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# Sluggish project pipeline amid economic revival



## TIMES KUWAIT REPORT

A special session of parliament called for by the government on 25 October, to discuss and approve the annual budget for fiscal 2022/2023 did not achieve this objective, as most lawmakers objected to approving the budget without extensive study and discussion. Though the annual budget needs to be approved by November, the MPs asked for the document to be returned to the National Assembly's Budgets and Final Accounts committee for further review, and agreed to vote on the budget at the next sitting of parliament on 1 November.

Parliamentary budget approvals are needed to implement the

programs and projects of the state, and to move the wheels of progress forward. Any delay in passing the budget hampers these development processes and results in market uncertainty. For instance, the budget for the previous fiscal year 2021-22, which was eventually approved only in June 2021, had included substantial allocations for strategic projects. However, because the budget also envisaged a deficit of around KD11 billion, the government decided that the easiest way to reduce the budget was to cut spending on projects. As a result several projects were shelved or scrapped, unsettling the plans and forecasts of stakeholder in the projects market.

Given the importance of development projects to the country



the hope among many is that with a new executive and legislative now in office, and an apparent truce prevailing in relations between the two arms of the National Assembly,

even a belated budget approval for the many stalled development projects could provide a much-needed boost to economic revival in the country.

Reviving the construction sector should be a priority for the authorities considering that development projects, especially vital infrastructure projects, are crucial to achieving the country's ambitious Vision 2035, that guide the 'New Kuwait' development plans, designed to transform Kuwait into a financial, commercial and cultural hub in the region. Construction projects, which form a major non-oil component of the economy, are also integral to the country's strategic growth plans, of weaning the market away from its over-reliance on the oil sector, encouraging greater private sector participation, and providing more jobs for young nationals in the workforce.

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# NeoBanks to complement, disrupt traditional bank services



**N**eoBanks, sometimes referred to as Challenger Banks, are online fintech firms that offer apps, software and other technologies to streamline mobile and online banking. These digital banks, operating under the umbrella of mainstream financial regulators, are challenging many of the services offered by traditional retail banks, payment providers,

and international wire services. These new-gen financial service providers operate online entirely, with no physical presence apart from office space in the offline world.

According to a new report by global management consulting firm, Boston Consulting Group (BCG), neobanks in the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) bloc will account for more than \$2 trillion in market size by 2030, at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 53.4 percent. The report notes that this growth spurt is fueled by changes in the regulatory landscape, and the mass adoption of the internet and smart technologies in the region.

GCC financial regulators have in recent years indicated their readiness to challenge existing norms and fast-forward the development of policies and frameworks to foster an environment conducive to fintech advances. The easing of requirements for

new market entrants to enter, launch and promote innovation, and the presence of sandboxes to trial these processes, before their roll-out to the general public, has led to a surge in this sector.

Customer preference for digital banking over branch banking has come at a time when the internet itself is arguably entering the next stage of its revolutionary life cycle. The GCC has some of the highest connectivity rates in the world with more than 90 percent of its population connected to the internet far surpassing the global average of 51.4 percent, and nearly two-thirds of the population is expected to hold 5G connections by 2026.

Disruptive innovators partnering with mainstream financial institutions, telecom operators, or e-commerce providers, can secure significant advantages early on. While mainstream financial institutions

offering these services provide users with the ability to organize and access their finances however they choose to, telecom operators and e-commerce providers offer users with wide ecosystems through which to transmit or transact.

"Given that traditional branch banking in the GCC provides one of the highest rates of return on equity globally, the proliferation of digital-only branchless banking, favored by a young, highly connected, and digitally savvy population can only enhance the significant returns generated," said Martin Blechta, Principal, BCG.

NeoBanks, with their digital and mobile-centric services, great user experience, cloud-based platforms and a lean, agile technology-first culture, are evidently going to have a tremendous impact on consumer finance, the economy, and society at large over the coming years.



## Carmel School rewards academic achievers

**C**armel School last week organized the school's annual O-grade ceremony, which was graced by the chief guest, the Vatican Ambassador to Kuwait H.E. Eugene Martin Nugent, and by honorary guest, Ashok Kalra, the managing director of Mughal Mahal Group. Also in attendance were the principals of various Indian schools in Kuwait, parents, teachers and students.

Carmel School Principal Sr. Christy Maria welcomed the gathering. After invoking God's blessings, Carmelites displayed their creative skills to perfection, with a thought-provoking mime, a medley of songs, Spanish dance and Fusion dance, all of which held the audience



spell-bound. A presentation showcasing the achievements of the students was also displayed during the event.

In his speech on the occasion, the chief guest congratulated the students on achieving excellence in both curricular and co-curricular activities. He also reminded the gathering that each one of us is a student in life's journey.

The highlight of the function was the awarding of gold medals, plaques, trophies and medals to deserving students, which was received by a thunderous applause from the proud parents, classmates and teachers. The function ended with the singing of the Carmel anthem.

## Italian musical season in Kuwait

**T**he Italian Accademia Chigiana Di Siena held two concerts for cello and piano at Salmiya Theater and Yarmouk Cultural Center on 26 and 27 October. The concerts, performed by talented young individuals from Italy, brought to a close the Italian musical season 2021-22. This was followed by the opening of the new musical season for 2022-23. The collaboration between the Italian institutions and Kuwait's National Council of Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) made this grand event possible.

Ambassador of Italy, H.E. Carlo Baldocci, in his address to the audience on the occasion said the new cultural season will unfold in November with an exhibition to showcase the history of the Italian Language, along with a chance to enroll in courses to learn the language. The event will be held during the 45th edition of the Kuwait International Book Fair at the National Library of Kuwait in November. He added that lectures explaining Italy and Kuwait's diplomatic relations will also take place from 16-26 November.

One of the salient events to be featured will be a concert by renowned Bel Canto Italiano on 17 November at the Salmiya Theater. The



concert will provide a grand opening to the new 2022-23 musical season with classic opera arias. A celebration of Italian Cuisine will also unfold for an entire week, wherein various Italian hotels across Kuwait will participate in this special event.

Ambassador Baldocci also highlighted Italy and Kuwait's remarkable diplomatic relations for 60 years, ensuring that the beginning of this new phase will strengthen the bilateral relations through the launch of new initiatives in political, economic and cultural dimensions.

## Lawmakers call for regulating social media advertising

**L**awmakers in the new parliament have raised alarm over fraudulent activities and money-laundering operations through social media sites and introduced a proposal that calls on the authorities to monitor and regulate advertisements placed on popular social media sites.

Five deputies — Abdulaziz Al-Saqabi, Abdullah Jassim Al-Mudhaf, Dr. Hassan Johar, Muhallal Al-Mudhaf, and Muhammad Al-Sayer — said they have submitted a proposal to the authorities on the urgent need to implement laws to monitor and regulate advertising activities on social media channels. They added that the need for such a proposal had risen because of the increasing reliance of brands and distributors on popular social networking sites and famous social media influencers to market their products.

In an explanatory memorandum on their proposal, which includes 12 related articles, pointed out that social media sites are currently not under the control of regulating authorities in the country, which makes it a venue for suspicious activities and money-laundering operations. Cyber-security officials have been warning of this phenomena and noted that legal bank accounts of people, who knowingly or unknowingly act as 'money-laundering mules', were being used to transfer funds from illegal operations. The source of these funds, which were shown to come purportedly from advertisements on social media sites, were in fact part of extensive global money-laundering operations.

The deputies added that the law they proposed is based on regulating the relationship,



and preserving the rights of advertising entities, while creating a healthy and suitable legal business environment for advertising activities on social media sites, and based on well-defined and correct procedures, under the supervision of the country's authorities.

The proposed law also specifies the conditions for citizens, companies and institutions in the country, or citizens of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and Arab countries, as well as companies and institutions affiliated with the GCC states and Arab countries, to be able to submit an application for a license to engage in advertising activities through social media networks.

In addition, the proposed law was keen on granting a license for young entrepreneurs over the age of 18, in accordance with the provisions of Law No. 1 of 2016 issuing the Companies Law. The law also stipulates that exceptions to the law can be granted only by the concerned minister and based on the nature of activity.

The proposal also specifies prohibitions and penalties for violations of the law, and that, in case the authorities discover the source of funds deposited in the bank account from advertising on social media advertisements, were not as claimed, the state would have the right to confiscate and transfer the funds to the state treasury in accordance with existing Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-terrorism Financing Laws..

## Half of state subsidies spent on energy, fuel

**A** new report by the Parliamentary Budget Committee shows that more than half of the annual budget subsidies are spent on energy and fuel. Of the total KD4.4 billion spent on subsidies last year, around KD2.8 billion was allocated as energy and fuel subsidies.

Trailing in second spot was education subsidies of KD837 million, followed by social support at KD522 million, housing support



at KD360 million. The report also disclosed that other state entities allocated subsidies were: Health (KD193mIn), Economic support (KD73mIn), sports (KD45mIn) and media (KD36mIn).





# India and Kuwait share a long-standing dynamic relationship

*After a brief but brimmingly eventful 26 months as Indian Ambassador to Kuwait, H.E. Sibi George, is now headed to Japan to take up his new appointment as India's top envoy there.*

By Reaven D'Souza  
Managing Editor

The word dynamic does not do full justice in describing the energetic ambassador, who since his arrival in Kuwait in mid-August of 2020 has been going about rejuvenating and broadening relations with Kuwait and its people on the diplomatic, economic, cultural and social fronts. He has also introduced transformative changes within the Indian Embassy and its operations, as well as in its interactions with the Indian community in Kuwait.

In a recent interview with the Managing Editor of The Times Kuwait, Ambassador George spoke on an extensive range of topics covering bilateral relations with Kuwait, and the various initiatives launched by the Embassy to strengthen links with the host community, and within the Indian diaspora in this country.

