Dr. Ahmad Al-Khatib, whose contributions best served the country throughout his career, especially in parliamentary work, through his membership in the Constituent Assembly and beyond.

## ZCrew donates essentials to kids in shelter



RICKY LAXA  
STAFF WRITER

**Z**Crew, a team of fitness trainers from different gyms and weekly attendees to the event, held a one-day 'Charity Exercise for a Cause' at the Chai Al Dhaha Hall of Radisson Blu Hotel on 11 March, spearheaded by its team leader Blanche Bravo.

"The idea was suggested by our mentor Ricky to hold a one free class and request attendees to bring kids and baby essentials such as diapers, milk, clothes and toys for the children in the shelter run by the Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO) and Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA)," commented Bravo. The campaign started two weeks back and gathered awareness among fitness groups and inspired others to organize individual team charity workouts.

Among those present were regular attendees and their guests who were treated to an hour and half of pure workout and fun. The warm up was led

by a fitness trainer and mentor of the group Ricky Laxa, followed by sets of Zumba dances from trainers Rowena Atienza, Ronna Pacia and Jamie Red. The presenters were also joined on stage by Ida Pellaud, a mentor of Z Crew and Dennis Apolonio, a great supporter of the team for years. Food was also brought in by some of the attendees and shared with everyone after the workout.

Representatives from POLO and OWWA arrived at the venue immediately after the occasion, gathered the donations and arranged for its transfer to the shelter. Speaking on the occasion, Labor Attaché Mustafa extended his gratitude to ZCrew for their initiative and effort to help women and children in the shelter. For their part, ZCrew expressed thanks to the trainers, Nympha Luat, Leo Capiendo and Ga See Marie for their assistance during the event and to The Times Kuwait for their support.

ZCrew meets every Friday at the Chai Al Dhaha Ballroom of Radisson Blu Hotel from 8:30 am till 10:00 am under the leadership of Bravo and sponsorship of Mrs. Pellaud.

## PAM provides access to status of work complaints on Sahel



The Unified Government Application, Sahel, which provides an integrated platform for the delivery of e-services by government entities to citizens and residents in the country, has announced the launch of yet another novel service to the public by the Public Authority of Manpower (PAM).

Official spokesperson for Sahel, Youssef Kazem, said that PAM has added a 'Labor Complaints Inquiry' to the Sahel application, which enables anyone who has filed a complaint with PAM against their company, to ascertain the latest status of their complaint.

Sahel app provides citizens and residents with a new experience in accomplishing

government transactions, as it allows them to conduct various services and transactions online, easily, quickly, and effectively, in line with the highest quality and security standards, said Mr. Kazem.

He added that the App also delivers notifications and announcements from the government to the public in a matter of seconds, accurately, cost-effectively and efficiently. He also praised PAM for the efforts the authority has exerted in saving time and effort of the beneficiaries of its services through making many of its services available through 'Sahel'. Elaborating on the government's goal to accomplish a full digital transformation by bringing all e-government services to the Sahel application, Mr. Kazem noted, "This digital transformation will help deliver every kind of official transaction through a digital click, for anyone residing in Kuwait." He revealed that since launching the Sahel application, there have been over 250,000 completely paperless transactions and certificates issued through Sahel, "which also contributes to the government's plan to go completely paperless in delivering its

services to people in Kuwait."

It is noteworthy that 'Sahel' is an integrated public service application launched by the government with the aim of transforming the government-to-citizen experience. It also marks

a strategic achievement for the government in its 'Vision 2035, New Kuwait' development plan, as it will enhance the efficiency and speed of completion of government transactions and operations digitally.

### MoPW to open bids for third package of work at KIA

Starting next week, a special committee at the Ministry of Public Works (MoPW) will study bids submitted by companies desiring to participate in the third package of projects for the construction, completion and maintenance of aircraft hangars, runways and service buildings for the new passenger terminal building at Kuwait International Airport (KIA).

The committee, chaired by the assistant undersecretary for the major projects sector, Abdulmohsen Al-Enezi, will look at the lowest priced bidders if they meet the conditions

mentioned in the tender. The study work is expected to take between one and a half to two months before choosing the company to carry out the work.

The launch of the third package, comes in line with the works that are being implemented in the first and second packages of the main building and the annexes, the roads and services of the project, which is proceeding according to plan.

It is noteworthy that the third package project is located between the eastern and western runways, extending from Building 2 on an estimated area of 3.2 million square meters, and consists of aircraft hangars, corridors linked to the current runways, air service roads, service tunnels associated with Building 2, a power station, a building Food supplies, support building, and pedestrian bridges.

## Redefining democracy in Kuwait

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

In addition to the above two imbalances, there is also a significant segmentation in the labor market, with nationals accounting for over 80 percent of workers in the public sector and less than four percent in the private sector. The presence of a large expatriate population to fill jobs in the private sector has also resulted in a demographic imbalance, where every three in four of the population is a foreigner.

Aware of the economic and demographic shortcomings the government has often attempted to introduce meaningful economic, financial and administrative reforms, especially during times of low oil prices when its revenues are constrained. However, these efforts have been thwarted and stonewalled in parliament by an opposition that considers any reforms that touch the pockets of citizens a redline that no government would be allowed to cross. Unfortunately, on those occasions when oil prices surge and the state treasury overflows, the government and opposition appear to find common ground in maintaining the statist status quo and funding the welfare state.

The adoption of a democratic style of governance, along with the institution of a welfare state from the accruing oil wealth, has had both up- and down-sides to it. The welfare state that evolved from the time of Kuwait's independence has provided citizens with cradle-to-grave shielding that ensures they receive free healthcare, education, housing, assured employment and social protection. Abundant oil revenues and the welfare state have combined to create a rentier state and imbued the same rentier mentality among many nationals. Generations of citizens have come to regard state largesse as their entitlement by virtue of nothing more than their birth as Kuwaitis.

