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# Global economic outlook for 2023



## THE TIMES KUWAIT REPORT

In its latest assessment on the global economy released last week, the World Bank predicted that global growth will face a widespread slowdown in 2023 and 2024 compared to last year. Underlining the sharp slowdown in global growth, the report indicated that worldwide economic output is projected to be just 1.7 percent in 2023 before edging up to 2.7 percent in 2024.

The study warned that the downturn would be widespread and could affect 95 percent of advanced economies and nearly 70 percent of emerging markets and developing economies — with the potential for increasing poverty rates in some regions, and the likelihood of the global economy slipping into recession.

Growth in Europe and Central Asia is expected to slow to 0.1 percent in 2023 before increasing to 2.8 percent in 2024, said the report. In the US, growth is expected to hover around 0.5 percent before rebounding to a little over 1.7 percent in 2024. Meanwhile, in the Middle East and North Africa region, growth is expected to slow to 3.5 percent in 2023 and fall further to 2.7 percent in 2024.



In his foreword to the January 2023 edition of 'Global Economic Prospects' report, President of the World Bank Group, David Malpass, noted that higher inflation, and interest rates, along with low investment, and disruptions caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as a resurgence of the COVID-19 pandemic, were among reasons

behind the report's downcast forecast.

According to the World Economic Forum, heightened inflation was visible across a broad swathe of countries in 2022. By June, inflation in the United States hit 8.6 percent, a 40-year high, before trending downwards to reach 7.7 percent in November. In the European Union it was 11.1

percent in November, a heady rise from the 5.2 percent a year earlier. International Monetary Fund (IMF) experts forecast global inflation to be around 8.9 percent in 2022 before falling to 6.2 percent in 2023.

In response to elevated inflation, unseen in the developed world since the 1980s, many central banks, including the US Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank, raised their interest rates. These coordinated rate hikes — by 33 out of the 38 central banks tracked by the Bank of International Settlements — were the broadest in over two decades. However, the interest rate hikes, while tempering the inflation surge in many developed countries, also caused adverse economic consequences in many emerging markets and developing countries.

Many of these low-income countries, already struggling to recover from pandemic-period disruptions to their economy, were then further burdened by the high interest rates in developed countries, which caused an outflow of their meager foreign-currency reserves. The dollar-appreciation from US interest hikes also made repayment and servicing of dollar-denominated debts exorbitantly expensive for these nations.

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# CPA imposes record fine on company for anti-competition activity

The Competition Protection Authority (CPA) issued a decision to impose a record fine of KD2 million on a company specialized in distributing reinforced steel for carrying out practices in violation of competition laws and harming the interests of consumers.

According to reports the Disciplinary Board of the CPA monitored the company's violation of the rules and discovered the company had created artificial scarcity for reinforced steel in the market. The company had wilfully withheld sales of the product that caused an increase in demand, which

allowed the company to charge a higher premium price for its steel products.

From direct observations and evaluations, the Disciplinary Council concluded that the company was guilty of violating prevailing competition laws in Kuwait, and warranted the imposition of due penalties. According to the law, a company found in violation of competition laws would be charged a penalty of 7 percent of its total revenues in the previous year. In the case of the above-mentioned company, the 7 percent fine amounted to KD1.75 million dinars.

Reports from CPA indicate that the same company had previously been fined KD250,000 for violating Article 34 of the competition law, which stipulates the need for companies to submit data requested by the CPA in a timely manner. The law also states that failure to comply with the CPA request could entail a fine of 1 percent of total revenues in the previous fiscal year on the violating company. The board decided on the fine amount based on the above company's total revenue of KD2.5 million in fiscal year 2020-21.



It is noteworthy that the Disciplinary Board of the Competition Protection Authority exercises its powers in accordance with the provisions of the law of the agency, and it is composed of five members from outside the agency, three of whom are judges who are delegated from the Supreme Judicial Council, including the president, and two members with experience in economic and legal affairs.



## India's Laughter Champions enthrall audience with comedy show



Kuwait witnessed the start of 2023 with a rib-tickling comedy show titled 'Comedy Night with India's Laughter Champions', organized and hosted by SAAZ Events, at the American International School auditorium in Hawally on 6 January.

India's Laughter Champion is an Indian reality stand-up comedy series broadcast on Sony Entertainment Television from June 2022. Stand-up comedians from the show enthralled the audience with their comments and talent in 'pomedey' mimicry and ventriloquism. The show was also accompanied by talented and dynamic dance groups who rocked the stage with famous Bollywood numbers.

The show began with dance performances by different dance groups, following which the CEO of SAAZ Events, Dr. Shabbir Qamar felicitated the event partner Bahrain Exchange Company (BEC) Kuwait and presented them with a memento. He also acknowledged and thanked the other guests for their presence.



Then, as a part of local talent hunt, Sandeep Panchal, the winner of the 'Short Video Contest' performed on stage.

The evening's comedy section began with Jayvijay Sachan, aka 'The Man of Many Voices', who has mimicked more than 350 people. Arriving on stage in a characteristic Bollywood style entry, he then mimicked several famous Bollywood stars, including Nawazuddin Siddique, Nana Patekar, Naseeruddin Shah and Ajay Devgan, among others. From the time of his entry till the end of his performance it was nonstop hilarious entertainment for the audience.

The host then introduced versatile talent Vighnesh Pande, a ventriloquist along with his female marionette Anna. The audiences were mesmerized by his talent in ventriloquism with the marionette Anna.

Taking the stage next was India's Laughter Champion, winner for 2022, Rajat Sood, the 'pomedey' king, who left the audience in spells of laughter with his mixture of poems and comedy (pomedey). He also thanked the audience for their whole hearted welcome and said "I am extremely happy to get this much love and affection from Kuwait."

The Show came to an end with some more feet-tapping dance performances by different groups that left everyone fully entertained.

As a token of appreciation, all the three individual artists were presented with a memento by Dr. Qamar. Besides the event partner BEC Kuwait, the show was sponsored by City Centre, Oriental Restaurant, Malabar Gold, Thakkara Restaurant, Al Mailem Tyres and Badur Travels.

## ALSAYER invites application for Toyota 'Dream Car Art Contest'



Share ideas about the future of mobility by drawing your dream car. To promote children's imagination and artistic talents powered by unique ideas to tackle our day-to-day challenges, ALSAYER invites entries for the 16th Toyota Dream Car Art Contest (DCAC), one of the largest global art contests for children. Every great idea was born in the glimmer of a dream, and Toyota believes in nurturing the creativity of the next generation of great inventors, thinkers, and dreamers.

In the past Mohamed Naser Al Sayer & Sons Est Co W.L.L and ALSAYER Holding Corporate Excellence Department succeeded to nominate two Kuwait contestants to win prestigious DCAC World Contest Award in Japan, and regionally achieved six Toyota MECA Awards.

National selection will be conducted by ALSAYER, and winners will be presented with attractive prizes. The National Contest winners will enter the 'Toyota Middle East & Central Asia Award' to honor the regional talents and will also receive attractive cash awards. And finally, Kuwait National Winners will enter the World Contest to select the Best Finalist from each age category will receive prize money in cash for the individuals and for the representing schools, to be utilized for academic purpose of the participants (\*as per the terms & conditions of Toyota Motor Corporation).

We invite all young talents to participate and draw your amazing dream car to become

a regional and global winner. Last date for entry submission is 11 January 2023.

**Eligibility:** The contest is open to anyone in Kuwait with age 15 years or younger.

### Age categories

Category 1: Under 8 years of age  
Category 2: 8-11 years old  
Category 3: 12-15 years old

### Terms & Conditions.

Hand-drawn colorful artwork, which shows 'Your Dream Car'. Remember to include a brief about drawings to support your idea. Your artwork may be viewed by the world, so bring us your best dream, creativity, and expressions.

Any standard drawing medium. Coloring pencils, crayons, watercolors or markers, digital and computer graphic artworks. We restrict one resemblance to the previous Toyota Dream Car Art Contest artworks, famous paintings, and that include trademarked characters.

Contact below numbers to enroll and collect the forms and drawing sheets.

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You can also collect your free Drawing sheet from the following Toyota showrooms and service centers during regular working hours: (Jahra, Al-Rai, Aswaq Al-Qurain, Ahmadi, Fahaheel, and Toyota Spare Parts Center in Sharq).





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# Botswana invites Kuwaitis to visit, invest

*Ambassador of Botswana to Kuwait, H.E. Augustine Ntshomane*



THE TIMES KUWAIT REPORT

In his first media interview, following taking charge as the new Ambassador of Botswana to Kuwait, H.E. Augustine Ntshomane Makgonatsotlhe, expressed his keen interest in further developing the existing strong relations between his country and Kuwait.

A law graduate from the University of Botswana with a Masters Degree from the University College of London, Ambassador Makgonatsotlhe is an eminent legal practitioner and staunch human rights advocate. Immediately prior to his appointment as ambassador to Kuwait, he served as Botswana's fourth Ombudsman from 2016 to 2022. Before that, he was from 2007 the Secretary for Defence, Justice and Security in the Ministry of Defence, Justice and Security.

In his role as Secretary to Defense, Justice and Security, he was responsible for ensuring Botswana's compliance with various human rights conventions, treaties and protocols. He has also contributed extensively to Botswana's multilateral diplomacy agenda, and rendered legal advice to his government on complex international trade and international law matters, as well as negotiated and drafted commercial contracts and international agreements.