The ambassador began by saying that it was "a great honor to represent my beloved country, India that is Bharat, a land of 1.4 billion people, which is the oldest, largest and among the very few continuous major civilizations in the world." Indicating that his previous diplomatic experience in the region and elsewhere prepared him for his posting here in Kuwait, the ambassador noted, "I began my diplomatic career in Cairo where I served in the Mission as Political Officer. Subsequently I moved to the Indian Embassy in Doha as First Secretary. Later as Political Counselor in Indian High Commission in Islamabad, and then as Political Counselor and Commercial Counselor at the Indian Embassy in Washington DC.

"I also served as Deputy Chief of Mission in Indian Missions in Tehran and Riyadh. At the Ministry of External Affairs headquarters in New Delhi, I served in the East Asia Division and also as coordinator of the India-Africa Forum Summit. I later headed Administration, Establishment and Welfare Divisions in the Ministry of External Affairs. Before my posting here, I was Ambassador to Switzerland, The Principality of Liechtenstein and The Holy See. Each of these assignments gave a different experience which I cherish everyday of my life."

Talking about some of the major challenges he faced during his diplomatic career, the ambassador was emphatic in his response.



“When I look back today, I am satisfied that the Indian community in Kuwait joined hands with their Embassy, transcending religious, regional and language barriers, in its efforts to fight the pandemic.”

"Thinking about past challenges I have faced, there is no doubt that the biggest challenge was to prepare the large Indian community in Kuwait to face the unprecedented problems posed by the devastating COVID-19 pandemic.

"I landed in Kuwait in the middle of the pandemic in 2020, at a time when the large Indian community in Kuwait was facing many challenges, which included those stranded in Kuwait due to non-availability of flights to India; those stranded in India due to travel restriction; the continuing job losses; non-payment or reduction of salaries; shortage of food materials and medicines; growing mental stress; people getting infected with virus in large numbers; medical treatment

related issues, including shortage of vaccines; people who lost their relatives and friends; worried parents and children due to closure of schools, and the uncertainty associated with various examinations, including all-India exams and tests such as CBSE, JEE, NEET, and NATA among others. The Indian diaspora were also suffering due to continuous pandemic related lock-down.

"When I look back today, I am satisfied that the Indian community in Kuwait joined hands with their Embassy, transcending religious, regional and language barriers, in its efforts to fight the pandemic. Another major challenge was during my posting in Saudi Arabia when we had to work towards the welfare of the 2.8 million Indians

in Saudi Arabia during the most challenging period of Nitaqat. Our Mission in Riyadh worked very closely with the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and received excellent cooperation and support from the government and the citizens of the Kingdom. It was a mutually beneficial cooperation which helped regularize the legal status of over a million Indians in Saudi Arabia."

Asked about his experiences in Kuwait in his interactions with government officials and ordinary citizens, the ambassador once again stated categorically, "India and Kuwait have a historic relationship which can be traced back several centuries. Over the years, this relationship has grown into a mutually beneficial long-standing dynamic partnership. Each time I see a dhow or a replica of a dhow here, I am reminded of earlier generations in Kuwait who traded across the seas with India. Every family in Kuwait has some kind of connect with India. That deep bilateral connection was evident in the way I was received by the officials and citizens of Kuwait. I always felt at home in this friendly country. I also found that Kuwaiti citizens are very positive in their dealings with India at all levels."

Elaborating on his impressions of Kuwait's top leadership about India and their views on Indians living in this country, the top envoy said: "As a diplomat with over twenty-five years of service worldwide, I have seen how the Indian diaspora has contributed immensely in building relationship between their motherland India and their host country at all levels and in several fields. This diaspora has produced many successful entrepreneurs, scientists, beloved educationists, architects and engineers and medical professionals. This is also the case with the Indian community in Kuwait.

"Every Kuwaiti whom I met, both in government and business, had good things to say about the vibrant Indian community in Kuwait. They are thankful for the contributions of the Indian community in the economic progress of Kuwait. On my part, I found the Indian community to be one of the most vibrant of the Indian diaspora abroad. They have contributed immensely in the economic progress of Kuwait,

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# Employment rises among nationals, falls among expats

Employment rates of Kuwaiti nationals witnessed a sharp increase during the past year, thanks to the increase in job opportunities provided by the private sector. The number of jobs for Kuwaiti citizens increased during the twelve months ending in June 2022 by about 26,000 jobs to reach 449,000, supported by 13,600 new jobs in the private sector, compared to 12,300 jobs provided by the public sector. This was the first time that the private sector was adding more jobs than the public sector since 2013. Meanwhile, the country's population witnessed a spurt in numbers — the first such increase since 2019.

The data and analysis of employment figures and on the population, are from a new economic analysis report by the National Bank of Kuwait, the nation's largest commercial lender. The NBK report also noted that the overall rate of employment (excluding domestic workers) decreased by 5.9 percent on an annual basis in June 2022, driven largely by the decline in non-Kuwaiti jobs (-9 percent).

In contrast, jobs held by Kuwaiti citizens increased by 6.1 percent, which was the strongest growth rate registered since 2011. As a result, the proportion of Kuwaiti citizens in the total labor pool (excluding domestic workers) jumped to 23.4 percent compared to 18.7 percent in 2019.

The report indicated that the numbers of the Indian community recorded the largest decline by 15 percent, on an annual basis, (-153,000 people), followed by the Egyptians with a fall of 9 percent (58,000 people) in 2021. As a result of this decline, the proportion of Indians in the total population decreased to 19 percent, compared to 22 percent in 2019, while the percentage of Egyptians



decreased from 15 percent to 14 percent of the total population of Kuwait during the same period.

Despite the noticeable decrease in the number of expatriates compared to 2019, the number of their family members increased by 3.5 percent, which may indicate that most of the people who left the country during the past two and a half years were among the category of low-paid workers, who do not have families living with them in Kuwait.

On the other hand, the number of unemployed Kuwaiti nationals decreased to 24,000 citizens to reach the lowest level since December 2017, bringing the unemployment rate among Kuwaiti citizens to 5.2 percent. According to the NBK report, the rate of Kuwaiti women's participation in the workforce has witnessed a steady increase over the past decade, rising from 48 percent in 2010 to 51 percent in the first half of 2022.

The report emphasized that despite the decrease

in the unemployment rate among Kuwaiti citizens to about 5.2 percent, a continued increase in job opportunities supported by economic growth would be critical so as to accommodate the increase in numbers of new entrants into the labor market.

The NBK report also provided the latest figures on the population in Kuwait, based on data from the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI). The bank's analysis of the country's population structure noted that the number of people increased by 1.8 percent as of June 2022 compared to the end of 2021. This was the first increase recorded at the level of citizens

and expatriates, alike, since 2019.

Although, the resumption of economic activities in labor-intensive sectors and the increase in need for more domestic helpers, led to an increase in expatriates in the first half of 2022, the expatriate population was 11.4 percent lower, a drop of 382,000 expats, than the peak levels recorded in pre-pandemic 2019.

The report also indicated that while the growth rate of the number of Kuwaitis has remained unchanged at the level of 2 percent on an annual basis over the past two and a half years, the number of expatriates increased again by 2.3 percent in the first half of 2022.

## RECIPE



## Rose Kalakand

Happy Diwali to you all! Let us celebrate this Diwali by trying your hand at creating this exquisite sweet dessert. Kalakand is a soft barfi, moist, grainy, and deliciously sweet delight. It is beyond scrumptiousness and is a staple in most Indian homes, particularly in the North, and is a perfect treat for this festive time of year.

**Total time:** 30 minutes

**Serving:** Around 15 pieces

### Ingredients:

- 1 liter full cream milk
- 250g cottage cheese (Crumbly)
- 150g sugar
- 1 tbsp rose water
- 1 tsp cardamom powder
- 1 tbsp almond slices
- Few rose petals for garnishing

### Instructions:

- Cook the milk on medium heat, stirring continuously, until it is reduced to half
- Add the cottage cheese to the reduced milk and keep mixing well
- Stir and cook till the mixture starts to leave the sides of the pan
- The importance of stirring continuously cannot be overstated
- But make sure not to overcook, the mixture has to be moist and juicy, not dry
- Turn off the flame, add rose water and cardamom and transfer to a greased tray
- Spread it over the tray and gently level with a spatula
- Garnish with rose petals and almond slices
- Refrigerate for at least two hours. It will set to a soft crumbly cake
- Remove and cut the kalakand to square pieces or form into any desired shape
- Rose kalakands can be stored in airtight containers for 2-3 days in the refrigerator.



Chef Chhaya Thakker

## FAIPS-DPS celebrates 28th Founders Day



Fahaheel Al Watanieh Indian Private School (DPS Kuwait) celebrated its 28th Founder's Day on Monday 17th October. The school marked its noteworthy completion of 27 years since it was founded on 11th September 1995.

The ceremony was graced by, H.E Mr. Morino Yasunari, the Ambassador of Japan as the Chief Guest. The Guest of Honor was Mr. Meshal Abdullah Ali, the Chairman of Al Rayan Holding Company. Mr. Arun Choudhary, the CFO and Head of Strategy of Al Rayan Holding Company, was also present among the dignitaries.

The program began with the soulful recitation of the Holy Quran, followed by the significant traditional lighting of the lamp.

An opening speech was delivered by Head Boy Kavin Balamurli and Head Girl Niharika Suresh. The Principal, Mr. Ravi Ayanoli, extended a warm welcome to the chief guest and other dignitaries as he traced the remarkable growth of the school, from its humble beginnings to its present colossal stature and its futuristic expansion plans.

Followed by a medley of cultural performances, to commemorate this occasion. For the first time in FAIPS history, a 21-piece orchestra of vibrant pianists, violinists, drummers, and guitarists was played, mesmerizing the audience with its symphony and rhythm. Followed by dynamic dance performances from the students.



The felicitation of award winners took place, like every year students of FAIPS continue to produce stupendous results in grade 10, 12 CBSE and IGCSE Board Examinations. The Kuwait toppers are, for Grade 10, Sharon Maria Thomas and for Grade 12, Meghna Ninan, Stream toppers are Sharda Nair for Science and Palneeka Jubbel for Commerce, while the subject toppers of grades 10 and 12 in the CBSE exams 2022 were honored with certificates and cash awards.