Increase in size of the national population, fickleness of global oil prices, and consequently the roller-coaster ride in the state's revenues, have over the decades led to a situation where the welfare state is increasingly becoming unsustainable. While the rentier model of economy and state subsidies had allowed most nationals to pursue a relatively luxurious modern lifestyle, it also generated indifference and lassitude in society, as well as a deep, vested interest in retaining the status quo.

The 18th-century French political philosopher Montesquieu once noted that 'if a republic is small, it is destroyed by foreign force; if it is large, it is destroyed by internal imperfection'. Kuwait, a small democracy has survived attempts to subjugate it in 1990 by the Iraqi forces, and even earlier by other factions in the neighborhood. But now it faces the dilemma that Montesquieu attributed to large democracies, internal imperfections in its democratic choices.

In Kuwait, we have all the trappings of a

democracy, from universal suffrage, a quadrennial election exercise, an iconic parliament building that flaunts the country's democratic credentials, and a relatively unfettered media space that ensures, to a limited extent, freedom of expression. The country also has a contentious parliament that vigilantly monitors, evaluates and censors the government over its functioning and nonfunctioning. And, elected lawmakers have the constitutionally guaranteed right to challenge the executive through grilling and no-confidence motions that could potentially bring down the government.

So yes, for all intents and purposes Kuwait can be considered a functioning democracy with all its democratic accoutrements in place. But a functioning democracy on its own is not an indicator of a flourishing democracy, where citizens embrace all of the democratic values and principles, as well as accept the rights and responsibilities that come with democracy.

**Democracy is a universally recognized ideal; it is yearned for by those that are denied it, misused by many who have it, and held up with pride by the few that truly embrace it. Democracy is also one of the core values and principles of the United Nations, as it provides an environment for the protection and effective realization of human rights for all.** In 2015, the UN General Assembly envisioned 17 integrated Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) that call for action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity.

Goal 16 of the SDG calls for 'Peace, Justice and strong institutions', with many of the targets of this goal being geared to protect and strengthen democratic institutions, including reducing corruption and bribery; developing accountable and transparent institutions; urging inclusive and representative decision-making at all levels; and ensuring protection of fundamental freedoms. It also calls for promoting the rule of law and ensuring equal access to justice for all.

In Kuwait, we never tire of telling others that we are a nation of laws. While this is true to a large extent, it is in the application of these laws universally and equally among citizens and residents that a wide chasm exists. Ask any foreign worker who has had the misfortune to get into a dispute with a citizen, whether it is a traffic infraction, a rent disagreement with a landlord, a work issue with the sponsor, or any of the myriad problems that end up in contention between a national and a foreigner. The final outcomes usually speak for themselves. An important caveat to be added here is that how the law is applied also depends to an extent on the nationality, religious affiliation, or even the color of the skin of the foreigner.

The deep discrimination and prejudices that prevail in all aspects of interaction involving citizens and foreigners, as well as among various sections of citizens themselves, is indicative that despite the passage of six decades of democracy,

a truly democratic spirit has not yet percolated down among the citizenry. Perhaps this explains Kuwait's consistently mediocre ratings in numerous global studies that assess democratic traditions in a country. This is also a pointer to why 'democratic' Kuwait fares no better than its peers among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states who largely have very few democratic credentials to their name.

**In its assessment of democracy around the world in 2020, the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute, a highly respected independent research institute affiliated to the University of Gothenburg in Sweden, found Kuwait to rank relatively low in all the indices used to measure prevailing democratic traditions. The V-Dem Institute, which is funded by the World Bank, several government organizations and research institutions, bases its assessment on five indices that correspond to each of the five high-level principles of democracy it identifies — electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative and egalitarian democracy.**

The first measures whether elections are free and fair, and assesses the presence of a free and independent media. The second rates the rule of law, prevailing checks and balances and civil liberties. The third measures the degree to which citizens participate in their government through local democratic institutions, civil society organizations, and direct democracy. The fourth assesses the degree to which decisions are made in the best interest of the people, and not due to coercion or narrow interest groups. The fifth measures the level of equal access to resources, power, and freedoms across various groups within a society.

In 2020, Kuwait scored a relatively low 0.317; 0.288; 0.1; 0.275; 0.246 respectively for each of the five indices to obtain an average aggregate of 0.245 out of a possible 1. By contrast, Denmark that figured top on the list in 2020 had a scoring of 0.91; 0.878; 0.696; 0.869; and 0.87 respectively for the five indices, with an average aggregate of 0.845. The one possible consolation for Kuwait in regard to this relatively low ranking is that it ranked higher than its other five peers in the GCC bloc.

A year from the V-Dem report, Kuwait fared no better than its other GCC siblings in the 2021 Democracy Index compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), the research division of the UK-based Economist Group. The Democracy Index, which measures the state of democracy in 167 countries, is based on 60 indicators grouped in five different categories that measure pluralism, civil liberties and political culture. In addition to a numeric score and a ranking, the index categorizes each country into one of four regime types: full democracies, flawed democracies, hybrid regimes and authoritarian regimes.

Sadly, Kuwait along with other GCC states fall in the authoritarian regime group, which is characterized by absolute monarchies or dictatorships that may have some conventional institutions of democracy but with only meager significance. Again, the only

redeeming point for Kuwait is that it ranked on top of other GCC states with its 110th global spot. Other GCC states that ranked lower respectively were Qatar (114); Oman (130); the UAE (134); Bahrain (144); and Saudi Arabia (152).