The ambassador began the interview by giving his assessment of current relations between Botswana and Kuwait: "Botswana and Kuwait have friendly relations dating back to the 1980s, however, we opened our embassy in Kuwait only in November 2010. The fact that this mission is the only Botswana embassy in the Middle East and the Arab world, signifies the importance that Botswana grants to maintaining and strengthening this good bilateral relations with the State of Kuwait. Botswana has also benefited greatly from development and technical assistance provided by Kuwait."

Describing his conversation with His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishaal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, on presenting his credentials as "very interesting". He added, "I was really humbled by His Highness's knowledge of Botswana. Diplomatically, you really feel welcome and, most importantly, at home in this country. I also discussed with His Highness a number of ways to enhance bilateral relations between our two countries, including more food security and enhanced trade."



“Tourism promotion is an important area of the Embassy's strategy in promoting Botswana in Kuwait and the Middle East. Our thirst for sharing beauty never dries up and accordingly we have always promoted tourism to our country.”

Expanding on his plans to further cement his country's ties with Kuwait, the ambassador indicated that among his priorities would be to enhance bilateral trade, encourage investment, and increase tourism to his country.

Noting that trade and investment are still not at the aspired level given the huge potential opportunities that exist in Botswana, the ambassador said: "Beef is the number one food commodity Botswana exports. We believe it is time to shift focus from our exports to the well-established European market to the Gulf market.

Therefore, we hope that the process of ending all import requirements, which we are currently following, will open the doors for Botswana beef in the GCC countries.

Botswana beef is among the best in the world, thanks to our quality controls and organic farming methods."

Commenting on the current levels of Kuwaiti investments in his country, the envoy observed: "Although there are investments by the Kuwaiti private sector, the numbers are not very encouraging. We hope to exert more efforts with local businesses, the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and all other stakeholders, to encourage more Kuwaiti investment in Botswana.

"We have just published an investment guide in collaboration with Botswana Investment and Trade Center (BITC) for Kuwait and other GCC countries. The booklet covers sectors such

as manufacturing, tourism, trade, agriculture, information and communication technology, and transportation. I would also like to point out that Botswana is centrally located in the Southern African region, and this represents a great opportunity in terms of trade as a logistics hub."

Turning to tourism and tourist visits from Kuwait to Botswana, Ambassador Makgonatsotlhe said: "Botswana is a big oasis, and it has the largest inland water delta in the world, the Okavango Delta, which is the largest salt pans in the world, and is the home of elephants in Africa. There is also an interesting geographical fact about Botswana in that it is the only place on earth where four countries — Botswana, Angola, Zambia, and Zimbabwe — meet. The people of Botswana are also known for their peace and tranquility, as well as sustainable tourism. "Tourism promotion is an important area of the Embassy's strategy in promoting Botswana in Kuwait and the Middle East. Our thirst for sharing beauty never dries up and accordingly we have always promoted tourism to our country. And, we will continue to do so through various methods, including online platforms, exhibitions, trade shows, and digital advertisements.

"In addition, while we enjoy natural wealth, security remains a primary goal, and I will continue to encourage Kuwaitis to visit Botswana to learn not only about diamonds and tourism, but also how to live in our social environments, which are part of cultural exchanges."

Regarding the number of Kuwaitis visiting his country annually, the envoy noted: "Earlier, when Kuwaitis needed entry visas to Botswana, it was easy to know the exact number of visitors, but since visa cancellation for most GCC nationals, we only receive inquiries when travelers need assistance. Nevertheless, the numbers are encouraging, especially during the summer here in Kuwait, which coincides with the April to August good season for tourism in Botswana."

Concluding his interview, Ambassador Makgonatsotlhe said, "First of all, our deepest gratitude to the State of Kuwait and its people for the great relations both nationally and personally. Botswana and Kuwait share a number of similarities, so there is a lot to learn from this country. I would also like to continue urging the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce to continue working with the embassy to explore investment opportunities in Botswana in various sectors."

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## Kuwaiti media delegation visits Tajikistan

**E**mbassy of Tajikistan held a reception last week to welcome members of the media delegation that visited Tajikistan in December, following the first-ever direct flight between Kuwait and Tajikistan, which was operated by Jazeera Airways.

In his welcome speech, the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and Ambassador of Tajikistan, H.E. Dr. Zubaidullah Zubaidov, highlighted the strong bilateral bonds between Tajikistan and Kuwait, and underlined the importance of the direct flight between the two countries. He pointed out that the direct flight operated by Jazeera Airways was a product of the successful, effective and fruitful years of the Embassy of Tajikistan in

Kuwait. The ambassador added that the more than 1,000 passengers who have already flown on the direct flight to Tajikistan is an indication of the tourism potential and that tourism activity between the two countries will continue to witness rapid growth in the coming periods.

He also revealed that talks on waiving entry visa requirements for Tajik citizens to Kuwait was underway, so that people from both countries can freely travel to and fro and enjoy each other's hospitality. He noted that currently there are no entry visa requirements imposed on Kuwaiti citizens, and they can easily obtain the visa either electronically, through the embassy, or upon arrival at the Tajik ports.

He added that Kuwaitis should explore Tajikistan as a new tourist destination in which all the elements of family and medical tourism are available, expressing his hope to witness plenty of Kuwaiti tourists in Tajikistan in 2023. He went on to express optimism that economic, commercial, investment and technological, as well as scientific and cultural cooperation will continue to develop between the two countries.

Speaking about his meeting with Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah, the ambassador revealed that both sides stressed the need to develop their relations in all fields. He added, "We are working to arrange a visit for the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister to Tajikistan to

hold political consultations between the foreign ministries of Tajikistan and Kuwait, as well as to promote exchange of high-level visits"

He expressed his hope that Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah's visit to Tajikistan would culminate in the opening of a Kuwaiti embassy in the capital, Dushanbe, which would consolidate and enhance cooperation between the two countries.

The ambassador concluded by noting that the Embassy plans to celebrate the cultural days of Tajikistan in Kuwait next month, along with an exhibition of Tajik food products in Kuwait, which he hoped would help expand food trade between the two countries.



Dr. Adarsh Swaika being presented a memento by Yusuff Ali MA, Chairman of Lulu Group in the presence of Smita Patil, First Secretary (Political & Commerce), Mohamed Haris, Lulu Kuwait Director, S. Sreejith, Lulu Kuwait Regional Director.

## Lulu Group's Yusuff Ali meets new Indian Ambassador

**Y**usuff Ali MA, Chairman of Lulu Group International has called on Dr. Adarsh Swaika, the new Indian Ambassador to Kuwait. During a meeting held at the Embassy last week, Yusuff Ali welcomed the new envoy to the State of Kuwait and conveyed greetings for a successful tenure.

The Ambassador was briefed by Yusuff Ali about Lulu's expansion plan in Kuwait.

Also present on the occasion were Smita

Patil, First Secretary (Political & Commerce), Mohamed Haris, Lulu Kuwait Director, S. Sreejith, Lulu Kuwait Regional Director and other officials.

Indian Ambassador Dr. Adarsh Swaika, an officer of 2002-batch of Indian Foreign Service, holds a Ph.D Degree in Chemistry from Delhi University. Prior to his appointment in Kuwait, Ambassador Swaika has served at the Indian diplomatic missions in Russia, Bulgaria, China and Bangladesh.

## ABK announces winner of Alfouz weekly draw

**A**l Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced Nourah Jumaan Al Mutairi as the winner of KD10,000 in the Alfouz weekly draw. The result of the draw, which was held under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, was announced on 9 January.

The Alfouz draw account offers ABK customers the chance to win life-changing rewards. With Alfouz, ABK customers will get a chance to win KD10,000 and the ultimate grand prize of KD5,000 monthly additional income for 10 years. Both new and existing ABK customers can benefit from this opportunity, with a minimum account balance of KD100 only.

ABK encourages everyone to open an Alfouz draw account and/or increase their balances to have more chances of winning in the upcoming



draw which will happen on Monday, 16 January. The higher the deposits are, the higher the chances to win.

## Housing accounts for biggest share of loans by citizens

**L**atest statistics from the Central Bank of Kuwait reveal that a total of 550,194 citizens availed of loans worth KD14.7 billion over the past year, with the overwhelming

amount of loans being for housing, followed by KD1.7 billion in consumer loans.

The statistics also show that only a small percent (2.5%) of loan recipients default on their repayment, and that 97.5 percent of citizens taking loans have been regular in repaying the installments with the majority of loan beneficiaries

The Central Bank explained that the degree of regularity in repaying loans on the part of citizens amounted to about 97.5% of the total value of loans.

## WHO holds workshop on climate induced health vulnerabilities

**L**ast week, the World Health Organization (WHO) Kuwait, concluded a two-day intensive national workshop that it had organized under the title of 'Conducting Climate Change and Health Vulnerability and Adaptation Assessment'.

The workshop was developed in cooperation with the Environmental Health Unit of the Public Health Directorate, with the goal of working with the core national technical group on identifying priority vulnerabilities and adaptation measures associated with climate change and health.

Technical officers across the three levels of WHO participated in the workshop which is testament of the importance of the initiative to

the health agenda.

Recently, multiple reports have indicated the increased threat posed by climate change on the world and specifically in the Eastern Mediterranean region, including increased prevalence of extreme heat and dust storms, which have a direct and indirect impact on human health and well-being.