Teachers who were the catalysts in bringing laurels to the school were also recognized for their relentless efforts in guiding young minds. Along with long service awards given to the pioneer staff who have completed 20 and 25 years as a token of appreciation for their dedicated contribution to the school.

Then, the honorable Chief Guest H.E. Mr. Morino Yasunari addressed the audience, expressing his extreme happiness to witness the program and gave the audience an insight into magnificent culture of Japan.

The Award ceremony was succeeded by a Power Point presentation, showcasing landmark activities throughout the school's history of 27 glorious years. An eloquent Japanese Song was performed as a tribute to the Chief Guest. The cultural extravaganza came to an end after the release of the 3rd edition of the In-house magazine by the Principal and the Editorial team.

**Thought for the week** “Life doesn't require that we be the best, only that we try our best

- H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

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)



# ITL World crowned best Travel Management Company in Kuwait

ITL World won the 'Leading Travel Management Company in Kuwait' award, instituted by the World Travel Awards (WTA), at a glittering ceremony held at The Ritz-Carlton in Amman, Jordan on 23 October.

Voted for by travel and tourism professionals worldwide, the World Travel Awards are recognised globally as the ultimate hallmark of quality in the tourism industry. Winners of the WTA set the benchmark to which others in the industry aspire.

ITL World won the prestigious distinction of being the best Travel Management Company in Kuwait against a host of competitors, for their commitment to excellence over the years and for successfully maneuvering and leveraging their core strengths to provide exceptional service to their clients under the most challenging times.

Commenting on the recognition, Chairman and Managing Director, ITL World, Dr. Siddeek Ahmed said, "We are honored to be recognised at the World Travel Awards Middle East Gala 2022 — one of the world's leading travel industry award programs. We are immensely proud to have been acknowledged here amidst what has



been one of the most challenging periods in our industry's history. We will continue to remain agile in our approach to supporting our clients, whilst we continue to grow and evolve ensuring we meet dynamic customer requirements."

Chief Executive Officer of ITL World, Rafeeq Mohammed added, "ITL World's

increased innovation and investments into technological development has positioned us for long-term success. The award further cements and showcases the determination of the highly skilled ITL team to continuously deliver above and beyond industry expectations, while setting new standards of excellence year after year.

To be recognised by the travel industry's apex body, and by our industry peers, as the 'Best Travel Management Company' in Kuwait is exceptionally rewarding.

Director of Kuwait operations, Najida Abdulla emphasized, "This is a great collective achievement and I take the opportunity to thank our clients, partners and team members. Without their wholehearted support, this remarkable feat would not have been possible".

Since its official launch in 1998, ITL World has demonstrated phenomenal growth and now has offices across the GCC and prides itself on being a game-changer in the industry. From being rated one of the powerful Travel Management Company in the Middle East and a Superbrand four times in a row, to its strategic and its exclusive partnership with award-winning Global Travel Conglomerate - CTM, not to mention maintaining the regional industry's most consistent client retention rate, the company's commitment to excellence has remained steadfast.

ITL World, has also been appointed as the Authorized Agent by FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 for the sale of the Official Hospitality Programme in Kuwait.

## PACI moves 14 services to Sahel app

The Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) announced last week that it would stop providing in-person transactions for 14 public services, as it was moving these services to the unified government application, Sahel.

The authority noted that the transfer of these services to the Sahel app was in line

with the country's goals in achieving digital transformation, which relies on digital services instead of physical attendance. The transfer of these services would also speed up the pace of completion of work thus saving time and effort of PACI workers and improving the services to the public. The authority noted that in addition to the 14 services that were now shifted, PACI had earlier moved 20 services to the Sahel app, which has been facilitating the completion of these transactions by individuals and entities in a quick and efficient manner..

## Indian Embassy event highlights Goan tourism, investment

Embassy of India organized a State Facilitation Event that focused on the tourism and investment opportunities in the Indian state of Goa.

The event, held at the embassy premises, was inaugurated by First Secretary Dr. Vinod Gaikwad, who extended his gratitude to everyone on behalf of the Ambassador of India H.E. Sibi George. He added that Goa is one of the widely popular tourist destinations of India, known for its exotic beaches, thrilling night life, mouth-watering savory delicacies and much more, and which has rightfully earned its place as the perfect blend of traditional and modern culture.

The first-secretary added that besides being renowned as a tourist destination, the state is also making its way in upcoming knowledge-based industries like IT, BT, Pharmaceuticals and others. He urged Kuwaitis to visit this incredible destination to experience the warm hospitality of Goa and relax in the soothing embrace of nature, while also considering the various investment opportunities of the state.

A detailed virtual presentation was shown on the occasion by Goa Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Goa Investment and Promotion Board and Goa Tourism Development Corporation. The presentation covered the main objective about the potential of trade between India and Kuwait, and explained the opportunities for investment in Goa.

Another presentation by Goa Investment Promotion and Facilitation Board, gave a background on the strengths of the state along with its Industrial Growth and Investment Promotion Policy, and reforms made by the state government with an overview of the incentives such as the recently enacted Investment Promotion and Single Window Clearance Act.

Meanwhile, the presentation by Goa Tourism Development Corporation, focused on the vibrant tourism industry in Goa, the competitive advantages enjoyed by Goa, the upcoming infrastructure projects and promotions to showcase the heritage and culture of Goa.

The event received an enthusiastic response from the business community in Kuwait and from other associations.





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# KGBC working towards making Kuwait environment friendly



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Sandra Draskovic,  
General Manager,  
Kuwait Green Building Council (KGBC)

water saving at home' on how people can save domestic water and energy use by simply changing their behavior. It was a successful campaign that reached a large audience. We plan to do more online campaigns and infographics related to technical aspects of green buildings. We have also organized webinars, technical training, and workshops for LEED building certification. We reached an audience of around 3,000 people and trained around 30 professionals on various related topics.

"We organized our first face-to-face 'Green Talks' as soon as events and gatherings were allowed. We partnered with our member, Volvo, to discuss existing buildings in Kuwait, which was an important topic that not many people had discussed before because the focus was on new development, projects and buildings. We discussed what we can do with the old buildings with low performance that likely consume a great deal of water and energy. That initiative was also successful, and we will certainly host more lectures and training of this kind that will equip engineers with technical skill-sets and know-how to deal with sustainable renovations and retrofitting projects."

Expanding on the progress level of sustainable practices being applied in Kuwait. Ms. Draskovic noted: "Currently, there are several major developments in the country and more on the horizon. One is housing development that includes five pillars and is focused on Kuwait Vision 2035. The government is planning to provide at least 65,000 housing units. There are also existing projects like the new Airport Terminal and an extension of Kuwait's Scientific Center.

"All of these projects are aiming to obtain green building certification. Some of them are applying for LEED certification or to be LEED compliant. For example, The Kuwait Scientific Center will be LEED compliant, which means they might not reach the certification level, but will nonetheless be following sustainable practices during construction. The challenge lies with the new 90,000 housing units because these are private investments and projects that do not incline towards sustainable solutions. The government is working on this segment, especially the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy.

"But it is difficult to make a drastic shift from unsustainable to high-performance

buildings that are respectful of the environment and resource consumption.

The first step is to change the behavior of the people and give them incentives to save water and energy. For instance, If consumers manage to save a certain percentage of water and energy, they will have their annual bill amount reduced by 40 percent for electricity and 50 percent for water bills. This incentive will help the government to collect data on consumption and encourage people to conserve resources more consciously and responsibly. It will change people's behavior and help them accept sustainable practices more easily.

"This is where we try to provide information and the technical know-how, including to engineers, consultancy offices, architects, and even the governmental sector like the Kuwait Municipality. It is important to know how to build sustainably. Increasing the energy tariffs for the end consumer is one of the solutions to guide behavioral change. Nevertheless, the government's main goal is to save resources for the future generations and reduce consumption. Indeed, this is one of the sustainability pillars of Kuwait Vision 2035.

"We first need to reduce by introducing no-cost solutions, then by introducing passive design solutions and cost-solutions. We need to build and equip buildings with high-performance MEP systems, and operate them and maintain them in a better way to have building units that are energy and water efficient. When we have this in place for existing and new buildings, then we can think about increasing the energy tariffs."

Explaining what KGBC offers companies entering Kuwait, Ms. Draskovic noted, "KGBC is the best membership-based platform in Kuwait to provide information on current developments in different segments of sustainable construction and green buildings. We have access to information related to governmental initiatives, country building and energy codes and building legislations, governmental entities, and private sector organizations who are practicing in the field of building material manufacturing, supplying, engineering, contracting and consultancy.

"We aim to be an online and printed platform. Our goal is to have a magazine that will be issued every four months to provide information to each of our members from all related sectors. We already provide

people with information, consultancy and one-on-one support, but we want to improve that service, and will create a single platform where everyone can access required information, through paper-based and digital magazines. We believe this will be the best way for companies seeking to partner with each other, enter a tender, or offer their services. We are putting together a business plan and will likely partner with certain governmental entities as well. We hope to bridge the public and private sectors and start issuing information in 2023."

Asked what were the core factors behind her success as a project manager with extensive experience across different countries, Ms. Draskovic elaborated: "Each country has different cultural values and business climates. Working in Europe, Mongolia, Russia or Kuwait is not an identical process. It takes time to understand how to communicate and what values are in place. People in Kuwait value personal connections, so it is crucial to understand what matters to them. We focus on hiring Kuwaiti nationals, because I personally believe that if our team is Kuwaiti oriented, they will have a personal drive to improve their own country, to be more sustainable, to work and live in a comfortable, pollution free, resourceful environment. This will motivate and encourage greater involvement and motivation."