If yet another assessment of Kuwait's poor democratic rankings was needed, it came from the Freedom in the World index, which is an annual survey and report by the US-based non-governmental organization Freedom House. The Freedom in the World index, which measures the degree of civil liberties and political rights globally, produces scores on a scale from 1 (most free) to 7 (least free) based on a points system that goes from 0 to 100. Depending on these ratings, the nations are then classified as Free, Partly Free, or Not Free.

In the 2021 Freedom in the World index Kuwait was characterized as 'Partly Free' scoring 5 respectively for its civil liberties and political rights, and receiving 37 points out of a possible 100. Other GCC countries fared even lower and were considered in the 'Not Free' category, including Qatar that received 25 points, Oman (23), the UAE (17); Bahrain (12) and Saudi Arabia (7).

In its foreword to the 2021 report, Freedom House notes that today the word democracy has been applied, rightly or wrongly, to states of all types, including by the 'Democratic People's Republic of North Korea'. And, in a December 2021 joint op-ed by the Russian and Chinese ambassadors to the United States, both countries referred to themselves as 'democratic'.

Democracy means more than just having a parliament, periodic election exercises or ensuring majority rule. Ideally, democracy is a governing system based on the will and consent of the governed; has institutions that are transparent and accountable to all citizens; adheres to the rule of law, and ensures respect for human rights. The ideal democracy also calls for an openness to alternations in power, with rival candidates or parties competing fairly, and when gaining power, governing for the good of everyone in the country, not just themselves, or those who voted for them, or to further their parochial interests. In a consummate democracy there is a level playing field so that all people, no matter the circumstances of their birth or background, can enjoy the universal human rights to which they are entitled and participate in politics and governance.

But democracy is also more than just an ideal; it also involves an ongoing process of self-correction and incremental improvements to its functioning, and empowers and encourages people to constantly and peacefully strive towards bettering the democratic experience. This unique and inherent capacity for self-correction is what makes democracy so successful at delivering long-term stability and prosperity for its people. Kuwait can take consolation in the fact that there is no country in the world which is a perfect, ideal democracy.

# Experience the best of France

The French affectionately call their beloved homeland "l'Hexagone" because of its distinct six-sided shape. This beautiful and diverse land is bordered by the English Channel, the Atlantic Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea, Italy to the south, Switzerland and Germany to the east, and Belgium to the north. From the seaside to the mountains, each region of France has its own unique character: the awe-inspiring French Alps, sun-drenched rural Provence, the glamorous French Riviera, the scenic coastal province of Brittany, and charming Alsace with picture-perfect hamlets nestled in vine-covered hills.



**Paris:** Known for its elegance and joie de vivre, Paris is a grand European capital city. The French have an expression that "there is only one Paris" ("il n'y a qu'un Paris") because this magnificent city is truly incomparable. Even the polished photos in tourist brochures do not do justice to the beauty of Paris. The city is filled with architectural masterpieces, like the famous Eiffel Tower and the majestic Notre-Dame Cathedral that reflect the city's rich heritage. The Louvre contains one of the finest art collections in the world. For French Impressionist art, the Musée d'Orsay and the Musée de l'Orangerie offer endless treasures.



**Normandy:** This is a quaint pastoral region, covered with apple orchards and cow pastures and dotted with historic castles, inspiring churches, and picture-perfect towns. Normandy also boasts one of France's top tourist attractions, Mont-Saint-Michel. Known as the 'The Heavenly Jerusalem', this 11th- to 13th-century Gothic abbey was a medieval pilgrimage site and is now listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. For those seeking relaxation, Normandy's seaside resorts Deauville, Trouville, Dieppe, Étretat, and Fécamp are wonderful summertime destinations.

**The Alsace Region:** The historic cities of Strasbourg and Colmar, along with the hundreds of Alsatian villages, have a



charming character that is completely distinct from the rest of France. The architecture and ambience of Alsace was influenced by neighboring Germany, as seen in the brightly-painted, half-timbered houses and venerable Gothic churches. Strasbourg enchants visitors with its narrow cobblestone streets, scenic canals, and ornate cathedral. Colmar is the quintessential Alsatian town, full of interesting old churches and traditional houses with flower-decked balconies. Outside these two cities is an unspoiled landscape of vine-covered foothills.



**The Burgundy Region:** For a taste of quintessential France, visit the Burgundy countryside. This pastoral landscape of lush woodlands and rolling hills is dotted with impressive monuments. Romanesque churches, ancient towns, and inspiring old abbeys attesting to a rich cultural heritage that dates back to the Middle Ages. Top attractions are the historic city of Dijon, with its aristocratic palaces, the medieval town of Beaune that delights with its old-world charm.



**The Côte d'Azur:** The French Riviera is a glamorous stretch of Mediterranean coastline known in France as the Côte d'Azur because of the mesmerizing azure-blue waters. The Côte d'Azur has something for everyone. Nice is the place to enjoy life, visit art museums, and stroll along charming cobblestone streets and stunning seaside boulevards. Saint-Tropez, Cannes and Monaco are glitzy resort towns, playgrounds for the rich and famous that are dotted with lavish vacation villas, luxury hotels, gourmet restaurants, private beaches, and yacht-filled marinas. Many sunbathers and nature lovers prefer Antibes for its expansive sandy beaches and natural environment.

**The Châteaux of the Loire Valley:** Like the scene of a fairy tale, the Loire Valley is a lush, wooded landscape dotted with magnificent castles along the gently flowing Loire River. Stretching for 280 kilometers, from Sully-sur-Loire to Chalonnes-sur-Loire in Anjou, the Loire Valley is the largest UNESCO-listed site in France. The region boasts an

incredibly rich cultural heritage. During the 15th and 16th centuries, France's kings built sumptuous country retreats here purely for entertainment and enjoyment. Extravagant châteaux, such as the grandiose Château de Chambord and the emblematic Château de Chenonceau, offer insight into the opulence of the Renaissance-era French court.