Speaking on occasion, the WHO Representative to Kuwait, Dr. Assad Hafeez, stated that "climate change is a pressing issue on a global scale that must be addressed as it has a negative impact on human health. Furthermore, it has the potential to undermine decades of progress in global health and achievement of the sustainable development



goals (SDG)." Elaborating on the national workshop, he added, "It is critical to build a climate resilient health system in Kuwait, and in this regard it is important to identify climate

sensitive health risks now and in the future, as well as understand the groups of people that are the most vulnerable. This is needed in order to highlight the adaptations required so as to inform policy and programs."

The WHO country office is devoted to work with all local stakeholders to enhance health and well-being in Kuwait, which is achieved by bringing in global experts to improve Kuwait's health indicators. In July 2022, WHO Kuwait conducted a national training workshop on the health impacts of air pollution, by building critical capacity using the WHO software tool known as AirQ+, which performs calculations that allow quantification of the health effects of exposure to air pollution.



# Over 60 percent of workers hope to seek new jobs in 2023

A new survey shows that despite 70 percent of professionals in Kuwait expecting salaries to stay the same, and over half expecting a salary raise in 2023, more than 60 percent of workers said they aim to seek another job this year.

While 37 percent of respondents to the survey claimed that their loyalty to their company is not linked to the salary they receive, 30 percent said it was. Other than salaries, the important drivers of loyalty were: nature of daily responsibilities (33%), line manager (32%) and colleagues (28%).

When asked about their career plans in the next twelve months, 61 percent of Kuwait respondents said they will look for a better job in the same industry, and 33 percent said they plan to look for a better job in a different industry.

The Middle East and North Africa Salary Survey 2023 by Bayt.com, the Middle East's leading job site, and market research agency YouGov, was conducted to gauge employee satisfaction with their current salaries and factors affecting thereof, as well as explore the drivers of loyalty towards employers and the

significance of salary in career satisfaction and general wellbeing.

The survey also showed that the current salary package of nearly a third (32%) of Kuwait respondents consists of basic salary and benefits, while 51 percent said it consists of basic salary only, and 16 percent said it consists of basic salary, benefits, and commission. Among the various benefits employees receive, personal medical insurance (32%), bonus (25%) and personal annual air ticket (21%) are found to be the top benefits in Kuwait. Additionally, 44 percent of respondents say that their company pays for overtime.

When it came to the preferred pay structure, more than 6 in 10 respondents (62%) said they preferred a 100 percent fixed pay structure, while 27 percent of respondents said they prefer a partially fixed pay structure with a variable pay for commissions

and incentives.

Director of Human Resources at Bayt.com, Ola Haddad, says: "Our annual Salary Survey outlines the evolution of current income structure and levels, salary satisfaction and perception towards cost of living, providing an insight to the job market and the economy. Employers need to treat compensation as an integral part of an employee's reward, and monitor major factors driving the salary expectations."

In terms of quality of life, nearly 7 in 10 (69%) respondents in Kuwait believe they are better off or about the same as other people of a similar generation in their country of residence. Regarding future investment, the survey showed that only 18 percent make regular financial investments, while 22 percent invest in their own business.

Research Director at YouGov,



Zafar Shah, said: "The Salary Survey illustrates the job market from employees' perspective, helping candidates gauge their worth in the current job market, and promoting employers' understanding in a way that best serves the business and employees. While financial rewards are key to attracting talent into organizations, non-financial rewards can be essential differentiators when it comes to retaining talent."



## GIS bids adieu to Class XII students

Gulf Indian School bid adieu to its 26th batch of Class XII students on Monday, December 19, 2022 – a day earmarked with dignity and seriousness. It was the day the students took centre stage; a day the faculty experienced mixed feelings of pride and sadness, while the parents looked on joyfully; a day that will forever be etched in the collective consciousness of Gulf Indian School as covering yet another milestone in this beautiful journey of togetherness.

The chill December evening was warmed with the view of the valedictorians lined up awaiting the arrival of the dignitaries. The programme commenced with an imperial parade of valedictorians led by the Chief Guest Mr. Radhakrishnan .C, Principal United Indian School, Manager GIS Mr. Sreekumar Pillai, Principal GIS Dr. S. Prashant Vasudev & Vice Principals. Walking down the aisle in all their splendour, with their heads held high, the VIP's of the evening – the outgoing batch of Class XII, took their much coveted places. The solemn music that ushered them in set the tone for the rest of the evening. The august gathering was accorded a warm welcome by Mrs Jayadevi, the Primary Class HOD of English Department. The solemnity of the evening gathered momentum with the lighting of the lamp that symbolizes dispelling of darkness followed by prayer that filled the atmosphere with serenity and divinity. As a token of expression of gratitude, the chief guest and the other dignitaries were honoured with bouquets and mementos. The Principal in his address to the Class XII graduates envisioned the bright future that lay ahead for the batch about to make its way into a new phase of life, a brand new world. Each student then had his/her moment of glory as he/she proudly walked up on stage to receive a memento and Principal's message. Special awards were conferred on students acknowledging their skills, talents and personal traits.



In the tranquil ambience of the candle lit auditorium, blessings were showered on the valedictorians. The auditorium was lit brilliantly by the candle light that shone from the candles held by the outgoing batch, to symbolise the light that will continue to shine to light up their chosen pathway in life.

Then came the poignant moment of experience sharing by Ushasi Nandi, Mr GIS and Miss GIS recollecting their memories from 14 years of school days.

This momentous evening drew to a close upon a grateful note with the vote of thanks by the Vice Principal, Mrs Kala Rajan leaving everyone with an evening well spent and memories to cherish forever.

Though the event marked the end of one's school days, there radiated a sense of achievement and satisfaction of a journey well done.



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# Thought for the week

“The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.

-Nelson Mandela



By Sareha Shah  
Special to The Times Kuwait

**D**o you know how many cups of coffee you drink each day? Do you know when you drink your coffee most? Do you need coffee to wake up? Do you always crave a cup after meals, while with friends, or at work?

It is important for you to answer these questions so you will know whether you are a coffeeholic and when you are most susceptible to the caffeine habit. Caffeine is an alkaloid stimulant and a potent drug, affecting the central nervous system, cardiovascular system, gastrointestinal tract, adrenaline release, and muscle contraction.

Because of ubiquitous use of tea, coffee, and cola beverages, caffeine is probably the most widely used drug as it is subject to overindulgence. For some people immediate effects of caffeine are 'Coffee Nerves' and symptoms, such as shaky hands and an overall jittery feeling, become apparent within an hour of drinking as little as one cup of coffee (about 100 to 150 milligrams(mg) of caffeine. The effects last several hours. Then you crash, because coffee initially raises blood sugar (one reason you get a lift) but soon the body's insulin overrides that and you are left with a letdown feeling.

For those who cannot stop at one cup, the adverse effects are multiplied, too. A syndrome known as 'Caffeinism' occurs in people who drink five or more cups of coffee a day (about 500mg of caffeine.) The syndrome is much like Anxiety Neurosis, and the people afflicted suffer from nervousness, irritability, agitation, headache, muscle twitching and rapid heartbeat. If you are starting to get worried, that is good because in order to kick the caffeine habit, you have to have the incentive. Once you have that you are ready to go.

**Quitting 'cold turkey'**, or the abrupt cessation of dependence on a substance, sounds easy. One day you are a coffee drinker and the next day you are not, but look out. Caffeine can be, after all, physiologically addictive. That means when your body is deprived of its usual 'fix', it may rebel. The most common symptom is headache that begins about 18 hours after your last cup of coffee. It begins with the feeling of cerebral fullness (as if your brain were too big for your head) and rapidly progresses to a painful and throbbing headache and peaks about three to six hours after onset, but it is not unusual for the pain to last a day or more. A person desperate for relief may reach for an aspirin, but again, beware. Many over the counter pain remedies contain, what else? Caffeine. Sure your headache will go away but then you are hooked again and have to start all over.

**Besides the headache**, you may also feel extreme

irritability, lethargy or anxiety. In fact, the same kind of anxiety associated with heavy caffeine consumption is experienced during withdrawal as well. Still, if you persevere, it will not be long before you see some positive results — it takes only about three days. However, it may take two to three weeks before the full benefits are felt. Then you will notice that you are sleeping more soundly, feel more relaxed and less tense during the day, and are better able to handle everyday stresses in stride.

Some people find tapering off less painful than cold turkey because they spread the final event over several weeks. But that does not mean you get off scot free. Depending upon how addicted you are, your symptoms may be severe just from cutting down. But, remember each reduction in caffeine is a plus for you.

Recognizing your own vulnerability to coffee can help you breakout. If morning is your toughest time, get up later and do not leave enough time for coffee. If you crave a cup after dinner, go for a walk.

**Visiting friends?** Let them know you are kicking the habit. In fact, let everyone know. It makes you want to succeed even more if you have to answer to inquisitive friends or family members. Besides they will probably offer their support by not tempting you with the stuff you are trying to avoid.

Meantime, you can be creating a new set of rituals and habits to replace the ones you are giving up. That is where caffeine-free or low-caffeine beverages come in.

Moreover, anyone who has recently given up caffeine will be delighted by the new influx of herb teas to hit the market. Not just in health food stores, either. Herb teas can be found in almost any grocery store right alongside the regular caffeinated varieties.