Turning to the key initiatives that KGBC is focused on for the upcoming year, Ms. Draskovic explained: "We will focus on education and consultancy, hosting conferences, webinars, seminars, and Green Talks. We also intend to work closely with schools and universities through frequent visits to offer students some insight into the private sector. We also plan to provide technical workshops, training and courses mostly for companies and the government sector. At the same time, we will be delivering knowledge on LEED and other sustainable certifications such as WELL and BREEAM. We will provide technical sessions on how to design, build and operate sustainable building, facility management, operations, deep retrofitting, and everything related to those issues, plus provide engineering, and consultancy offices tools enabling the design, construction and operation of green buildings in Kuwait. And of course, we plan to launch our magazine."

In this week's exclusive interview, The Business Year talks to Sandra Draskovic, the general manager of Kuwait Green Building Council (KGBC), on the organization's activities, aims and future plans in the country.

She began by highlighting some of the major highlights of KGBC in the past few years. "KGBC is a membership-based organization that serves both the public and private sector. We try to bridge these two spheres together through events and initiatives. We moved our activities online when COVID-19 struck, which was a real challenge. Networking online is unlike networking in real life, and so our members certainly felt that change; however, it was also successful because it shed some light on these challenges.

"We thought about the benefits we can provide for our members during a time of crisis. We discussed the well-being of people inside their homes. We organized weekly 'Green Talks' on Instagram and we also shared it on YouTube. We discussed the benefits of lockdown on the environment in Kuwait, sustainable transportation, benefits of green building practices for the future, and how we could save energy and water while stuck at home.

"We created a digital, informative animation titled 'The guide to energy and

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## Czech and Kuwait share a strong bond of friendship

Czech Republic and Kuwait share a historical and friendly relationship since the establishment of relations between the two countries in 1963, said Ambassador of Czech Republic H.E. Jaroslav Siro in his speech during his country's National Day celebrations held last week.

He pointed that "the democratic and liberal Czech Republic is a prosperous and highly developed country with an open and trade-oriented economy. It has held the prestigious position of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union since the second half of this year, which is a great honor. It is a great



responsibility for the Czech Republic to head such an outstanding organization."

He further reiterated that the recent parliamentary elections and the formation of a new government will give a new impetus to a prosperous and stable country, stressing that "Kuwait is an important partner for the Czechs in the region, and we share with them a number of major international interests and goals, as well as respect for the United Nations Charter and principles of international law."

He stressed that "next year, both countries

will celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of their establishment of diplomatic relations based on mutual trust and friendship, which gives me confidence to look to the future with great optimism". He described the economic relations between the Czech Republic and Kuwait as strong and concluded by stating that Kuwait's stability, geographical location and balanced policy encourage Czech companies to look for opportunities in Kuwait.

Speaking on the sidelines of the Czech National Day, Assistant Foreign Minister for Asian Affairs, Waleed Al Khubaizi said that this year marks the 59th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Kuwait and the Czech Republic, which began in 1963, and the two sides look forward to organizing a celebration next year coinciding with the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations.

Al-Khubaizi referred to the holding of the third round of political consultations between the two countries in the Czech capital, Prague, on 20 June, 2022, between the former Deputy Foreign Minister, Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafiri, and the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Economic and Development Cooperation for Non-European Countries, Martin Tlapa, in the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Al-Khubaizi praised the current Czech presidency of the European Union.

Speaking about economic relations, Al-Khubaizi confirmed the participation of the General Investment Authority in London in the Czech-Gulf Investment Forum from May to June 2022 in Prague, referring to the ongoing arrangements for concluding a technical economic cooperation agreement between the

two friendly countries.

He also explained that "the volume of trade exchange for the year 2021 was over KD30 million, and that the Kuwait Investment Authority has investments in the Czech Republic worth \$97 million until the end of June 2022."

He praised the health services provided by the

Czech Republic, as the Czech Republic is a major destination for Kuwaitis to receive treatment, pointing out that Jazeera Airways has launched two flights to Prague starting from 5 June, with two flights per week every Tuesday. He also stated that "the number of Kuwaiti tourists to the Czech Republic reached about 6,000 this year."

### Tanzanian Ambassador visits The Times Kuwait

Ambassador of Tanzania H.E. Said S. Musa visited The Times Kuwait office recently and held wide ranging discussions with the Managing Editor Reaven D'Souza.

Ambassador Musa extended his appreciation over the news magazines' content and quality and discussed ways and means of cooperation. He also briefed Mr. D'Souza about the various tourism and investment potential in Tanzania and extended an invitation to visit the country.



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# COVID-19 Travel & Return Policy for international fans attending this years FIFA World Cup

Citizens and residents are advised to exercise caution when traveling to international destinations taking into account their vaccination status and the extent to which COVID-19 is spreading in the country of arrival.

### General Policies:

- It is the responsibility of travelers to know about any changes to the travel and return policy through official sources and websites before planning to travel to the State of Qatar.
- Travelers must adhere to the measures in place in the State of Qatar to limit the spread of COVID-19 at all times.
- Quarantine is no longer mandatory for all travelers arriving from abroad, however, travelers who test positive for COVID-19 after arriving in Qatar must undergo self-isolation measures in accordance with the procedures followed in the State of Qatar.
- Citizens and residents of the State of Qatar are no longer required to take a Rapid Antigen test (nor PCR) upon their arrival in the State of Qatar.
- Visitors are no longer required to bring a Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) or Rapid Antigen test certificate before traveling to the State of Qatar.
- From 1 November 2022, visitors entering Qatar are not required to pre-register on the Ehteraz health application prior to arrival.

### Ehteraz Mobile Application Policy:

- It is mandatory for individuals to present the health status of the Ehteraz application when entering public and



- private healthcare facilities in Qatar.
- To download Ehteraz, the traveler must have the following:
- SIM card from one of Qatar's service providers (Ooredoo or Vodafone) or an international SIM card.
- Mobile internet connection.
- The smartphone should support Android 6, newer versions or IOS 13.5 and later versions.
- Download and install the app on the mobile phone either via Google Play,

- Apple App Store or from any online search engines.
- SIM cards and smartphones are available for purchase at Hamad International Airport and Abu Samra border crossing if the passenger does not own them before arrival.
- Fully vaccinated persons in Qatar will have a golden frame around their Health Status on Ehteraz.
- The Health Status for citizens, residents, visitors who have received the vaccine

- outside Qatar will remain green without a golden frame until their vaccine data is updated in the system or through the Overseas Vaccine Portal (www.ehteraz.gov.qa).
- The Health Status on the Ehteraz app will remain red throughout the isolation period, until the end of their period of isolation.
- Diplomats, administrative card holders and VIP visitors arriving on official state visits are excluded from this measure.

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# Fans, FIFA Festival and World Cup 2022

As Qatar eagerly awaits the kickoff to FIFA World Cup 2022 on 20 November, the wave of anticipation and excitement sweeping over the billions of football fans around the world is almost palpable. Aside from hundreds of millions expected to watch the games on television or other digital media, tens of thousands of frenzied fans are expected to land in Doha to witness and support their favorite teams during the month-long football fiesta.

Fans are as integral to football as are the players out on the field, and Qatar along with FIFA is preparing to roll out the carpet to welcome them. Dedicated areas have been arranged to welcome and entertain the fan hordes. "After more than a decade of hard work and close collaboration with stakeholders across the country, Qatar stands ready to host a tournament that will live long in the memory of fans from across the globe," said Yasir Al Jamal, Director General, Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy during a recent media briefing.

Adding to this account of Qatar's readiness and its commitment to provide fans with an unprecedented experience during the tournament, the CEO of FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, Nasser Al Khater stated: "We look forward to welcoming fans and players from across the world as they sample our welcoming hospitality, vast array of entertainment options and, of course, top-class international football. It promises to be a unique edition of the FIFA World Cup — and one that will leave a lasting, positive impact on Qatar, the Middle East and the Arab world."

Fans from all over the world can look forward to 29 days of football, music, culture and lifestyle, with a true festival of football awaiting fans at the FIFA Fan Festival that has been arranged by FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. The festival will be the perfect place to watch FIFA World Cup matches live in a buzzing atmosphere, while also enjoying an exciting football and entertainment program.

The Fan Festival will take place at Al Bidda Park, located in the center of Doha, in the heart of Qatar. The venue is situated between the West Bay area and the Souq Waqif marketplace. It will be accessible via the metro stations Corniche, Al Bidda and The White Palace, and by foot along the Corniche.

The Festival will be open every day of the tournament (from 19 November to 18 December) for fans and will be free of charge for everybody. Aside from the stadiums, the Fan Festival will be the place to be for football lovers from all over the world with several entertainment extravaganzas planned for the duration of the World Cup. Besides watching all 64 FIFA World Cup matches in a buzzing



atmosphere, fans can enjoy the following:

- Performances by top global music acts, as well as local artists
- A food court with unique culinary experiences ranging from local cuisine to international delicacies
- Unique football matches with FIFA Legends, in addition to interactive physical and digital football gaming stations for fans of all ages
- Innovative sponsor activities, dedicated football exhibitions and an official FIFA Store with licensed FIFA World Cup products
- Additional programs at the Festival are evolving and more information on them will be available over the next weeks.

With almost all stadiums within a short

distance of the FIFA Fan Festival arena, this will be the place in Doha where international and local fans will come together to celebrate the FIFA World Cup. It will be the central destination where fans from all over will meet to share their emotions and celebrate the unique atmosphere of the FIFA World Cup, and a hotspot for fans of all types, from avid or casual football enthusiasts to lovers of music, food and culture.

Dedicated transport will be provided from the stadiums to the FIFA Fan Festival and vice versa. Visitors with match tickets will not have to miss any of the action as they will be able to travel swiftly and efficiently between both locations.

As the icing on the cake, the Doha skyline will provide a stunning backdrop, offering incredible photography and filming opportunities for visitors, so that everyone can

share their personal highlights from this FIFA World Cup experience.

A must-see at the FIFA Fan Festival is the FIFA Museum, which has once again tied up Hyundai, the South Korean multinational conglomerate, to celebrate global football heritage and culture. Entry to this major exhibition at the FIFA Fan Festival is free for all visitors.

The exhibition, titled 'Goals Create History', will be the cultural highlight at the FIFA Fan Festival, and can be visited at any time during the regular opening hours of the event, from 19 November to 18 December.