**The French Alps:** Boasting some of the most awe-inspiring natural scenery in the world, the French Alps draws many tourists for alpine skiing, snowboarding, and cross-country skiing. Besides the spectacular mountain terrain, the region also has a rich cultural heritage linked to the ancestral territory of the Italian royal House of Savoy as well as the historic Dauphiné region. The lovely mountain village of Chamonix offers traditional alpine charm, while Annecy has an ancient château, lakeside scenery, and fairy tale ambience.

**Prehistoric Caves in the Dordogne and the Pyrenees:** France's Dordogne region boasts incredible sites for viewing prehistoric cave art. To admire the masterpieces of prehistoric man, the UNESCO-listed Lascaux Cave in the Dordogne's Vallée de la Vézère is a must-see site. This cave contains beautifully rendered prehistoric paintings, among the finest examples of Paleolithic art in the world. In the mountainous Pyrenees region is the Grotte du Mas d'Azil, an amazing cave decorated with intricate drawings.

**Cirque de Gavarnie in the Pyrenees Mountains:** The mountainous Pyrenees region is an inspiring place that offers both natural splendor and spiritual wonders, with many sacred pilgrimage sites. The UNESCO-listed Cirque de Gavarnie is nature's version of a cathedral. Forming a semicircle, the awesome 3,000-meter-high granite rock walls are draped with dramatic waterfalls that lead down to rushing rivers and peaceful streams. The entire Hautes-Pyrénées region is part of a national park, the Parc National des Pyrénées that borders Spain. Within the park are hiking trails through lush forests and verdant valleys.



# Oil at historic highs could wipe off actual deficits

**O**il prices jumped last week to historic highs, not seen since July 2008, with Brent Crude hovering around the \$140 per barrel mark, and creating fears of an impending inflationary shock to the global economy.

Oil price analysts at various financial institutions, such as Ethan Harris, the chief economist at Bank of America, estimate that losing the five million barrels of Russian oil in the market could double oil prices to \$200 a barrel and slow global economic growth. On a similar note, analysts at JPMorgan Chase said Brent could end the year at \$185 a barrel if Russian supply disruptions continue.

Head of Global Commodities and Strategy at RBC Capital Financial Services, Halima Croft, opined that the Russian-Ukraine conflict and Western sanctions on Russia could prompt many countries to quickly obtain additional barrels of oil to fill the possible shortfall in Russian oil exports.

For his part, Muhammad Al-Shatti, who was recently promoted as Kuwait's governor to OPEC, ruled out that Russian production and export disruptions could be

compensated if Western sanctions included the Russian oil and gas sector. He warned that the sanctions could cause the market to suffer from a shortage of supplies.

Last week, the price of gas in Europe rose to historic levels of \$3,300 per 1,000 cubic meters. The price of natural gas has also reached an all-time high in the European markets while The United States and The European Union are discussing sanctions on Russian energy in the face of the invasion of Ukraine.

Fears of disruption to Russia's exports, which accounts for 40 percent of European gas imports, have caused a 60 percent rise in European electricity cost to 300 Euros per megawatt hour.

The windfall revenues could help wipe off Kuwait's projected budget deficits for the fiscal year 2021-22 that ends on 31 March.

Based on various oil price scenarios in the wake of sanctions imposed on Russian oil and gas supplies by the United States and Europe, and amid signs that the return of Iranian oil to the market could be delayed further, analysts project that at an average

oil price of \$120 per barrel in March, Kuwait will receive nearly KD2.6 billion in revenues in March. Ministry of Finance data shows that oil revenues during the first 10 months of the current fiscal amounted to KD12.8 billion, which together with KD1.84 billion received in February 2022 and the windfall in March will take total oil revenues in the fiscal year to KD17.2 billion. This together with KD1.8 billion revenue expected from the non-oil sector will take total revenues for the entire fiscal year 2021-22 that ends on 31 March, to KD19 billion, in place of the KD10.9 billion in revenues estimated in the budget.

The KD8.1 billion in additional revenue over budget estimates, along with the government mandate to cut down planned budget expenditure of KD23 billion by 10 percent to KD20.7 billion, will result in the forecast budget deficit of KD12.1 billion being slashed by KD8.1 billion to KD1.7 billion.

However, the budget figures on revenues and deficits would be thrown out through the window when one realizes that the budget numbers for fiscal year 2021-22 are based on a very conservative estimate



of average oil price for the entire fiscal. Though it comes from the wisdom gained in hindsight, it needs to be pointed out that the budget revenues and deficits for fiscal 2021-22 are based on an annual average oil price of \$45 per barrel.

The \$45 per barrel figure, which was low even by the oil prices prevailing in January 2021, when the initial draft budget for the current fiscal was presented, has now become ridiculous, in view of the high oil prices prevailing since the start of this year, and the price surge expected for the rest of March.

## MoCI assures abundance of food stocks

**M**inistry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) has assured the public that there are abundant stocks of foods and other goods in government reserves and that there is no need for any panic in this regard.

Revealing this the Minister of Commerce and

Industry Fahad Al-Shariaan said the government has taken all measures to ensure the normal supply of goods and foodstuffs, and their price stability, in light of fears of interruptions of supplies at the global level.

Al-Shariaan added that the state has an

abundant strategic stock of basic and consumer foodstuffs available to supply all governorates of the country and to distribute them through its main stores and supply branches.