**Herb teas are naturally caffeine-free.** What is more, some have nutritional benefits not found in ordinary tea. Rosehip tea is high in vitamin C, and dandelion tea is loaded with vitamin A. Almost all herb teas are blends of several ingredients, such as alfalfa and hibiscus flowers, cinnamon, lime, orange peel and mint. You can choose something with peppermint to wake you up in the morning or a chamomile tea to soothe and relax.

Another possibility is to try a coffee substitute: roots, grains, or seeds that have been dried, roasted and ground. After all, real caffeine is made from well-roasted seeds too. Chicory is a very popular coffee substitute, but you can do the same with carrot, parsnip, corn, barley, wheat, rye, chestnut and others. In addition, relaxation techniques help to reduce caffeine intake for the one who is badly hooked.

Compulsive coffee drinking is a type of drug addiction. Say no to it and feel healthier.

## RECIPE

# Sesame Bites



**S**esame seeds are a 'go-to' ingredient for many chefs to lend crunch and depth to their sweet and savory recipes. The seeds, which come in a variety of colors, are also a good source of healthy fats, protein, B vitamins, minerals, fiber, antioxidants, and other beneficial plant compounds. Sesame Bites are a special delicacy served on certain religious occasions in India, and are considered an immunity-boosting treat that provides warmth and energy to the body in winter.

**Total Time:** 15 minutes

**Serving:** 20 pieces

### Ingredients:

- 1 cup sesame seeds (white)
- 1/4 cup black sesame seeds (optional)
- 3/4 cup jaggery (natural unrefined brown sugar)
- 1/4 tsp dry ginger powder (optional)
- 2 tbsp ghee (clarified butter), plus a little to grease the mold

### Instructions:

- Dry-roast both sesame seeds in a non-stick pan on low heat till light brown
- Remove from pan and let it cool on a plate
- Add the ghee and jaggery to the pan
- Cook on medium heat until jaggery dissolves and starts to bubble up
- Continue heating for 2 more minutes or until syrup reaches a soft ball stage
- Test by adding a small drop of syrup in a bowl of cold water and see if it forms a soft ball when rolled between fingers.
- If done, reduce the flame to low and add the roasted sesame seeds and dry ginger powder to the syrup. Mix well.
- Remove the mixture to a bowl and let it cool down a bit. Do not wait for it cool completely, or it will become difficult to shape
- Grease a mold or your palm with ghee and start making small bite-sized balls with the mixture.
- Sesame Bites can be stored safely for up to a month.



*Chef Chhaya Thakker*



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



# China biggest exporter of goods to Kuwait

Data from the Central Administration of Statistics (CAS) show that in 2022 China was the biggest exporter of goods to Kuwait, while Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) were the biggest importer of goods from Kuwait.

The figures reveal that in 2022, Kuwait imported goods worth KD2.4 billion, of which over half (KD1.2 billion) came from just five countries — China, the UAE, United States, India and Saudi Arabia. China on its own accounted for nearly 20 percent of the total imports to Kuwait.

Other import/export data from the CAS note that of the top 10 countries that imported goods from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia ranked first, accounting for KD64 million in the first-quarter of 2022, an increase of 13 percent over the same period in 2021. The UAE came second with an export volume of KD60 million, and India came third with KD58 million in goods purchased from Kuwait, an increase of 23 percent from the KD48 million in first-quarter of 2021.

Pakistan, which imported KD42 million worth of goods from Kuwait, while China ranked fifth with imports amounting to KD38 million. Iraq came sixth with KD32 million followed by Qatar in seventh spot with KD25 million, while Turkey was the eighth largest importer of goods with KD14 million in imports, then came Oman with KD12 million

and Egypt rounded off the top ten with KD11 million in imports from Kuwait.

In terms of imports, China topped the list of countries supplying goods to Kuwait, as it exported goods worth KD465 million during the first three months of 2022, an increase of 10.4 percent over the same period of 2021. The UAE came in second place with KD578 million worth of commodities exported to this country, followed by the US, which exported goods totalling KD209 million. India came fourth, having exported goods worth KD135 million, and Saudi Arabia was in fifth place with KD124 million followed by Japan exporting KD111 million and Germany exporting KD97 million in goods. Turkey ranked ninth with KD58 million and France brought up the rear of the top ten exporters of goods to Kuwait, with a total of K55 million.

It is noteworthy that Kuwait's commodity exports during the first quarter of 2022 witnessed a large and noticeable boom, as its value increased by about 75%, amounting to 3 billion dinars, to record 7.2 billion dinars, driven by the price boom, with direct stimulation from Kuwait's oil exports, and non-oil exports rose to 424.6 million dinars by the end of the year compared to 336.6 million for the same period in 2021.

As for imports, there was a relative increase in the amount of imported goods, while the cost of importing those goods into

the country decreased. Kuwait imported cigarettes and shisha worth about 15 million dinars in 3 months, as the classification for tobacco included importing products worth 14.79 million dinars during the period from January to the end of March 2022, compared to exporting products with 143 thousand dinars for different types same during the same period.

The data showed that Kuwait imported live animals and meat worth about 83 million dinars, including live animals worth 18.57 million dinars in 3 months, while animals of the same classification were exported worth 1.14 million dinars during the same period, and Kuwait imported meat and its preparations worth 64.32 million dinars, while it exported from the same type worth 5.58 million dinars.

Kuwait imported dairy products, bird eggs and fish worth about 58 million dinars in 3 months, as the volume of the country's imports of dairy products and bird eggs reached about 40.1 million dinars, while fish and its preparations amounted to 17.75 million dinars, while Kuwait's total exports amounted to about 9.3 million dinars during same period.

The data revealed that Kuwait bought fruits and vegetables from abroad worth 74 million dinars during the first 3 months of 2022, while it exported the same types with a value of 3.12 million dinars, while it imported coffee, tea, cocoa and spices worth 28.4 million dinars,



compared to exports amounting to 1.66 million dinars.

Kuwait imported clothes and shoes worth 157 million dinars in 3 months, as the country's imports of clothing and accessories amounted to 125.56 million dinars in the period from January to the end of March 2022, while the value of its imports of shoes amounted to 31.56 million dinars, and exports of the same items were recorded at a value of about 5.8 million dinars.

Kuwait imported perfumes and cosmetics worth 67 million dinars in 3 months, as Kuwait's imports of essential oils, resins, perfumes, decorating, polishing and cleaning products amounted to about 66.84 million dinars from January to the end of March 2022, while Kuwait's exports of the same items amounted to 12.6 million dinars.



## LuLu Hypermarket launches 'LuLu Go Green' promotion

LuLu Hypermarket, the leading retailer in the region and the destination of choice for discerning shoppers, launched the 'LuLu Go Green' promotion at all outlets of the hypermarket.

As part of the promotion, which runs from 4 to 10 January, a special promotional campaign, 'Explore your Garden Collections' was held on 7 January from 10.30 am to 4-30 pm at the Al-Qurain outlet of the hypermarket. The event was jointly inaugurated by the CEO of Gulf Palms Company, Muhallal J.E. Mudhaf, and

the owners of Zalzalah Nurseries, Fawaz Jawad Hasan Allanaqawi and Jawad Hasan Allanaqawi, in the presence of top level management of LuLu Hypermarket and a large gathering of well-wishers of the brand.

Nearly a dozen leading plant nurseries in the country are participating in the promotion, with their respective stalls presenting an array of products, including fresh flowers, ornamental and vegetable plants, as well as a variety of garden accessories, all made available at amazing price discounts. Among the major suppliers

of the promotion are Zalzalah Nurseries, Gulf Palms Company, Makita and, Black and Decker. Adding to the excitement of the week-long promotion, two online garden competitions as well as a kite-flying display are being held on the occasion. A special kids play area has been erected near the event area to keep young children entertained, while food and beverage sampling counters provide nourishment to visitors.

The online Best Balcony Garden contest and Best Garden contest offers winners and participants exciting prizes, with winners

of the first, second and third prizes being awarded gift vouchers worth KD100, KD75, and KD50 respectively, while consolation prizes await all other participants in the contest.

The LuLu Go Green promotion takes all nature lovers on an exciting journey of discovering nature. The campaign also reflects the hypermarket's continued commitment to offer customers the best shopping experience with the widest range of products from all over the world at highly competitive prices.

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# French envoy honors Philippe Petria



**F**rench Ambassador to Kuwait, H.E. Claire Le Flecher hosted a reception at her residence, in honor of Philippe Petria, the author of the French book 'The Global History of Kuwait', which includes evidence that Kuwait was a center for cultural and commercial exchanges.

In her speech on the occasion, Ambassador Le Flecher praised the book and its author for providing glimpses of Kuwait through history and how the country was a center for cultural and commercial exchanges. The event was attended by a large number of heads of diplomatic missions, Kuwaiti historians and members of the French community in Kuwait.

The book, which was published last November in three languages, has been highly appreciated by readers.

The book is the work of two French researchers, who worked in association with the French Research Centre of the Arabian Peninsula (CEFREPA), namely Julie Bonerique, an archaeologist who until this year directed the French mission in Failaka, and Philippe

Petria, senior lecturer at the Sorbonne University in Paris, who is currently in Kuwait as part of an intensive Arabic course.