'Goals Create History' celebrates the FIFA World Cup through the passion and devotion of the fans today and tells its history through the players who have left an indelible mark on it in the past, with goals being the highest currency that shapes the future.

The exhibition will feature original objects and stories from each of the FIFA World Cup finals since 1930, as well as unique multimedia experiences. A special highlight at the FIFA Museum will be its iconic exhibit titled 'Rainbow of Shirts', which will display the jerseys of all 32 national teams participating in this year's tournament and representing 32 football cultures from around the world, all playing for the ultimate prize.

Celebrating the rich heritage and culture of football, the FIFA Museum will also feature a lively and passionate platform for Hyundai's 'Goal of the Century' campaign at the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. The exhibition inspires the world to unite under the theme of sustainability.

This unique exhibition invites fans across the globe to connect with each other, to explore iconic and legendary moments and goals of football history, while also reflecting on sustainability 'goals' in their own lives.





# CAIT supports the country's digital transformation



Under the sponsorship of the Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT), the Kuwait Digital Transformation Conference is slated to take place on 2 – 3 of November. The conference aims to provide a national platform for Kuwait's digitalization stakeholders, leading international solution providers, and consultants, to discuss the latest plans and innovations in the country's digital transformation journey.

With the participation of more than 250 IT executives and specialists, the two-day high-level international conference is set to address key advances and pressing challenges in Kuwait's digital transformation journey. The transformation will be guided by a series of insightful presentations and panel discussions from some of Kuwait's industry leaders during the conference. With access to accurate data, easier and timely communication, efficient services and

informed decision making, digitalization can transform how governments and companies run their operations and services.

Haya Alwadani, Director General, Kuwait's Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT) said, "Kuwait's Central Agency for Information Technology assumes many responsibilities; most notably, overseeing all IT projects and the mechanisms for pushing forward their development within the government sector, in addition to implementing and activating the e-government project across all government agencies, as well as managing the official electronic portal for the state of Kuwait.

CAIT also plays a key role in enabling government entities to migrate to the cloud, powering the country's digital transformation through training IT talent within the public sector. In addition, she noted that the training component is one of the main tasks that CAIT undertakes through developing Integrated training programs, which enhances the skills of the national workforce and supports building a balanced digital culture associated with sustainability in its mechanisms.

Ooredoo business, the technology partner for business solutions will participate in the conference as a headline sponsor. Elaborating on this role, Executive Director of Business and Consumer Sales at Ooredoo Kuwait, Essa Al-Moosa, said through a statement, "This sponsorship comes as part of Ooredoo's strategy of being a leader in digital transformation. At Ooredoo, we aspire

to continuously create products and services to enrich the digital transformation journey of our customers.

Kuwait has made great strides towards digital transformation, which is a main pillar of the country's Vision 2035, and its New Kuwait development plan, said the newly appointed Minister of State for Communications and Information Technology Affairs and Minister of Commerce and Industry, Mazen al-Nahedh.

Speaking last week at the ninth iteration of three-Government Forum, which was launched with the participation of several government and private entities, the minister said that development and digital transformation are closely linked. He added that there is no room for sustainable development without smart digital transformation.

Pointing out that digital transformation of government transactions saves a lot of time, effort, and money to the country, Minister Al-Nahedh added, "Technology can also be used to boost transparency and limit human intervention in government transactions in a way that enhances anti-corruption efforts."

In addition, he stressed the importance of having highly-qualified Kuwaiti cadres in information technology to help materialize the digital transformation goals of the country.

Speaking at the forum, the Director-General of CAIT, Haya Alwadani, pointed out that during the COVID-19 pandemic, Kuwait took several important steps towards digital transformation in government transactions

so as to overcome the challenge of lockdowns and facilitate services to the people. She noted that it was during this period that CAIT launched the 'Sahel' app, which is the unified digital platform for various government agencies to provide their services to the public, and which reduced a tremendous amount of paper work and added value to the national economy.

Speaking at the launch of the forum, the Director-General of the Public Authority for Youth (PAY) Dr. Mishal Al-Shahin, revealed that the Authority had launched a new edition of the popular 'Professional Initiator' training program in the digital and technology sector. The program, launched this year in association with the Canadian Algonquin College, is designed to guide the youth to be involved in industrial and digital technologies and sharpen their skills in start-ups through integrated workshops.

He noted that the nine-week program, which this year involves 40 young male and female trainees, will proceed at an intensive pace with the cooperation of several local and international companies, including aviation giant Boeing Corporation, which would select the top ten participants and offer them financial support to further their training program. Adding to the words of the PAY official, the Ambassador of Canada to Kuwait H.E. Aliya Mawani who was also present at the launch ceremony said that interested participants could register for the program through the PAY website at [www.youth.gov.kw](http://www.youth.gov.kw)

## India and Kuwait share a longstanding dynamic relationship

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

while at the same time remaining closely attached to their motherland. They are contributing in India's march towards an Aatmanirbhar Bharat or Self-reliant India.

"In Kuwait, I have seen that the vibrant Indian community has produced stars in almost every profession and every business, some of whom are nurturing a second and third generation far outshining their parents and grandparents, while at the same time cherishing the fine traditions of India.

"I am convinced that this highly talented community has so much untapped potential to contribute in celebrating India in Kuwait, and in promoting our strong relationship. For its part, the Indian Embassy has created several platforms such as the Indian Cultural Network (ICN), Indian Professionals Network (IPN), Indian Business Network (IBN) and Indian Sports Network (ISN) to connect with the many talented Indians in Kuwait."

Expounding on India's relations with the region, and more specifically with Kuwait, Ambassador George noted, "Kuwait is part of India's extended neighborhood and the two countries are among each other's major trading partners. Stability, security and prosperity of this region is very important to us. Apart from trade and investment there are several crucial areas that are a priority to India, including security of the country, security of maritime lanes, fight against terrorism, defence, science and technology cooperation. In recent years, we have been able to make tangible progress in each of these crucial areas.

"We were able to take our bilateral relationship with Kuwait to a new level of partnership with two high-level visits, that of the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister to India in March and that of our External Affairs Minister to Kuwait in June last year. We also established an India-Kuwait Joint Commission Meeting at the level of Foreign Ministers. We also prepared a forward-looking roadmap in our bilateral relations and organized the Regional Ambassadors' Conference in Kuwait for the first time, which was attended by all our ambassadors in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. Our bilateral cooperation in the fight against the recent pandemic also further



strengthened our partnership.

"On the economic front, our business partnership with Kuwait is something that evolved over several generations. It is a partnership involving several stakeholders; business establishments, industry and commercial chambers, investment boards, industry groups, factories, science and technology establishments, and at the root of it all are the vibrant people-to-people contacts. There are several key areas such as energy security, trade and investment, infrastructure development projects, healthcare, automobiles, petrochemicals and education where there exists huge potential to broaden our longstanding partnership and I am happy to note that cooperation in each of these areas are growing."

Asked about his remarkable engagement with the Indian diaspora especially in most challenging times, and the various initiatives he has launched to support these initiatives, the ambassador recollected, "When I look back, I can say with a lot of satisfaction that last two years have been a period when we addressed many of the challenges associated with the unprecedented pandemic and at the same time deepened our long-standing dynamic partnership with Kuwait. As an Embassy, we reinvented ourselves and engaged both the community and our Kuwaiti partners in a hybrid format, a mix of digital and physical.

"I am proud of the fact that each one of the nearly one million Indian community

members worked closely with the Embassy as a team during the pandemic. I need to add that each one of our Kuwaiti partners also responded positively to our efforts. Our challenges during this period were many; I recall the Vande Bharat Mission that provided travel arrangements for the hundreds of thousands of stranded Indians back home during the pandemic; and later, when the crisis eased, the setting up of an air-bubble to facilitate the return of those stranded in India back to Kuwait. There was the vaccination drive, and the supply of air-tickets, as well as addressing the food shortages and spearheading the distribution of medicines and other essentials to the needy.

"With the full support and active participation of Indian Community Support Group (ICSG) and our many associations and groups we were able to meet most of these challenges. We should always remember the many sacrifices made by our doctors, nurses and other medical professionals in saving the lives of Indians, Kuwaitis and other expats. Also, we should not forget the contributions made by other professionals, our lawyers who organized free legal consultations every Saturday at the Embassy, our businessmen who contributed generously and our many volunteers who served honestly and dedicatedly. We were also able to address the many concerns that our children and their parents had, including by organizing JEE, NATA and NEET examinations for the first time in Kuwait."

When queried as to which of the many

successes he has notched in Kuwait, he would consider to be the most gratifying to him personally, the ambassador turned ruminative before replying, "I would like to mention a few developments as among the most gratifying moments for me during my stay in Kuwait. First was to get the NEET examination center to be allotted in Kuwait, which was a first at that time for any place outside India. It helped a large number of students and parents in the middle of the pandemic. This year fourteen centers were allotted outside India for the conduct of NEET examination.

"Equally gratifying was organizing the supply of a large quantity of medical oxygen from Kuwait to India during the second phase of COVID-19 pandemic in India. It was an occasion when we mobilized the entire Indian diaspora in Kuwait to join hands with the Embassy to support their motherland. We were able to organize a sea-air bridge, involving several Indian Naval Ships and Indian Air Force aircraft, to transfer the medical oxygen to India. Another moment was the supply of 'Made in India' vaccines to Kuwait during the pandemic."

On another note, Ambassador George recalled with obvious pride the two major celebratory initiatives — India @75, and 60 years of India-Kuwait diplomatic relations — that were held here during his tenure. "During the last two years we organized at least three events every week with the aim of realizing our target of holding 600 events to mark the 60th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations with Kuwait, and 750 events to mark the 75th anniversary of India's independence. We fully utilized every opportunity to celebrate India and Indianness, everyday in Kuwait. It was so gratifying to see the presence of so much talent within the Indian community here in Kuwait," said the ambassador.