In recent days, rumors had been making the rounds on social media that Kuwait could face food shortages in the wake of the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which is a significant supplier of wheat and other foodstuffs around the world.

Pointing out that emergency teams at the ministry were prepared for any sudden changes or disruptions to global supply chains, Al-Shariaan said that the team was monitoring global developments and its impact on supply networks, and that alternate solutions in case of any major disruption are being constantly studied. He added that currently the supply lines for imports of food and consumer goods into, or the export of goods from, Kuwait and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states were not affected, stressing that the normal flow will continue according to a specific schedule in cooperation with the Kuwait Ports Corporation, and the General Administration of Customs and other official bodies.

He stated Kuwait and the GCC states have drawn contingency plans — in case of any sudden changes arising from the ongoing crisis — to ensure the smooth flow of goods by air, land and sea freight operations without any interruption, in particular with regard to food supplies. Al-Shariaan reassured citizens and residents of the availability of all basic needs and food commodities in catering companies, cooperative societies and supermarkets, stressing that the government has the financial resources necessary to face any emergency that occurs in the region.

When asked about any sudden change in



the prices of commodities and foodstuffs, Al-Shariaan affirmed that the Ministry of Commerce will not tolerate any such unwarranted price hikes, and will take legal measures against any violators found raising their prices without justification and proper authorization.

He indicated that the ministry's emergency teams work seven days a week in the local markets to monitor and supervise the quality and price of goods being offered to customers, and to collect data in order to prepare studies and conduct price comparisons to ensure their stability.

In this regard, the minister praised the efforts of workers in his ministry, and in other government agencies, and their coordination with the private sector, to deal with the present crisis. He also added that previous crises such as the recent coronavirus pandemic had allowed the ministry workers to gain sufficient experience to monitor and supervise the availability of goods and the stability of their prices in the market.

Stressing the ability of the country to deal with any emergency, the minister added that MoCI was also prepared to develop appropriate solutions and decisions to remedy negative effects of disruptions in supplies or prices, and to limit its repercussions on the public.

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## Government offices return to normalcy with full attendance

**T**he Civil Service Bureau announced the return of the official working system in all government agencies, starting from Sunday.

The CSC Bureau said "With the return of work, all cases of exemption from work will be canceled, and the employee's absence will only be within the limits of the legally established leaves that are authorized for him."

He referred to the abolition of the flexible working system and the rotation system and the return to work with the entire official workforce



by 100 percent, pointing to the return of the fingerprint system in accordance with what is legally decided in this regard.

EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

# Closing the Global Childcare Gap



MEGAN O'DONNELL

Leads the Center for Global Development's COVID-19 Gender and Development Initiative.

When COVID-19 lockdowns began, the importance of affordable childcare suddenly became a lot clearer to many more people, especially working women. Last year, women spent three times as many hours as men providing additional unpaid childcare, losing an estimated \$800 billion in income as a result. The gender gap in childcare provision is even wider in low- and middle-income countries. In India, for example, women provided ten times as much unpaid childcare as men.

Since the start of the pandemic, the world's wealthiest countries have sought to strengthen their domestic childcare infrastructure and broaden access. But if these countries truly want to improve the economic outlook for women globally, they must invest in childcare programs abroad, too.

Even before the pandemic, quality childcare was widely accessible in many high-income countries. Canada gives families sizable monthly allowances to subsidize the cost. Iceland provides universal preschool, and Denmark allows new parents to shorten their work hours while keeping their jobs, salaries, health care, and other benefits. Swedish parents are entitled to a combined 480 days of leave at around 80 percent pay, which can be used at any point until their child's eighth birthday.

Now, these countries are taking further steps. The United States contributed \$53 billion in pandemic relief to help daycare centers stay open. Australia has invested A\$1.7 billion (\$1.2 billion) in childcare subsidies and lifted the cap on financial assistance for childcare for working families. And Canada is discussing lowering the cost of childcare to \$10 a day.

But while wealthy countries focus on their own childcare infrastructure, access to care remains difficult in low- and middle-income countries. Globally, there is no viable option for childcare for over 40 percent of preschoolers. In low- and middle-income countries, that number increases to 80 percent. Compared to children in high-



income countries, children in low-income countries are nearly five times less likely to have childcare available.

Although inadequate childcare systems have taken on new significance during the pandemic, this crisis is not new. And when access to childcare is scarce, women pay a far higher price than men do. In 2018, more than 600 million working-age women were unable to accept paid employment due to childcare responsibilities; only 41 million men cited the same reason for

balance childcare responsibilities with paid work and school. Investments in childcare also create new opportunities for women (and men). The World Bank predicts that meeting childcare needs in low- and middle-income countries would create 43 million jobs.

Likewise, research by the International Monetary Fund has shown that when more women work, economies expand, productivity rises, economic diversification increases, and income inequality falls.

countries are limited in their ability to pursue this agenda alone. Wealthy countries must help realize the potential of women's economic participation, and that means acknowledging that quality, affordable childcare solutions are important everywhere, not only at home. Of the \$40 billion committed at the 2021 UN Women Generation Equality Forum to addressing gender inequalities, just \$100 million (from Canada) went to address care constraints in low- and middle-income countries.

Likewise, multilateral development banks have yet to make investment in childcare a core concern. These institutions commit funds to address important objectives such as preventing gender-based violence, promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights, and providing financial and technical support for women-owned businesses. But by failing to fund childcare adequately, they neglect one of the most persistent factors driving global gender inequality.

The pandemic taught high-income countries a valuable lesson about the importance of childcare. Now they must prove their commitment to a gender-inclusive recovery by making childcare more accessible and affordable around the world.