Ambassador Le Flecher pointed out that since 2015 CEFREPA has been active in Kuwait and the center, which specializes in the Gulf region and Yemen, maintains a distinguished relationship with the Kuwait University, the National Library, the Dar Al-Athar Al-

Islamiyyah, and various scientific and cultural organizations in Kuwait.

The ambassador added that France's artistic and literary heritage has influenced several countries in the world, "but we must know that France has also developed an intellectual and scientific exception, as it is the only country in the world that has established an international network that includes

nearly 30 research institutes specializing in the humanities and social sciences."

The event included an exhibition of pictures from the pages of the book about the stages of Kuwait's history, and evidence that Kuwait was a center for cultural and commercial exchanges, in addition to Kuwait's global role in pictures and historical documents.



## Global economic outlook for 2023

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Economists explain that inflation intensified in 2022 largely on account of higher energy and food commodity prices fueled in part by the Russia-Ukraine crisis, which has since triggered price increases across a basket of goods and services. They added that it is not just 'cost-push' inflation, such as from current high energy and food prices, but also a simultaneous 'demand-pull' inflation, causing price hikes.

The 'demand-pull' was triggered following abatement in the COVID-19 crisis, when consumer spending surged on the back of generous stimulus packages provided by many governments during the pandemic period. But, with production cuts and supply-chain bottlenecks limiting the amount of goods available in the aftermath of the pandemic, demand outstripped supply and the typical situation of 'too many dollars chasing too few goods' resulted in the prevailing price increases.

With the global economy poised at a tipping point into recession, the blame-game for surging prices and slowing growth is in full swing. Western leaders and politicians have unanimously pointed the finger of blame at Russia's aggression in Ukraine for the energy and food price hikes. And, many have attributed the global supply-chain bottlenecks that contributed to the cost-of-living crisis, to China's decision to lockdown its cities to curb the surge of COVID-19 infections there.

On the other hand, several economists contend that it was the prodigious stimulus responses by developed nations, aimed at reviving faltering economies and supporting families that initiated the global inflationary trend. Other experts attribute the global inflation to the West's continuing unilateral sanctions, export controls and price ceilings imposed on Russian energy supplies, as well as the decision by the Organization of Oil Exporting Countries (OPEC) and their allies in non-OPEC states, to introduce concerted

production cuts in order to maintain higher oil and gas prices.

It is indisputable that high energy and food prices were exacerbated by the Russian invasion, and that supply bottlenecks are in part due to Chinese measures to curb the spread of COVID-19. But then, there is also no denying that the overly generous stimulus packages by the United States and others also helped fuel inflation — in particular, the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan, passed in March 2021 by US President Joe Biden, and the \$4 trillion in emergency COVID Relief approved by his predecessor Donald Trump.

Notwithstanding these accusations, there is no evidence to show that any one of these events on their own was responsible for spurring global inflation. Moreover, data indicators available from the Food and Agriculture Organization and the International Energy Agency clearly show that food and energy prices were already high, and on an upward trajectory, much before the Russian invasion in February of 2022. Similarly, investment growth slowdown was widespread long before COVID-19 emerged.

On a similar exoneration note, in a faltering economy caused by the global pandemic, it was imperative for countries to launch stimulus packages. Also, the trend to curb inflation by raising interest rates has been a characteristic response by most central banks. So the right answer to who, or what caused the current inflation would be, all of the above and none of the above.

In the globalized world we live in, it is just not possible to factually pinpoint to one particular instance or event, or blame one specific country or region, for economic decline and hardships that prevail at any given time. Nevertheless, the blame-game continues unabated. Last week, in a commentary titled 'Resilient Trade' published online, US Secretary of the Treasury, Janet Yellen, in her assessment of the global economy, blamed others for the prevailing crises.

Highlighting the importance of developing resilient trade to maintain sustained, robust

growth and overcome economic difficulties, she wrote: "Events over the past three years have strained global economies. The COVID-19 pandemic claimed millions of lives and brought the world economy to a standstill. Russia's brutal war has taken a devastating toll on lives and infrastructure in Ukraine, generating seismic repercussions for oil and food prices."

Stressing that her country is concerned about vulnerabilities that result from geopolitical and security risks, over-concentration, and violations of human rights, Secretary Yellen added: "We must protect against geopolitical and security risks. Not only is Russia waging a brutal war against the Ukrainian people; it has also weaponized commodity exports against the world. In the first five months following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the price of natural gas in Europe jumped by 170 percent. Russia's destruction of grain storages and blockade of Ukrainian ports have also driven up food costs."

Implying Chinese policies were to blame for many of the supply-chain bottlenecks, she added, "The US and its partners have a strong interest in creating redundancies in our supply chains. We must avoid over-concentration of the production of critical goods in any particular market. We must also shift away from supply chains that violate core human rights. One area of particular concern is imports from the Xinjiang region in China."

Emphasizing that the future of resilient trade was in 'friend-shoring', Secretary Yellen said that with this approach the US aims to deepen economic integration with a large number of trusted and dependable trading partners. She clarified that friend-shoring is not for a closed group of countries. "It is open and inclusive of our partners in emerging markets and developing countries, in addition to advanced economies."

Turning to climate change and her country's planned aggressive domestic action on climate change, she said: "We will also continue to help developing countries move decisively toward more resilient, low-carbon futures. Beyond the

effect on the climate, our collective movement away from fossil fuels will also reduce our vulnerability to oil- and gas-price shocks and our exposure to autocratic regimes, which often control much of the world's reserves of fossil fuels."

It is only to be expected that the US Treasury Secretary would be interested mainly in ensuring greater stability of the US economy. However, it is dismaying that she did not comment on the global economic crisis, or high inflation — caused in part by the generous COVID-era stimulus in her country, and the US Federal Reserve's policy tightening measures — that has caused disruptive repercussions worldwide, negatively affected world trade, and raised the potential of a global recession.

In a more equitable and pragmatic approach to ward off risks of a global recession, the World Bank urged policymakers to ensure that their monetary policies to restore price stability stays the course, despite the difficulties it could entail. The Bank also said the priority of fiscal policies should be to protect vulnerable groups through targeted, temporary support to alleviate the burden of the cost-of-living crisis, while also supporting monetary policy targets.

Concerted efforts and collaboration on a global scale are clearly needed to tackle the various global crises, from climate change to geo-politics, and a potential economic recession. At a time like this, stoking parochialism and divisions along lines of free-market democracies and autocratic regimes, or blaming Middle East fossil fuel suppliers for the woes of the world, is definitely not the ideal approach.

Unlike politicians who make egregious claims to notch brownie points with voters, as a technocrat we would have expected Secretary Yellen to do better. While 'friend-shoring' or other policies recommended by her could lead to more robust and dependable supply chains for the US, it could also lead to fragmented world trade and usher in a compartmentalized, less productive, and poorer global economy.





# IBPC Kuwait attends PBD 2023 convention

A 65-member delegation from the Indian Business and Professional Council (IBPC) Kuwait attended the 17th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) 2023 convention held in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India from 8 to 10 January.

On the sidelines of the convention, the delegation met with the Indian Cabinet Minister of Education and Minister of Skill Development, Dharmendra Pradhan, and the Minister of State for External Affairs, V. Muraleedharan. Minister Pradhan conveyed the Government's appreciation for the efforts and support extended by IBPC to develop and strengthen business links between India and Kuwait. He also stressed that the Government would continue to support the issues of non-resident Indians in Kuwait.

Chairman of IBPC, Gurvinder Singh Lamba, welcomed the ministers on behalf of the Kuwait delegation. He introduced the Executive committee of IBPC and senior members of the community to the ministers.

He then briefed the ministers of IBPC's activities and contribution in nation building and assured the ministers of the support that IBPC would always provide in

strengthening and building Indo-Kuwait ties in terms of business opportunities, investments into India and exports from India to Kuwait.

IBPC requested the ministers to convey a sincere and earnest invitation to the Honorable Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, to visit Kuwait, at the prime minister's earliest convenience, especially since over the past four decades there has been no visit by an Indian prime minister to Kuwait. The last such visit was in 1981, and

a visit by the premier would help reinforce the historic ties between India and Kuwait and India that trace their roots more than a century ago.

The IBPC Kuwait delegation, which was led by the IBPC Chairman, also included executive members, Kaizer T. Shakir (Vice Chairman), Soly Mathew (Secretary), Suresh K.P. (Jt. Secretary), and Sunit Arora (Treasurer), as well as 65 members from IBPC Kuwait.

IBPC expressed their gratitude to the

Indian Ambassador to Kuwait, H.E. Dr. Adarsh Swaika, for arranging the meeting and interaction with the ministers, as well as his guidance and support for the delegation's successful three-day trip to PBD 2023.

Also accompanying the IBPC delegation to the meeting with the ministers was the Chairman of Indian Community Support Group (ICSG), Rajpal Tyagi, President of BPP Kuwait, Binoy Sebastian, and President of Rajasthani Darpan, Dhanpal Panchal.

## Drugs affect national development plans

The spread of drug usage in the country has a negative impact not only on individuals and families, but also on society and the nation's development plans.

Underlining this in a statement last week, the CEO of Ghiras National Awareness Project for Drug Prevention, Dr. Ahmad Al-Shatti, said that the increasing interest by the Kuwaiti leadership and people in curbing the spread of drugs was an essential step into beating this social ailment.

Pointing out that there can be no social or national development if drug usage

among youth and others is not curbed, Dr. Al-Shatti added that recent efforts launched by the government against drug usage are heading in the right direction.