He concluded the interview by adding, "I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their support and cooperation during my tenure here, starting with the leadership and Government of the friendly State of Kuwait for the continued support in further deepening and strengthening of India-Kuwait relations, and to the citizens and all friends of India in Kuwait, as well as to every member of the Indian diaspora in Kuwait."



# Austrian Ambassador holds reception to mark National Day

Austrian Ambassador H.E. Marian Warba, praised the development of relations and the great cooperation between his country and Kuwait in all fields, pointing out that this year Austria and Kuwait are marking the 60th anniversary of the start of bilateral relations that began in 1962.

Speaking on the occasion of Austria's National Day, in the presence of Deputy Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for European Affairs, Counselor Muhammad Hayati, Ambassador Warba revealed that 30,000 Kuwaitis visit Austria every year, and expressed his happiness for the European Union's intention to exempt Kuwaitis from the Schengen visa requirement.

He added, "Let us all hope that the exemption for Kuwaitis will be in the year 2024 at the latest, if not before that," noting that everyone will benefit from this exemption, which will further



strengthen the relations between the peoples of the two countries. He pointed out that the

economic and trade relations between the two countries are witnessing a steady growth, but

there is a possibility to further enhance this, declaring the Austrian embassy's readiness to assist in further deepening of trade relations, and thanked "all Kuwaiti and Austrian business partners who helped and supported us."

He pointed out that the two famous Austrian companies EVN and WTE are building one of the largest sewage treatment plants in the world in Umm Al-Hayman in southern Kuwait. He also referred to the work of two other famous construction companies, DOKA and Strabag in Kuwait, which are considered among the largest hospital builders and suppliers in the world.

The ambassador added, "I was ambassador to Kuwait from 2008 to 2012 and I am pleased to be here again among many friends I have known for over a decade and many new friends and partners of Austria that I met upon my return to Kuwait in September 2020."

## Sluggish project pipeline amid economic revival

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Over the past two years, repercussions from the COVID-19 global pandemic including a steep fall in global oil prices and a subsequent liquidity crunch led to the country facing a fiscal crisis, which led to delays in rolling out and implementing several vital developmental projects. The surge in oil prices following an abatement of the pandemic has eased pressure on the country's finances and the budget for fiscal year 2022-23 is now expected to run a surplus. This has fueled optimism among many that the projects market could witness a surge in the coming months.

Despite the apparent buoyancy in the market over the current conviviality in parliament, and the windfall revenues pouring in from higher oil prices, there is skepticism among some about whether the prevailing politically and financially favorable environment will result the structural changes required to revive stalled projects, and to revamp the projects market so as to accelerate the processes involved in approving, tendering and awarding of planned projects, as well as make the implementation of awarded projects more efficient.

Kuwait has many factors in its favor when it comes to project developments; it is the sixth-biggest projects market in the region, after Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt, Iraq, and Iran. It is a high-income, energy-rich economy with substantial oil reserves that make it one of the most creditworthy countries in the Middle East. These favorable factors, along with the wide spectrum of investment and partnership opportunities, including in key project markets such as the chemical, construction, oil & gas, industrial, power, water, and transport sectors, should potentially attract investors and businesses to Kuwait. But they do not; and we need to find, why not?

Industry analysts have repeatedly pointed out that with currently over KD62 billion in projects planned or in various stages of the development cycle, the country's challenges are, not in a dearth of planned projects, but in its implementation. Very few of the planned ventures end up being brought to tender, or in contracts being awarded, most continue to be bogged down by bureaucratic hurdles or lie indefinitely in design and bickering phases. And, even when projects are awarded there could be further delays related to the incompetence or inability of contractors to finish awarded projects on time.

Many of these planned projects that have yet to be tendered or awarded, or are in delayed implementation stages are in some of the most urgently needed projects, including in the construction of infrastructure developments. Following more than a decade of underspending and inefficient spending in the infrastructure segment, there was a revival with the announcement of the 'New Kuwait' development plans. However, this initial euphoria appears to have faded.

The project for infrastructure development in the country's largest industrial area, the Shadadiya Industrial Zone, is a glaring example of this inefficiency in spending, as well as a showcase for the inability of incompetent contractors, often hired on the basis of the lowest tender they submitted, to complete awarded contracts. Spread over nearly 6 million square meters, the contract for infrastructure work was initially awarded in 2013 with project completion set for 2016.

Repeated delays by the contractor and extensions granted by the client, the Public Authority for Industry

(PAI), saw the project drag on till the November 2020, when PAI finally decided to dismiss the contractor and submit the project for retendering. The project is now expected to be completed only by 2024, a decade after the official launch of the project. Such delays are also evident in the country's vital oil sector. A project to remediate the soil after contamination from the oil-wells set ablaze in 1991 during the Iraqi occupation, were eventually awarded only last year.

Spending in the oil sector also suffered a slump in 2019 and 2020 due to the fiscal crisis and from market repercussions during the COVID-19 pandemic, including low oil prices, supply-chain disruptions and shortage of qualified and experienced manpower. Although a sector restructuring last year coincided with a few, previously shelved major contracts for oil and gas projects being awarded, there have been delays from other externalities with no major projects announcements.

One major project that has been underway since 2019 is the 145km long gas export pipeline that extends from gas fields in the border areas in northern Kuwait to the Mina Al-Ahmadi Refinery in the south of the country. The project by state-owned Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) and valued at around KD140 million, was awarded to the Indian multinational conglomerate Larsen & Toubro (L&T) in 2019. Completion of the project, which was subject to delays and extensions related to fall-outs from the global pandemic, is now expected to be completed by year-end..

Other mega projects in the pipeline in the country that are currently at various stages of the development cycle, include several ambitious power projects that together aim to produce around 14.3GW of capacity. Power generation to keep up with soaring demand is crucial given that much of the existing capacity is old and inefficient. Although Kuwait has an installed capacity of 20.25GW, available capacity is always much lower and in March of this year was just 12.69GW.

Industry analysts have repeatedly noted that the country urgently needs to speed up the delivery of projects, especially those deemed critical to Kuwait's continued growth and progress. They point out that the country's projects market has slid in terms of the value of contracts awarded, nearly every year since 2015. According to a previous World Bank report, implementation phases of infrastructure projects in Kuwait are drawn down by cost overruns in 20 percent of cases and time delays in 110 percent of cases.

These and other assessments by market analysts and international institutions are borne out by the latest report on the project market in Kuwait compiled by the National Bank of Kuwait. The report notes that new project awards declined to a near twenty-year low of KD49 million in the third-quarter of 2022, which was also down 69 percent quarter-on-quarter from the KD156 million registered in the second quarter of this year. In addition, the total value of project awards in the first nine months of the year totalled KD339 million, which was 63 percent lower compared to the same period in 2021.

The bank presaged that although a rebound in project awards was plausible in the fourth-quarter of the year, it would still require a significant number of projects to be awarded in order to tally with KD1.5 billion project awards notched in 2021. While there is hope that many of the more than KD2 billion in project tenders in the offing — many of them postponed from previous quarters — would be awarded in the fourth quarter, this appears to be highly unlikely given past trends.

Looking ahead to 2023, the bank report noted that project activity should increase from the low levels this year, especially with the new government looking to prioritize Kuwait's development plan, and oil prices expected to remain relatively high over the next 12 months. According to industry experts, nearly KD5.5 billion worth of projects are expected to be tendered in the first three quarters of 2023.

The buoyant projections for 2023 notwithstanding, it is worth remembering that a similar optimistic prognosis made in January of this year by Fitch Solutions, a sister-division of sovereign rating agency Fitch Ratings, did not pan out as predicted. The agency had forecast that following

the pandemic related delays the construction and transport sectors were expected to recover and gain momentum in 2022. But sadly, this optimistic analysis failed to materialize, as in the ensuing months yet another political stand-off between the executive and parliament once again led to resignation of the cabinet, dissolution of parliament and fresh elections.

With a new government and parliament now in place there is a tired sigh of weariness and once again the hope, although very faint, that this time around it will be different; that this time development projects will be accorded the priority they deserve considering their importance to the long-term sustainable development of the country and its people.

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An audit process underway at the General Traffic Department (GTD), affiliated to the Ministry of Interior, has revealed thousands of expatriates continue to hold

# Audit reveals thousands of invalid expat driving licenses

invalid driving licenses.

Figures obtained from the first week of the ongoing audit show that approximately 3,000 expatriates are still in possession of driving licenses that have become invalid, as they did not conform to the conditions required to own a driving license. The audit process, which is expected to continue for two months, was initiated under the instructions of the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled, with follow-up by the Ministry's Assistant Undersecretary for Traffic

and Operations, Major General Jamal Al-Sayegh, and Director General of the General Traffic Department, Major General Yousef Al-Khadda.

The invalid licenses have since been blocked to prepare them for cancellation. A statement from GTD noted that the blocked licenses were not forged but were obtained by the license holders legally, but then their work permits or field of work changed to a profession that was not entitled to hold a driving license. Consequently, their licenses were automatically invalidated.

Holders of invalid driving licenses have been instructed to approach the GTD to surrender their license. If the holder does not surrender the license, this will then be reflected on their Kuwait Mobile ID and Sahel applications, such that the violator will not be able to complete any transactions in the Ministry of Interior. Moreover, if someone is apprehended using an invalid driving license to drive a vehicle, the vehicle will be towed away and the violator will face legal measures, as well as be deported from the country.



## Porsche Centre Kuwait celebrates 20 years of the revolutionary Cayenne

Kuwait. Porsche Centre Kuwait, Behbehani Motors Company has celebrated an important milestone in Porsche's history with a gala evening to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the game-changing Cayenne SUV.

The arrival of the Cayenne in 2002 re-set the parameters for sports-luxury motoring with Porsche setting a trend other luxury and sports car manufacturers would eventually follow by introducing a full-sized SUV.



Hany Marie, General Manager at Porsche Centre Kuwait, said the Cayenne has been a welcomed success for Porsche in Kuwait, expanding the marque's appeal to a much wider audience beyond two-door sports cars and set the path for the likes of Panamera and Macan to follow.