Research by the International Monetary Fund has shown that when more women work, economies expand, productivity rises, economic diversification increases, and income inequality falls.

staying out of the workforce. An upgrade in childcare infrastructure in low- and middle-income countries could have a major effect on women's economic well-being. With childcare support, more mothers, grandmothers, and sisters can accept full-time, quality jobs, rather than struggling, as many women do now, to

Furthermore, gender equality in the labor market is good for business. More employment and leadership opportunities for women leads to greater organizational effectiveness and growth.

An increase in women's formal employment would benefit the global economy as a whole, but lower-income

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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

# Creating an economy that values what matters

**MARIANA MAZZUCATO**

*Professor in the Economics of Innovation and Public Value at University College London, is Founding Director of the UCL Institute for Innovation & Public Purpose.*

Care is the life-giving force that sustains health and well-being, binding together societies and ecologies. But everyday forms of care, though essential, are systematically undervalued. Most care is provided by women, whose contributions are celebrated on International Women's Day, even though they should be marked every day of the year.

The COVID-19 crisis has stretched our caring capabilities and highlighted the fundamental but underappreciated role that women play in our society. As we take stock of the pandemic's wreckage, we must use this moment to overhaul how we measure value, and thus how we organize the global economy. The goal should be to create an economy that supports the health and well-being of every person on the planet, as well as the health of the planet itself. We currently have the inverse: a system that values health only as a means to the end of economic growth.

The World Health Organization's all-woman Council on the Economics of Health for All was established to lead this paradigm shift. We believe that this year's International Women's Day is the perfect occasion for launching a radical revaluation of care and the economy. Even though the pandemic is still taking lives and creating a political impetus for transforming economic governance structures, the window of opportunity is closing. We are in grave danger of returning to the old siloed approach, whereby only 'formal' economic sectors are said to create value.

This old system is perversely beholden to indicators like GDP, an indiscriminate measure of 'progress' that ends up rewarding the destruction of people and the planet. The pathological obsession with GDP has undermined what we value most: life. In 2020, global GDP grew by \$2.2 trillion as a result of governments increasing their military spending; meanwhile, the world still has not provided the mere \$50 billion needed to vaccinate the global population.

A society that spends 44 times more on war and destruction than on ending a pandemic can hardly be considered sane. What if we based our decision-making on what we truly value? We would start with the primary goal of Health for All, and then work backward from that end to determine our means of achieving it.

In the WHO Council's policy brief on valuing Health for All, we propose three

providing everyone with the tools to lead lives of dignity and opportunity in healthy communities.

What would it take to create an economy that served these objectives, and that measured what we really value? First, we must recognize that no single metric can encompass all the diverse components of Health for All, especially not a monolithic, highly distortive measure like GDP. We should move toward a global data-collection apparatus and analytical framework that abandon such simplistic indices.

Second, alternative metrics must fit together as part of a holistic approach that allows for information to be transparently debated and replicated across diverse local contexts. We do not need to reinvent the wheel. The 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals provide a robust foundation for building better metrics

excess (represented by everything beyond the rim of the doughnut).

Any such framework will need to include detailed new metrics for valuing the goods and services that are indispensable to Health for All. Most of these are currently unaccounted for, from growing food, cooking, and cleaning to childcare and other unpaid household and neighborhood duties predominantly performed by women. As WHO Council member Marilyn Waring has long argued, time-use data can help reveal these underappreciated, unremunerated activities and begin to capture their true value.

Rethinking value is the critical first step. But for new metrics to produce saner perspectives, we also need to support strategic public finance and strengthen legal and economic policy levers across the public, private, and third sectors. As a previous WHO Council brief argued, this means broadening the tax base, introducing more progressive taxation, increasing financial literacy, broadening financial inclusion, expanding the public sector's capacity to build equitable financial frameworks, and eliminating the financial obstacles to health services.

This 'whole-of-society' approach to valuing Health for All would mean little if it did not start by empowering all stakeholders, especially the local communities most affected by health policies. Joint governance through public-private-common partnerships must be supported by a democratic process; only then will our new measures of progress be socially responsive and locally relevant.

Economics has hitherto measured the price of everything and the value of nothing. That must change. We need to measure the value of everything so that we can account for the things that truly matter. Health and well-being, and the care that sustains them, should become our principal measures of success.

**The third principle is to take human health seriously, by ensuring that every person can thrive both physically and emotionally, and by providing everyone with the tools to lead lives of dignity and opportunity in healthy communities.**

principles for guiding this effort. The first is to value planetary health, by protecting the integrity of essential common goods such as water and air, and by respecting the ecological boundaries upon which human health and well-being ultimately depend. The second principle is to value the social foundations and activities that promote equity. This means championing diversity and investing in social and physical infrastructure to support those in need and enable communities to thrive. The third principle is to take human health seriously, by ensuring that every person can thrive both physically and emotionally, and by

and indicators. With a mission-oriented approach, we can start to redesign industrial and innovation policies to meet grand societal challenges — pursuing concrete targets and encouraging sectors to work together to deliver policy solutions such as carbon-neutral cities.

Another promising model is WHO Council member Kate Raworth's Doughnut Economics framework, which is fast gaining traction in city governments around the world, from Amsterdam to Sydney. It encourages policymakers to aim for the sustainable ground between insufficiency (represented by the doughnut hole) and



# Anxiety behavior impacted by microbiome

**R**esearch conducted over the past decade has gathered substantial evidence to show that the communities of bacteria that inhabit the intestines of people and animals (the microbiome) influence the immune system and metabolism. More recent research has linked the microbiome to brain function and mood.

The influence of microbiome on brain functions have been corroborated by studies showing that people diagnosed with certain neurological conditions have distinctly different gut bacteria communities. Furthermore, experiments in mice have also shown that manipulating these communities can alter neurodevelopmental and neurodegenerative states, either ameliorating or exacerbating symptoms.