He called for coordinating efforts both politically and legislatively towards protecting society from narcotics and addictive substances, noting that Ghiras was preparing proposals for the government and parliament to boost efforts



against usage and supply of illicit drugs.

Dr. Al-Shatti stressed that the matter should not be restricted within the borders of Kuwait, it should be expanded in the region and internationally, to boost global efforts against narcotics. He commended Kuwait for continuing to launch awareness campaigns, saying

that the country was considered a pioneer in this regard.



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# Parliamentary committee keen to implement Domestic Violence law

Head of the Parliamentary Women, Family and Child Committee, Khalil Al-Saleh, said in a media statement last week that the committee holds comprehensive discussions and continues its periodic and vigorous follow-up to implement the law on Protection from Domestic Violence that was issued in September 2020.

The law, which created a national committee to draw up policies to combat and protect women from domestic violence, also calls for establishing shelters for victims of domestic violence,



a hotline to receive complaints of violence against women, providing counseling and

legal assistance for victims, and issuing emergency restraining orders to prevent abusers from contacting their victims.

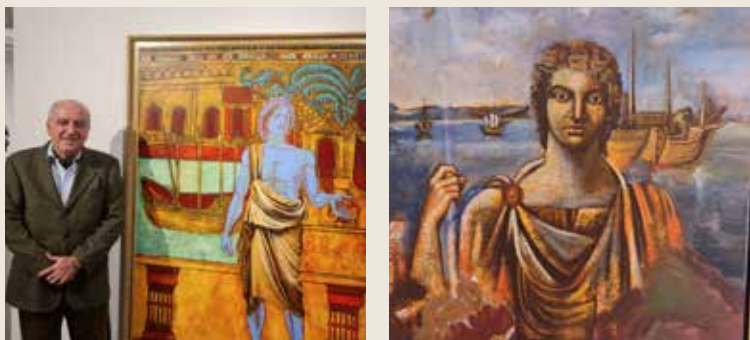
In addition, Al-Saleh mentioned that the comprehensive discussion on domestic violence included setting up specific centers and shelters for victims of violence. He said that the meeting also talked about proposals for new laws, including the establishment of a nursery in government agencies to serve female employees and benefit families having young children.

Moreover, Al-Saleh said that a proposal to protect children's privacy on social

networking sites and the imposition of punishment for violators was included in the discussion. All concerned authorities attended the meeting, especially the ministries of interior, Islamic affairs and endowments, as well as the Minister of Social Affairs and Community Development, Minister of State for Women and Childhood Affairs, the Undersecretary of the Ministry of the Interior, specialists from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Endowments and the head of the Women and Family Committee in the Kuwaiti Jurists Association.



## Alexander the Great exhibition to be held in Kuwait



Greek Ambassador H.E. Konstantinos Pepirigos, announced that the Greek Minister of Investment and Trade, Adonis Georgiadis, and the Greek Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for Economic Affairs, Kostas Vragogiannis, will inaugurate an Exhibition titled 'Alexander the Great in Kuwait: Bridging East and West' on Monday 16 January, at the Contemporary Art Platform in Shuwaikh.

Kuwait's Minister of Industry and Trade, Mazen Al-Nahedh, will also join the two Greek Ministers in the inauguration ceremonies, which is being held in the presence of a galaxy of VIP's. Speaking to the media ahead of the inauguration, the Greek ambassador expressed his hope that Greek investors would contribute to the cultural development of Failaka Island, as Greece has great knowledge and experience, and that Greek companies can transform Failaka not only as a tourist place, but also as a historical one that will attract archeology lovers from all over the world.

He added that the aim of this exhibition is an attempt to find common points between the peoples of Greece and Kuwait, as happened two thousand and three hundred years ago when Alexander came to Failaka Island, which indicates that our relationship began upon his arrival on this island, and this means that the history of Kuwait began with the arrival of Alexander the Great and his forces to Failaka Island.

The high level delegation from Greece will include large number of businessmen with the aim of strengthening economic relations between the two countries in all spheres, in addition to discussing the development of a direct flights between the two countries, that will help increase the number of tourists and facilitate investment opportunities.



## BPG's CX First and strategic transformation nets big business wins across KSA, Kuwait, Oman and UAE

On the back of an unprecedented volume of new business wins, award-winning agency BPG (Bates PanGulf, part of WPP) is undergoing a strategic transformation aimed at strengthening its specialist consultancy services and meeting client needs. Underpinned by a digital first, integrated by intent positioning, the transformation aims to create a simplified, silo-free organisation; ready to seize opportunities across the MENA region. Revenue from these recent wins alone will clock over USD 6 million.

Avi Bhojani, Group CEO, BPG said: "Three pivotal moments have shaped BPG over the last three decades. In 1995, BPG 1.0 was born after winning an integrated mandate from the Dubai Government to build and execute Dubai Shopping Festival. We evolved into BPG 2.0 in 2003, after winning mandates for public advocacy in Iraq. It's now time for BPG 3.0 after a significant, game-changing creative win in Saudi Arabia, crowning a host of wins through 2022. We are transforming into an agile integrated agency, able to scale up swiftly to meet client demands and deliver disruptive work in a fast-evolving commercial landscape. With our client-centric strategy and execution, we look forward to building and strengthening many more MENA brands in 2023 and beyond."

A host of multi-sectoral business wins will supplement a robust pipeline of existing work in 2023. Notably, this includes Jumeirah Group after BPG bagged the remit for design, content, and creative for the global luxury hotel company, which operates a world-class 6,500+ key portfolio of 25 luxury properties across the Middle East, Europe, and Asia. BPG's multi-year remit with one of the Sultanate of Oman's larger banks includes delivering brand, advertising, content, and CX across the country, as well as supporting regional expansion. BPG's wins in fiercely competitive pitches against global network and independent agencies testifies to the power of its compelling integrated by intent offering.

Other significant recent new business wins include GROHE, Kwai, Titan Eyewear, and Zayed Sustainability Prize in the UAE and Assima Hospital, Dhaman National Health Insurance, Ooredoo Telecom and Weyay Bank in Kuwait. Mandates encompass integrated marketing, communications, influencer marketing, creative advertising, branding, media services, digital and performance marketing, social media, and content management.

BPG will continue its expansion trajectory in 2023, with 15 key hires across PR, Media, UX, content and creative in the UAE. The agency's strategic transformation is powered by a reimagined structure and business processes to deliver silo-free, location-agnostic and client-focused integrated solutions. Solutions such as the BPG CX Multiplier harness the power of data, technology, creative and strategy to fulfil customers' needs. Notably in 2023, BPG will offer productization to meet specific client needs, priming the agency for greater scalability and success.

To ensure successful execution, Souheil Arabi has been promoted as Chief Operating Officer, BPG Group. Souheil will oversee BPG's MENA-wide expansion, consulting and productization initiatives, in addition to consolidating the Kuwait practice. A BPG veteran since 2001, Souheil has built

BPG Kuwait into the nation's leading agency, in demand for award-winning, digitally savvy integrated solutions, developed and delivered by a multicultural team.

Souheil Arabi, Group Chief Operating Officer, BPG said: "We are excited to welcome 2023 with a well-articulated vision, clear execution plan and disruptive work with some incredible clients and brands. BPG's success has been built on our continuous evolution and collaborative culture. With this transformation, we go a step further: leveraging technology to create an agile, integrated and collaborative platform, built around exceeding client needs and creating customer delight, keeping our customers' needs at the heart of all that we do."

Darius LaBelle has been promoted as President, BPG UAE and Viju Varghese has been promoted as President, BPG Kuwait. Ketaki Banga has been appointed Chief Communications Officer, and Mark Soufiar has been



appointed Chief Media Officer. Aaron Arthur is now Chief Creative Services Officer, overseeing Kuwait's creative output as well as building a cloud-based remote services offering. Ramy ElSakka, Chief Creative Officer will oversee all branding, creative and content output out of Dubai.

Darius LaBelle, President, BPG UAE said: "Our teams, structure, and services are designed to build on the BPG CX Multiplier, through which we use data and human insights to deliver targeted personal messages across digital and physical channels. We can truly put customers at the heart of both our strategy and our product by leveraging integrated teams in content, comms, media, data, experience, and brand on every brief. It's an exciting proposition, as evidenced by our 2022 successes and new business wins."

BPG is working on a unified customer experience through its full-service hubs in Dubai and Kuwait, supported by remote talent from North America and Europe to Egypt, Lebanon, India, Indonesia and the Philippines. Its strategic transformation is inspired by culture, powered by data-driven insights, human by design and integrated by intent. Born in Dubai more than four decades ago, BPG has always been part of the growth and evolution of the MENA region. Its silo-free culture integrates all its disciplines, from advertising and public relations to media buying, digital marketing and more, into a unified offering built around customers' needs.



EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

# Three-Front War on Academic Freedom



**Tom Ginsburg**

*Professor of International Law and Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago, is a research professor at the American Bar Foundation.*



It has been a tough week for academic freedom in the United States. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis packed the board of a liberal arts college with allies determined to transform it into a conservative ideological bastion. Kenneth Roth, the former head of Human Rights Watch, was denied a fellowship at Harvard's Kennedy School, allegedly over HRW's criticism of Israel's human-rights record. And Hamline University in Minnesota came under fire after an adjunct professor was dismissed for showing a centuries-old image of the Prophet Muhammad in an art history class.