"To put it simply, Cayenne is the model which introduced Porsche to an audience that perhaps would not have walked through our showrooms before. It provided a family-sized option for the first time and many of those initial customers remain with us today, often owning several Porsches including 911, Cayman and Boxster next to their Cayenne. So we wanted to not only celebrate Cayenne but also to say thank you to our many loyal customers."

The immersive night included a local film that highlighted the three Cayenne generations across 20 years as well as an entertaining session of 20 questions, testing participants on their Porsche and Cayenne knowledge in return for winning a memorable prize.

Located at Plot 40 in the industrial Shuweikh area, customers and media engaged in activities that included a 360-degree video booth with a virtual reality experience while being surrounded by all three generations of the Cayenne.

The birth of the Cayenne created an economic basis for sustainable success without compromising Porsche's motorsport values and succeeded by introducing a completely new market segment to the line-up. Since 2002, Cayenne has been one of the mainstays of Porsche's global success and is one of the bestselling sports luxury SUVs in Kuwait.

Hany Marie said the night reflected the connection Kuwaitis have built with the Cayenne and Porsche: "Many of our customers and long-term media, some of which were here for the launch of the first E1 model back in 2002, described how it changed their perception of Porsche from being a pure sports car brand to one that encapsulates the Kuwaiti lifestyle. For some of our more adventurous customers, it opened up the remote areas of Kuwait to explore while for others it allowed them to make a Porsche their family car for the first time."

"Now we have a full range of family-sized cars like the Panamera, Macan and of course the new Taycan electric sports saloon, but it all began with Cayenne 20 years ago. Cayenne remains as popular as ever with variants like the Cayenne Turbo GT being a hit with the Middle East. We see another very exciting 20 years ahead for Porsche's large SUV."



## LuLu Hypermarket holds 20th anniversary mega promotion

LuLu Hypermarket, the leading retailer in the region and the destination of choice for discerning shoppers, is celebrating the 20th anniversary of its opening in Kuwait. To mark this milestone achievement, the hypermarket is holding an unprecedented mega promotion from 26 October to 1 November.

The week-long 20th anniversary promotion features "Offers never seen before" and special discounts on a wide range of products. The spectrum of exciting offers huge range of amazing offers on Supermarket & fresh food products include a free KD20 gift voucher on purchase of KD20 worth of products from the fashion, footwear, ladies handbag sections (26-28th Oct.), as well as a 'Buy 1, Get 1 Free' promotion on selected products.

Additionally, for four days from 26 to 29 October, there are amazing deals on 20 special products. The celebrations also include an opportunity for shoppers to purchase their favorite Apple (Fruits) exclusive offers during the 'Apple Fiesta' promotion.

With World Cup football fast approaching, shoppers buying television sets with screen sizes of 65 inches or above, get a free gift card worth KD25. Meanwhile, for the health-conscious and sports enthusiast, select bicycles are also available at a spectacular discount up to 50 percent. On Selected Bicycle And, if you fancy



outdoor barbecuing, a range of products for cooking outside can be availed of during the promotion period at very special prices..

LuLu Hypermarket's 20th anniversary mega promotion is a celebration of its two decades of successful operations, as well as an attestation of the hypermarket's long-term commitments in Kuwait. The celebrations are also a recognition of the brand's continued popularity among people looking for the best shopping experience in the country.



## ICAI Kuwait Chapter concludes toy donation drive

Institute of Chartered Accountants of India, Kuwait Chapter as part of its corporate social responsibility and with its motto of giving back to the society, conducted a toy donation drive.

The members of the organization donated toys as per the wish lists handed to them by the children of the Kuwait Association for the Care of Children in Hospital (KACCH). KACCH is registered as a non-profit, charitable organization with the Ministry of Social Affairs. Since their establishment in 2003 KACCH has acted as an integral component for providing psychosocial and emotional support for hospitalized children and their

families across several government hospitals in the country.

The toy drive received an enthusiastic response from its members as the toys collected through this drive were handed over to KACCH, the act earned an incredible response from the children making it a truly humbling experience.

ICAI Kuwait will continue to strive in contributing their time, effort and resources for the benefit of the society as a whole. The Chapter extended their gratitude to KACCH for giving them this opportunity, while also congratulating all its members who contributed and volunteered for the donation drive.



EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

# Libertarian Lettuce



**Antara Haldar**

Associate Professor of Empirical  
Legal Studies at the University of  
Cambridge.

Following the brutal market backlash against her plans for unfunded tax cuts and tens of billions of pounds in additional spending, Liz Truss resigned as British prime minister, succeeded by her Tory rival, Rishi Sunak. The international media is now struggling to make sense of it all, but the task may be impossible. I have been working at it for over a decade and remain, in some ways, perplexed.

In 2007, I wanted to learn more about Friedrich von Hayek and 'Austrian economics', the apparent inspiration for Truss's libertarian philosophy, and so attended a two-week summer school program organized by the Foundation for Economic Education in the United States. Founded in the mid-1940s to incubate free-market ideology, FEE emerged as one of America's first and most influential right-wing think tanks. All the "greats" of libertarianism — including its high priest, Ludwig von Mises, the journalist Henry Hazlitt, and Hayek himself — had convened under its auspices.

In temporarily joining the FEE ranks at their previous headquarters in Irvington-on-Hudson, in upstate New York, I was immediately struck by how different the organization felt compared to other think tanks and academic forums I had encountered. One minute, we were all innocently agreeing that individual liberty is a valuable principle; the next minute, we found ourselves on a philosophical rollercoaster ride, with the concept of 'self-ownership' hurtling us toward fantastical places.

I well remember the key points that were drilled into us. First, liberty is both the necessary and the sufficient condition for the maintenance

of human dignity. Second, freedom amounts to the protection of individual liberty from state encroachment. Third, governments exist in opposition to their people.

The final, and central, point was that markets — propped up exclusively by private property (an extension of 'self-ownership') and contracts (the basis for voluntary exchange) — are the only just means of ordering society. Thus, if you believe in liberty, you must oppose government (and any state-sponsored social projects, especially welfare programs) as a matter of justice.

During my first week at FEE, I was convinced that I would succeed in setting up a Socratic dialogue: "Isn't inheritance anti-meritocratic?" I asked. "What if we defined freedom positively (as 'freedom to' rather than 'freedom from')?" "Are market failures worse than the state failures the libertarian perspective emphasizes?"

No one else chimed in. They nodded in glazed agreement with the instructors. By the second week, I had been silenced, but I could answer my questions in my own head: If you valued individual liberty and you adopted their definition of it, their conclusions were indeed inescapable, by dint of being tautologous. Given the slippery slope of libertarian logic, I was alarmed to learn that FEE also held 'summer camps' for school children. FEE was not a forum for critical engagement; it was an indoctrination program, an intellectual cult.

After two weeks, I was relieved that the experience was behind me. When I recounted it to a friend, he reassured me that it was all a thought experiment. "It can't be proved or disproved because no country would ever try it." I was mollified, because he was right, empirically. While full-bore libertarianism has long had a presence in US politics, it has always been the bridesmaid.

Imagine my surprise, then, to see a decidedly libertarian political doctrine pursued in the United Kingdom, the country I have long called home. Truss and her (first) chancellor of the Exchequer, Kwasi Kwarteng, will now be remembered primarily for their undying faith in

the power of tax cuts, including on the country's highest earners and corporations, to spur growth. Even though the country is experiencing double-digit inflation and a massive cost-of-living crisis, they apparently did not foresee any problem in announcing £45 billion (\$52 billion) in unfunded tax breaks.

Truss's 'mini-budget', unveiled on 23 September, was as much a religious document as a list of policy proposals. It was based on faith, and it read like something handed down from the libertarian high priesthood — a text belonging to the same tradition as philosopher Robert Nozick, who



equated taxation with the evils of slavery.

Truss and Kwarteng offered a preview of their agenda in the 2012 book *Britannia Unchained*, which was strongly influenced by Hayekian think tanks like the Institute for Economic Affairs (the British counterpart to FEE). The book, co-authored with three other Tory politicians (Priti Patel, Dominic Raab, and Chris Skidmore), bemoaned Britain's supposedly 'bloated state, high taxes, and excessive regulation'. These were hallmarks of the 'nanny state' that had been coddling 'idle' Britons and allowing them to work too little and retire too early.

Likewise, the European Union was characterized as a supernanny that was smothering British competitiveness. The book warned that Britain was becoming a second-rate power in Europe and a third-rate power in the world. Four years later, those arguments became the driving force behind Brexit.



But Truss and Kwarteng's love letter to the market went unrequited. Their agenda triggered a run on the pound, which hit its lowest level ever against the dollar. Projected mortgage payments rose sharply, and British bonds dropped in value, forcing the Bank of England to step in as market maker of last resort. In a rare rebuke of a major advanced economy, the International Monetary Fund weighed in to voice concerns about the UK government's plans. Truss fired Kwarteng and signaled that she would abandon some of the tax cuts.

Then, in one of the most dramatic U-turns in modern economic history, Kwarteng's replacement, Jeremy Hunt, announced a near-complete policy reversal. Trussomics — one of the most ambitious attempts at libertarian economic policymaking in living memory — had failed to last a month. It turns out that social order requires government after all.

It was a costly experiment. Truss's policy misadventure has addressed all the questions that my time in Irvington-on-Hudson left unanswered: when put into practice, libertarian philosophy does indeed wilt faster than a head of lettuce.





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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

# Electrification, clean cooking go hand in hand



**Ibrahim Matola and Damilola Ogunbiyi**

*Ibrahim Matola is Minister of Energy for Malawi.*

*Damilola Ogunbiyi, CEO of Sustainable Energy for All, is the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Sustainable Energy for All and Co-Chair of UN Energy.*

Almost one-third of the world's population — 2.4 billion people — cook with solid biomass, which has devastating consequences for their health and the environment. Worldwide, the use of traditional cooking fuels is estimated to cost \$2.4 trillion per year, owing to its associated health problems, lost productivity, and climate-driven damages. But with 733 million people still lacking access to any electricity, biomass fuels are often the only option.