Now a team of researchers at Caltech, the renowned science and engineering institute in the United States, has discovered that a small-molecule metabolite, produced by bacteria that reside in the mouse gut, can travel to the brain and alter the function of brain cells, leading to increased anxiety in mice. The work helps uncover a molecular explanation for recent observations that gut microbiome changes are associated with complex emotional behaviors.

Researchers behind the study point out that it is generally difficult to show causation

between something that is occurring in the gut and the brain. Scientists can at best associate between disease states and the presence or absence of certain microbes. The challenge for the Caltech team was to try and understand the molecular messages that are going between the gut and the brain, and how these signals may lead to changes in behavior.

This study focused on a bacterial metabolite (a by-product of microbes) called 4-ethylphenyl sulfate, or 4EPS. Initially produced by microbes in the intestines, 4EPS is then absorbed into the bloodstream and circulates throughout the body in both humans and mice.

Nearly a decade earlier, researchers at Caltech had shown that this particular molecule was present in higher levels in mice with altered neurological development, specifically, in mouse models of autism and schizophrenia. Though other aspects of the altered microbiome differed from the healthy microbiome, 4EPS levels were by far the most different.

Additionally, in a screening of human blood samples from 231 individuals, 4EPS levels were about seven times higher in children on the autism spectrum than in neurotypical children. For their current work, the Caltech team focused on the effects of 4EPS on mouse models of anxiety.

While anxiety disorders in humans are complex, animal models provide a way to study the precise changes in the brain and body that lead to anxious behaviors.

In mice models, 'anxiety' is measured by their willingness to explore or hide in a new space as well as the time spent in a risky environment. Bold mice will explore a new space, sniffing around, but anxious mice will hide, as if facing a predator, instead of exploring.

The study compared two groups of laboratory mice: one group was colonized with a pair of bacteria that were genetically engineered to produce 4EPS; the control group of mice were colonized with bacteria that were identical except in that they lacked the ability to produce 4EPS. Then, the mice were introduced to a new arena, and researchers measured each mouse's behavior.

The mice with 4EPS spent much less time exploring the area and more time hiding as compared to their non-4EPS counterparts, indicating higher levels of anxiety. Brain scans of the 4EPS mice also showed that some of the brain regions associated with fear and anxiety were more activated in addition to overall changes in brain activity and functional connectivity.

Looking closer at brain cells within these altered regions, the team found that particular cells called oligodendrocytes were altered. These cells are important in part because they produce a protein called myelin, which acts as a protective coating around neurons and nerve fibers called axons, like insulation around an electrical wire. The team found that in the presence of 4EPS, oligodendrocytes are less mature and



consequently produce less myelin, leading to thinner insulation around axons.

However, when the 4EPS mice were treated with a drug known to increase myelin production in oligodendrocytes, the drug was able to overpower the negative effects of 4EPS — the mice regained normal myelin production, and the anxious behaviors were reduced.

In a related study scientists have shown that treating mice with an oral drug to soak up and remove 4EPS from their systems led to reductions in anxious behaviors. This result enabled a small clinical study that gave humans the drug in an open-label trial (no placebo or control group). Sequestering 4EPS in the human gut led to reduced levels of 4EPS in the blood and urine, and many of the 26 study participants displayed overall decreased levels of anxiety.

Highlighting the significance of the new findings on human anxiety and other mood conditions, the team is reportedly conducting clinical trials to gather new data on the impact of the 4EPS and other related molecular level impacts on humans.

## Configuring donated organs to suit all blood types

**O**ne of the key components in successful human organ donation and transplant is ensuring that the blood types of donor and recipient are compatible. The need for compatibility in blood types has led to long waitlists, inequitable organ allocation, and a high risk of mortality for patients on the waitlist.

Each person has a specific blood type from four main ones. The eight most common blood types are A+, A-, B+, B-, O+, O-, AB+, AB-. These are based on whether or not red blood cells have certain proteins, called antigens. Blood has to be compatible between donor and recipient. Otherwise, the receiving body's immune system will interpret the new blood type as foreign and will reject the new organ.



People with Type O blood are called universal donors. These people lack antigens which can trigger an immune response. Similarly, Type AB blood is known as the universal recipient, meaning they can receive blood and organ donations from all blood types. Researchers say that with the current blood type matching system, wait times can be considerably longer for patients who need a transplant depending on their blood type.

The AB and O blood types are less common than Type A and B, and is one of the reasons why organ donation waitlists for people with AB and O type are particularly long. For instance, patients who have Type O blood and require a lung transplant experience a 20 percent increase in mortality while waiting for a matched organ.

A new study conducted by researchers at the University Health Network (UHN) in Canada suggests that it may be possible to convert blood types safely in donor organs intended

for transplantation. If this novel technological breakthrough becomes commonplace, organ donation could be far more common and accessible to more people.

The study explores the possibility of creating universal Type O organs, which could improve fairness in determining who gets an organ donation. Universal type O organs would also decrease mortality for patients on the waitlist. Currently, in many countries around the world, the average time frame for waiting for a kidney transplant can be 3 to 5 years, and even longer in certain places. The researchers used the Ex Vivo Lung Perfusion (EVLP) system as the platform for the treatment. EVLP is a technique developed at UHN to allow assessment and treatment of high-risk donor lungs. Ex Vivo is when doctors remove an organ, cells, or tissue from a living body, conduct the necessary treatment or procedure outside the body, and then return to the living body. Using the EVLP technique, lungs are perfused and ventilated ex vivo at body temperature in lung-protective physiologic conditions.