To advance their core mission of generating and transmitting knowledge, institutions of higher education rely on funds from three main sources: the state, the market, and their students and alumni. The key is to maintain a balance among all three; depending on any of them too heavily poses a distinct threat to academic inquiry.

Start with the state, which has a long history of constraining academic freedom. During the US Red Scares that followed both world wars, faculty were driven out of institutions solely for their ideological beliefs. While the explicit targeting of faculty is rare today, continued

But far from protecting academic freedom, Republicans have sought to prevent the dissemination of ideas with which they disagree. DeSantis has been a leader in the effort to ban "divisive" lessons about race, following a moral panic about "critical race theory" in schools. Last year, he signed into law the Stop Wrongs to Our Kids and Employees (Stop WOKE) Act, which forbade teaching that "espouses, promotes, advances, inculcates, or compels" several ideas related to race, including the view that discrimination to achieve diversity is acceptable. It also sought to prevent anyone from feeling "guilt, anguish, or other forms of psychological distress" on account of their race or sex.

Last November, a federal judge ordered a temporary injunction against the higher-education sections of the Stop WOKE Act for violating professors' First Amendment right to free speech – a victory for academic freedom. But DeSantis is not giving up; he now aims to achieve his ideological goals by other means. By appointing six conservatives to its 13-member board – including a dean at the conservative Hillsdale College – he hopes to transform the New College of Florida into the "Hillsdale of the South."

But the state is hardly alone in suppressing academic freedom. Good university leaders educate their private donors – including industry partners and philanthropists – on the importance of staying out of academic decisions. But there is no doubt that donor pressure can shape an institution's decision-making.

The denial of Roth's fellowship appears to be a case in point. While university officials have not publicly explained their decision not to approve his fellowship, scholars claim that HRW's alleged "anti-Israel bias" was the main consideration. HRW, which Roth ran for nearly three decades, has faced a powerful backlash from Israel's defenders, including over a 2021 report asserting that in some areas, the "deprivations" inflicted by Israel on the Palestinians "are so severe that they amount to the crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution."

Roth would not be the first person to lose out on a university position over Israel. In 2020, the University of Toronto rescinded an offer to Valentina Azarova to direct its law school's human-rights program, in response to donor pressure over her past criticisms of Israel. The university was ultimately censured by the Canadian Association of University Teachers.

Donor pressure was also behind the decision by the University of North Carolina's board of trustees to reject the journalism department's recommendation to offer tenure to Nikole

Hannah-Jones in 2021. Conservative donors apparently took issue with her involvement in the 1619 Project, a New York Times initiative focused on examining the political, social, and economic legacy of slavery in the US.

Student tuition – which has more than doubled in the last two decades – reduces universities' reliance on public and private donors. But overreliance on it generates its own risks, with institutions increasingly treating their students as customers. The result has been to submit to demands by students not to be exposed to material that they deem offensive.

Enter the Hamline University controversy. The adjunct professor, Erika López Prater, did everything right, issuing a trigger warning in the syllabus and providing context before showing the 14th-century depiction of the Prophet Muhammad – a Persian masterpiece long beloved by Muslims, many of whom do not hold that all representations of the Prophet are forbidden.

Students complained anyway, and the

university's "associate vice president of inclusive excellence" labeled Prater's actions "undeniably ... Islamophobic." It is apparently easier to undermine a faculty member in the name of ensuring that every student feels heard than to defend a clearly legitimate pedagogical decision.

The return of repressive state laws undoubtedly poses a grave threat to academic freedom. But as the Harvard and Hamline cases show, the excessive influence of private donors and students can be just as insidious. In all three instances, feelings of offended minorities limited the content of higher education. Such grievances need to be aired and discussed, and threats against minorities should of course never be tolerated. But if academic discourse and campus debate are shut down every time a person feels offended, how can universities possibly examine controversial topics? Without intellectual freedom – one of the great achievements of American civilization – they can't.

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In a 2021 speech entitled "Universities Are the Enemy," for example, future US Senator J.D. Vance argued that universities pursue not "knowledge and truth," but "deceit and lies," and called his alma mater, Yale Law School, "genuinely totalitarian" in its hostility to conservative views.

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dependence on government funding means that universities – especially public institutions – remain vulnerable to efforts by politicians to influence budgets, curricula, personnel decisions, and much else.

Republicans think this is a winning political issue. They argue that educational institutions, especially universities, are hotbeds of liberal indoctrination. In a 2021 speech entitled "Universities Are the Enemy," for example, future US Senator J.D. Vance argued that universities pursue not "knowledge and truth," but "deceit and lies," and called his alma mater, Yale Law School, "genuinely totalitarian" in its hostility to conservative views.

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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

# United for Humanity



**Annalena Baerbock**  
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Germany.

**H**ow can we be optimistic about 2023? As we enter the new year, a devastating war is raging on the European continent. Russia's war of aggression has slashed a devastating wound far beyond Europe, exacerbating a food and energy crisis in large parts of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. More than 800 million men, women, and children go to bed hungry every night. The climate emergency is deepening this pain, stirring conflict worldwide, and robbing people of their land, their homes, and their security.

How can we be optimistic in such frightful times of uncertainty? I strongly believe that, as responsible world leaders, we simply have no other option than to face the next year with a firm sense of confidence that we can drive change to improve people's lives. Not despite this 'perfect storm' of crises, but because of it.

Nelson Mandela once described the moments when his faith in humanity was tested, but still he would not give in to despair. "Part of being optimistic is keeping one's head pointed toward the sun, one's feet moving forward," is how he put it.

To look ahead and stay the course, confident in what we are able to achieve if we stand together — that, to my mind, is what should guide us into the new year. And I am not saying this from a position of naive hopefulness. I am saying this with the confidence of a foreign minister who has learned in many, often difficult, instances over the past 12 months how much we can achieve if we let solidarity and humanity guide our actions and if we defend what we believe in.

That is exactly how we responded to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine — united, in Europe, across the Atlantic, and worldwide — with our clear stand against the war's inhumanities, with our support for Ukraine, with sanctions aimed at Russia's war machine, and with investments in our security. Our strength is in our unity. United for humanity; it is this deep conviction that gives me confidence for the year ahead.

For that, we must be better listeners. That is another crucial lesson I have drawn from the past few months; not just with a view to our partners in Europe, but also in Africa, Asia, Latin America,



“

The climate crisis harms, kills, and displaces.

It is a direct threat to human life. It is a blatant injustice that many countries suffer so tremendously from this crisis, while having contributed next to nothing to its creation.

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and the Near and Middle East. When discussing Russia's war with many of these partners, I often heard the following sentiment: "You want us to stand with you now that there is a war in Europe. But where were you in recent years when we were in the throes of conflict?"

I hear these concerns. And I truly believe we should be willing to critically question our own actions and our past engagement in the world. We should also listen closely when our partners tell us how difficult it is to reduce their dependence on Russia — whether militarily, politically, or economically. This is an immense challenge. In Germany, we are seeing how the cost of overcoming our dependency is weighing on our citizens' wallets. For many partners, the slashes cut deeper, and, for them, setting up multi-billion-euro protective shields is simply not possible.

Our response has been the most effective when it has been the most united. It was the UN, together with our Turkish partners, that negotiated the reopening of Ukrainian grain ports. The G7, which brings together

economically strong democracies, committed over \$14 billion by June 2022 to help alleviate the pain of those most in need, and Germany remains the second-largest humanitarian donor worldwide. This solidarity gives me confidence. But it is not enough. The World Food Programme had to reduce food rations to Yemen, Somalia, and the Sahel. Every portion cut means another child goes hungry. And if you see your son or daughter starving, you cannot fight for democracy, rights, or freedom. That is why, going into the next year, we must not waver in our joint support.

At the same time, we will rally partners to tackle one of the most severe underlying causes of the food crisis: the climate emergency. For millions around the world, this crisis is a concrete threat to their lives. I heard from women in northern Mali how droughts are destroying their harvests, driving farmers from their homes, and exacerbating conflicts over land and resources. In Palau, a fisherman took me to his local beach, showing me how the rising sea levels may swallow up his house in less than ten years' time, robbing

him of his home, his safety, and his livelihood.

At the UN Climate Change Conference (COP27), I met an activist from Chad who told me, "While we are talking, my country is under water, my mother has lost her home, my sister has lost her home, my cousins have lost their homes."

The climate crisis harms, kills, and displaces. It is a direct threat to human life. It is a blatant injustice that countries like Chad and Palau suffer so tremendously from this crisis while having contributed next to nothing to its creation.

As industrialized countries that are largely to blame for the crisis, we have a special responsibility to help alleviate it, to reduce emissions and keep the 1.5° Celsius path within reach. Because every tenth of a degree less in global warming means less intense storms, floods, and droughts; and thus more security.

That is why it was a crucial step forward that we opened a new chapter for climate justice at COP27. It is now on the big emitters to pay their share for the climate losses and damages they are causing in the most vulnerable states. This is not about charity; it is about justice. It is something particularly small island states have been demanding for decades, and rightly so. This year, we finally sent a clear message: We heard you. We understood. And now, we will act.

In the climate emergency, as well as in other conflicts and crises, it is the most vulnerable who suffer the most: women, children, the elderly, and marginalized groups. I strongly believe that women's rights are a yardstick for the state of our societies. In autocratic regimes, they are often the first to give. And if they do, that is a sign of worse to come. What autocratic regimes are most afraid of is when women raise their voice.