It doesn't have to be this way. Promoting clean cooking and closing the electricity access gap are two of the key targets of the seventh United Nations Sustainable Development Goal, which calls for "access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all" by 2030. But these two pillars of energy access tend to be treated as discrete issues, which is reflected in the disparate levels of investment that each receives. Clean cooking and electrification each attract a different set of stakeholders, who then develop separate strategies for closing each gap.

But they are not discrete issues at all. When people have access to sufficient electricity (preferably provided by renewable-energy

sources), they can avail themselves of the kinds of cooking (e-cooking) technologies that are already widely used in the Global North. Ensuring access to both electricity and clean cooking options thus would go a long way toward helping the Global South tackle its energy, climate, and development challenges.

As matters stand, electric stoves and cookers have not made significant inroads in developing countries, owing largely to a lack of energy infrastructure (both on- and off-grid). But, as developing countries and their partners seek to expand and clean up national electricity systems, they have an opportunity to drive wider adoption of e-cooking, too. They can thus stimulate electricity demand and improve the business case for new on- and off-grid

The governments of Nigeria and Malawi have already recognized the power of IEPs. Working with Sustainable Energy for All, the Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet, and the Rockefeller Foundation, Nigeria has developed an Integrated Energy Planning Tool that will play a vital role in helping it achieve its energy-access goals by 2030, on the way to its net-zero goal for 2060. And Malawi launched a similar tool this week.

Powered by extensive geospatial modeling and data, these interactive platforms provide actionable intelligence for government and private-sector stakeholders, so that they can deliver least-cost solutions for expanding access to electricity and clean cooking. For example, Nigeria's IEP estimates that 3.5 million

addition to delivering better health outcomes, this level of adoption would also improve the economics of the grid expansion projects being carried out by the Electricity Supply Corporation of Malawi.

IEPs are indispensable for illuminating a country's potential market for e-cooking. They identify customers' location based on their current and anticipated electrification status, which is essential business information for clean-cooking companies. Because electrification efforts take time to bear fruit, an IEP also provides an indication of where e-cooking solutions may not yet be feasible for local populations. In these cases, the focus can shift to interim clean-cooking solutions, such as improved cookstoves or liquefied petroleum gas.

In any case, the minimal progress made toward improving access to clean cooking underscores the need for new, better-informed strategies. The launch of Malawi's IEP this week marks the start of a new chapter of evidence-based decision-making in the country. The IEP is easily accessible online for use by government institutions, the private sector, development partners, and the public.

At COP27 this year, many African countries will emphasize the need for greater international financing and investment to support their clean-energy development. The World Bank's recent \$1.5 billion commitment to finance electricity and clean cooking in Nigeria shows that an IEP can be a catalyst for mobilizing such support.

All developing countries should follow Malawi and Nigeria's lead by embracing integrated energy planning. Doing so will allow them to seize the twin opportunity that clean e-cooking offers: electrification and better health for their people and the environment.

“ Powered by extensive geospatial modeling and data, IEPs provide actionable intelligence for government and private-sector stakeholders, so they can deliver least-cost solutions for expanding access to electricity and clean cooking. ”

connections and other infrastructure upgrades.

But to make the most of this opportunity, governments must develop integrated energy plans (IEPs) that set clear goals for both electrification and clean-cooking access, and that direct resources effectively toward meeting them. Policymakers must look at the energy system holistically when mapping out how both household and institutional access to electricity and clean cooking (including e-cooking) will be improved.

households can afford and are likely to adopt e-cooking solutions, which would result in annual incremental electricity demand of 1,100 megawatt hours. Seizing this opportunity would require an investment of just \$83 million, mostly for cookstoves.

For its part, the Malawi IEP shows that e-cooking has the potential to reach 4.1 million households when the country achieves universal electrification — and that figure includes only grid-connected homes. In





# Neuron size, memory and Super Agers

**S**uperAgers is a term often used to refer to individuals aged 80 years and over who score similarly to individuals aged 20-30 years their younger in memory tests. Additionally, this group has been shown to exhibit less brain volume loss over time, which could explain why this group remains better protected against dementia.

As we age our memory capacity typically tends to decline. Various health studies have shown that around 40 percent of people aged 65 years and older have age-associated memory impairment, and approximately 1 percent of these cases progress into dementia each year.

Studies into how SuperAgers maintain their unique ability in memory capacity despite advancement in age could help researchers develop preventative strategies and treatments for cognitive decline.

To explore this issue in more depth, researchers at Northwestern University in the US state of Chicago, recently autopsied the brains of 24 individuals, including six who were characterized as 'cognitive SuperAgers'. They found that the neurons (nerve cells) in SuperAgers were larger than in those aged 20-30 years younger, and that neurons of SuperAgers did not have neurofibrillary tangles (NFT), also known as 'tau tangles'.

These tangles are understood to result from the soluble tau protein in neurons aggregating into insoluble tau protein tangles. For reasons that remain unknown, cell populations in the brain's entorhinal cortex (ERC) — area in the temporal lobe of the brain associated with memory, navigation and perception of time — are selectively vulnerable to 'tau tangle'



formation during normal aging and in early stages of Alzheimer's Disease.

Findings from the study showed neuronal shrinkage (atrophy) in the ERC, which the researchers suggested could be a function of 'tau tangle' formation in the affected cells, and which lead to poor memory abilities in older age. They also noted that identifying this contributing factor is crucial for the early identification of Alzheimer's, monitoring its course, and guiding treatment.

For the study, the researchers autopsied the brains of six SuperAgers with an average age of 91 years; seven 'cognitively average' elderly people with an average age of 89 years; six healthy younger adults aged between 26 and 61 years; and five adults with mild cognitive impairment (MCI) at an average age of 92 years. At the time of their death, all participants could perform daily living activities, and all were free from clinical evidence or history of neurological or psychiatric conditions.

The researchers noted no difference in years of education, brain weight, or postmortem interval between the groups. They also tested the groups for ApoE genotypes using DNA from previous blood samples of the deceased. Among the participants, only one person from the MCI group had the APOE-4 allele, a risk factor for Alzheimer's disease.

During the autopsy the researchers assessed a cross-sectional layer of neurons out of the six layers that comprise ERC. In particular, they assessed overall neuronal health and for the presence of tau proteins that have been implicated in neuronal dysfunction and are among the first markers of Alzheimer's disease.

The researchers found that layer II ERC neurons were significantly larger in SuperAgers than other groups, including younger controls, some of whom were 60 years their junior. They also found that those in the 'cognitively average' group of older

individuals had over twice the NFT density of SuperAgers in layer II of the ERC.

Though the study did not come up with any concrete answers on why these neurons were larger in SuperAgers, or why they are relatively protected from disease, one possibility put forward by the researchers was that the greater neuron size protected these cells from neurofibrillary tangles. They also found that this protection appeared to occur despite other age-related brain changes present in SuperAgers.

They further explained that larger layer II ERC neurons among SuperAgers than their young peers might indicate that large ERC cells were present from birth and structurally maintained throughout life. The scientists also said that their findings suggest that increased NFT levels lead to neuronal shrinkage. They noted that this observation was particularly apparent in the MCI group, which had a significantly lower cell size than other groups. On the question of shortcomings in their study, the research team admitted that their results were limited by their small sample size, which they pointed out was largely because of SuperAgers being unique and rare in a population. They added that future in-depth studies were needed to understand why and how some people develop these super-sized cells while others do not.

Taken together, research into neuronal size and related studies can provide improved insights to SuperAgers' cognitive functionality and relative resistance and/or resilience to neurodegenerative diseases. These studies could also lead to identifying and developing new interventions that could potentially maintain cognitive function throughout a person's lifespan.



## Night owls at greater risk of chronic diseases

**P**eople who are night owls and prefer to give sunrise a miss everyday may have a higher risk of some chronic health problems such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease, than people who are up early.

Differences among people in so-called sleep chronotypes — the natural sleep-wake cycles that program our body's biological clock — have long been associated with the risk of a wide range of chronic health problems, including obesity, type 2 diabetes, fertility issues, digestive disorders, and mental illness. But much of this research has focused on what happens when people cannot sleep when their body is naturally inclined to do so — a common issue for many shift workers.

In a new study that took a different approach to the problem, researchers at Rutgers University in the United States focused on people who do follow their natural sleep-wake cycles, also known as circadian rhythms. Scientists studied two distinct sleep chronotypes: 24 'early birds', who were most alert in the mornings and tended to go to bed earlier, and 27 'night owls', who were sharpest later in the day and tended to

stay up late. Overall, researchers found that the night owls had less ability to use fat for energy, meaning that fats accumulated in the body and increased the risk of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease.


These metabolic differences can be explained by how well people with different sleep chronotypes use the hormone insulin to turn glucose, or the sugars in the blood from foods we eat, into energy that cells can burn immediately or store for later. The study found that the early birds used glucose more efficiently for energy than the night owls, allowing them to churn through this energy source and then burn stores of fat for energy too. By contrast, the night owls did not use glucose as efficiently or burn through as much of their fat stores.


Based on their study, the researchers suggested that the differences in fat metabolism between 'early birds' and 'night owls' shows that our body's circadian rhythm could affect how our bodies use insulin and potentially result in major negative implications for our health.

For their study the researchers employed advanced imaging to assess body composition, tested participants for insulin sensitivity, and used breath samples to measure fat and carbohydrate metabolism. Researchers also monitored activity levels, provided participants with all their meals to control energy intake, and conducted treadmill tests to determine their aerobic fitness levels.

The research found that early birds used more fat for energy both when they were at rest and during the exercise tests. Early birds were also more sensitive to insulin, meaning they were better at using this hormone to lower their blood sugar and more apt to burn fats for energy. Night owls were insulin resistant, meaning they needed more of this hormone to lower blood sugar levels and also tended to store more fats.

Observations from the new study advances the understanding of how our body's circadian rhythms impact our health. The researchers pointed out that since chronotype appears to impact our metabolism and hormone action, this could be used as a factor to predict an individual's disease risk.






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