For their study the researchers took human donor lungs that were not suitable for transplantation from Type A donors and put them through the EVLP circuit. One lung was treated with a group of enzymes to clear the antigens from the organ, while the other lung, from the same donor, remained untreated.

Each lung was then tested with the addition of Type O blood with high concentrations of anti-A antibodies in order to simulate an ABO incompatible transplant. What the results showed was that the treated lungs were tolerated, while the untreated ones showed signs of rejections.

If the novel research proves to be effective in clinical trials, the results could mean that organs from one blood type could be treated so that they can be used in a recipient of a different blood type.

The study team voiced optimism that their study could have the potential to allow non-blood type compatible transplants to be performed for those having difficulty getting a match. However, they cautioned that more research was needed to verify that this method of engineering a donor organ for a specific recipient's biology can work in people.



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# Reconnaissance Research holds cultural event for diplomats at Becarre



Deputy CEO of Reconnaissance Research Yusuf Al Ghussain with Ambassador of Australia H.E. Jonathan Gilbert and Founder of Reconnaissance Research Abdulaziz Al Anjari



Hussam Al Rasheed and his daughter, Canadian ambassador, H.E. Aliya Mawani and Yarub Bourahmah and spouse



H.E. the Ambassador of Oman H.E. Saleh Al Kharusi with Sheikh Jaber Faisal Saoud Al-Sabah and Hussam Al Rasheed



**R**econnaissance Research hosted an exclusive cultural event attended by over a dozen ambassadors and diplomats at the Becarre Exhibition.

Attendees explored Kuwait's history through Becarre's modern designs, touring the exhibition that displayed a number of modern interior pieces of decor designed by Kuwaitis.

Reconnaissance Research was keen on introducing ambassadors and diplomats to Kuwait through designs that show its cultural and intellectual heritage, and unique aesthetic creatives.

In a press statement, Sheikh Jaber Faisal Al-Sabah, Co Founder and Director at Becarre Exhibition Organizing Company, praised the efforts of Reconnaissance Research in providing various events that project Kuwait, its culture and views.

Sheikh Jaber said: "Becarre aims to show aspects of our Kuwaiti culture and heritage, and then present it in a new innovative context for the modern generation. In addition, the gallery focuses on showcasing Kuwaiti talents who creatively design high quality elegant items, which allow Kuwaiti products to compete with items produced by international designers."



Yusuf Al Ghussain, Sheikh Jaber Faisal Al Sabah, Abdulaziz Al Anjari and Hussam Al Rasheed



Sheikh Jaber Al-Faisal and Deputy Ambassador of China

young, and present them in a beautiful and innovative way."

For his part, Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri, Founder and CEO of Reconnaissance Research, praised the work of Becarre, stressing that the tour of the exhibition caught the eye of the ambassadors of Oman, France, Iraq, Korea, Jordan, Australia, Tunisia, India, Sudan, Italy, and Canada. In addition to the Chargé d'Affaires of the Chinese ambassador, the Chargé d'Affaires of Uzbekistan and the Egyptian embassy delegation.

Speaking about the evening, Al-Anjeri said: "Cultural events have a major role in deepening friendship between people and introducing them to positive aspects in Kuwait that deserve more attention. They also contribute to the consolidation of relations with diplomatic missions by opening wider areas for cooperation, so we get out of the stagnation and limited horizons of political

files into a broader space. Art is the face of any country, and it must be taken care of and highlighted as a societal necessity."

He added, "Let us build more positive bridges of communication with the ambassadors of the countries with whom Kuwait has diplomatic relations, as part of our efforts to enhance the mutual cultural movement, and I can only thank the organizers of the Becarre Exhibition, Sheikh Jaber Al-Faisal and Hussam Al-Rasheed for the high organization and quality of the evening's content in all its details."

In turn, the Becarre company's designer, Hussam Al-Rasheed, stressed the importance that Becarre has on simplicity, quality, and luxury in its products, stressing that his designs came from his love for creativity, and keenness to visit the annual exhibitions in Europe to be up to date on what the latest style trends are in the world of decoration, then mix the current modernity with history of Kuwait.

"I cooperate with Sheikh Jaber Faisal Al-Sabah. We have a workshop to make our collection. I personally supervise creating and displaying our products in several international and regional exhibitions in Paris, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Saudi Arabia. Since the first exhibition, we have found a great turnout and we aspire to expand further internationally," Al-Rasheed concluded.

The cultural evening included a display of paintings and innovative pieces of furniture, deeply embracing the authentic Kuwaiti heritage touches, made locally in Kuwaiti workshops and inspired by the ideas of the designer of the Becarre Exhibition, Hussam Al-Rasheed.



Korean ambassador H.E. Chung Byung-ha and his wife with Lulwa Al Rasheed



Hussam Al-Rasheed with the Ambassador of Tunisia H.E. Hachemi Laajili and the Ambassador of Jordan H.E. Saeq M. Abu Shattal



Sheikh Jaber al Sabah with French Ambassador H.E. Claire Le Flecher and Italian Ambassador H.E. Carlo Baldocci and Hussam Al Rasheed



Sheikh Jaber Faisal Saoud Al-Sabah, Co Founder and Director at Becarre Exhibition Organizing Company with Indian Ambassador H E Sibi George



Sheikh Jaber Al-Faisal with Ambassador of Iraq H E Husam Al-Rasheed, and the Ambassador of Sudan H.E. Abdel Moneim El-Amin



Sheikh Jaber Al-Faisal and the delegation of the Egyptian Embassy in the presence of the Ambassador's wife



Ambassador of Korea H.E. Chung, Byung-ha with spouse and French Ambassador H.E. Claire Le Flecher and representative from Uzbekistan Embassy Abdul Gafoor