If half of the population is suppressed, no society or economy can thrive. That is why, for my government, a Feminist Foreign Policy that promotes the equal rights of each and every one of us in our societies is a core issue of hard security. It will figure prominently in our National Security Strategy that we are currently drafting.

"Women are the first victims of war, but only they hold the unique key to peace." That is how Congolese human-rights activist Julienne Lusenge put it. "Unless women are safe, no one is safe," courageous women in Ukraine told me.

"Women, life, freedom," is what the women in Iran have been chanting. Resounding across the world, their chant is an anthem of courage.

If I am to take strength for the year 2023, I take it from brave women like them, whether they hail from the Congo, Iran, Afghanistan, or Ukraine.

Their chant is our anthem. Their courage is our yardstick. Their cause is our call — to not only be confident, but to boldly take action, united for humanity.

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# Hungarian Medical Spas, making a better you in 2023

A new year heralds the opportunity for self-reflection, setting new goals and resolutions. It is also a chance to explore, refresh, and rejuvenate.

Hungary has one of the largest thermal water reserves in the world, with over 80 percent of the country's territory having some kind of thermal water underground. The healing powers of thermal spas have long been known, and in Hungary this precious resource has a long tradition of being at the center of exceptional wellness and medical retreats focused on regenerative health, beauty and vigor. Whether visiting such an institution as an individual, couple, group of friends or even family, Hungary has a wellness spa program perfect to make for a better you.

Here is a short list of our top picks for the best medical and wellness spa resorts to visit in Hungary in 2023 for Middle East travelers.



**Spirit Hotel Thermal Spa - Sárvár:** Known for having an exclusive setting with seven picturesque lakes where elegance, crystal clear air and unspoiled nature are in abundance, Spirit Hotel Thermal Spa is located at the source of a 250-million-year-old thermal spring, in the town of Sárvár, about 161 km, or a 3-hour car drive, west of Budapest.



This unique wellness complex and award-winning spa hosts world-class facilities including the Oasis spa with its spacious floor area and 22 magnificent pools and jacuzzis. It offers exclusive indoor and outdoor pools, a unique Sauna World, and therapeutic and medical spa, which ensure the maximum relaxation for its visitors. Here guests can enjoy rejuvenation treatments and health check-ups that use state-of-the-art diagnostic equipment. The resort also offers a wide variety of indoor and outdoor sport programs. For more information: <https://www.spirithotel.hu/en>



**Hotel Európa Fit – Hévíz:** A hotel fit for all families, from those that include the youngest of family members to those with great grandparents. In fact, the hotel prides itself on having extensive in-house Childrens' programmes allowing everyone to be able to find something suitable for

their needs and liking, whether it is engagement for kids or relaxation or recharging for parents.

The award-winning 4-star superior spa resort is located in the southwest of the country in a peaceful oasis only about 200 km from Budapest, taking about 2 hours by car or 3 hours by train. It is also only a mere 400 meters away from Lake Hévíz.

For more information: <https://europafit.hu/en>



**Lotus Therme Hotel & Spa – Hévíz:** Just a 20-minute walk from the thermal lake, Lake Hévíz, the largest swimmable thermal lake in the world, which is covered in lotus flowers, and is a true natural wonder and a major international wellness attraction. The hotel offers baths and body packs, electrotherapy, physiotherapy, inhalation therapy, and electrical treatments are all available after a short medical examination. For more information: <https://lotustherme.net/en>

**NaturMed Hotel Carbona – Hévíz:** NaturMed Hotel Carbona is a charming spa that brings the best of Hévíz to its doorstep especially for those visiting as individuals or couples. One of the most popular spots within the resort is the open-air leisure pool with a wide range of water features and a Mediterranean-style sunbathing garden to enjoy the warm rays of sunshine in the spring and during the summer.

The surrounding silence of nature, the warm thermal water and misty air make this place also an ideal winter

retreat for nature lovers. Located in southwest Hungary, it is about 200 km from Budapest and takes about 2 hours by car and 3 hours by train. For more information: <https://carbona.hu/en/home/>



**Saliris Resort Spa – Egerszalók:** Saliris Resort Spa stands for 'salt rainbow'. The name refers to the salt hill that has become a symbol of Egerszalók, as well as the diversity that the resort offers. Saliris Resort Spa provides 1900 m2 water surface consisting of 17 outdoor and indoor adventure and medicinal pools, a whirlpool tub, a slide and children's pools, an exclusive Sauna World and Fitness Room



equipped with cardio strengthening machines. It is located in northeastern Hungary, about 135 km from Budapest and about an hour and a half by car. For more information: <https://salirisresort.hu/en>





EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

# Debt Ceiling Is a Red Herring



**James K. Galbraith**

*Chair in Government/Business Relations at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas in Austin, is a former executive director of the congressional Joint Economic Committee.*

In his bid to become Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Kevin McCarthy apparently agreed to a demand, voiced by Representative Ralph Norman of South Carolina, that he commit to “shut down the government rather than raise the debt ceiling.” There is firm bipartisan agreement on what this would mean. Crisis looms. For the Republican extremists, the impending crisis is their chance to remake America. For Democrats (and a few surviving mainstream Republicans), the threat of catastrophe justifies a politically dangerous vote to raise the ceiling. For the media — left, right, and center — it is the drama, stupid.

What is the crisis? Paul Van de Water of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities puts it this way: “If the government couldn’t borrow, it would need to impose sharp, massive reductions in spending, which would have devastating economy-wide consequences. Some households, businesses, and nonprofits would be unable to pay their bills while they waited for payments the government legally owed them.

Cuts in grants-in-aid would strain the budgets of state and local governments. Such a large drop in spending would plunge the nation into recession and drive up unemployment... Moreover, the government’s inability to pay all its bills would shake financial markets around the world. It would raise serious doubts about the nation’s creditworthiness, sap the confidence of lenders, call into question the

dollar’s place as a reserve currency, and increase federal borrowing costs.”

Van de Water is nonpartisan. He would prefer that Congress repeal the debt ceiling entirely. Failing that, he urges a clean vote to increase it. I agree with him, but neither will happen. That said, his arguments do need to be challenged on their merits. It is time to drop the hype and look at the facts.

First, a failure to raise the debt ceiling does not override any legal obligation to spend. True, the debt ceiling is written into law. But so are Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, interest payments, and every other mandated or appropriated form of spending. The US Treasury

on — knowing perfectly well that the cutoff would be short-lived. If necessary, most could borrow for the short term — that is what banks and credit cards are for. Life would not end, and in most cases, it would barely slow down.

Fourth, the Treasury does not need to issue debt to spend. Like all governments, it spends by writing checks. It does not raise the money first by issuing bonds. Rather, it issues bonds to provide private investors with a safe interest-bearing asset in exchange for the cash it just created by writing checks. If it decides to stop issuing bonds (because of the debt ceiling), that is a problem for private investors, not for the government, despite what top government

Secretary Janet L. Yellen is fully empowered to issue a platinum coin in any denomination that she decides. The law granting this authority was enacted in 1997 by a Republican Congress. Yellen can order the US Mint to issue a trillion-dollar coin, with which the Treasury can buy back a trillion dollars of Treasury debt held at the Federal Reserve. Since a coin is not debt, the debt would fall below the ceiling with the stroke of a bookkeeper’s pen. There would be no economic consequences; the world outside the Federal Reserve and Treasury would be unaffected. Whose face should appear on the coin? McCarthy’s comes to mind.

In short, the debt ceiling imbroglio is not a crisis, but a farce. The farce has been performed repeatedly ever since the law was enacted back in 1917, as the US was entering World War I and running up public debt. But farce can lead to tragedy. If Democrats are trapped by their own fear-mongering, they may fold to the nihilists’ demands to enact spending cuts in exchange for an increase of the debt ceiling. This has happened before. As journalist Ryan Grim reminds us:

“The last time Republicans won a debt-ceiling standoff, Biden was vice president, and the Obama administration agreed to the so-called sequester. They also agreed to create the Biden Committee, which tried to land a Grand Bargain with then-Rep. Eric Cantor. A Grand Bargain was a Washington fever dream for years, and would include some combination of tax increases and cuts to Social Security, Medicare, and other social spending, and the idea is that it will be massively unpopular but if the parties do it together then voters have nobody to take it out on.”

We are getting set to avert a fake crisis by creating a real one — for retirees, for the sick, for law enforcement, for the economy, and (of course) for all those hated regulatory agencies that have not yet been destroyed. That danger is real. The debt ceiling? It is just a ruse and a trap.

“In short, the debt ceiling imbroglio is not a crisis, but a farce. The farce has been performed repeatedly ever since the law was enacted back in 1917, as the US was entering World War I and running up public debt. But farce can lead to tragedy.”

must follow the law. Debt ceiling or no, it cannot legally default on any obligation.

Second, the Treasury has no legal authority to single out Social Security or interest payments or anything else for cuts, and, so far as I know, it could not stop those payments if it wanted to. The Treasury makes millions of payments every day. The last time I checked (during Barack Obama’s presidency) the software needed to stop them had never been authorized and did not exist. So far as I know, it still does not exist. Why would it? Social Security has never once missed a payment.

Third, if the Treasury somehow did delay paying some bills, most businesses, governments, and households would just carry

officials may say.

Nor would there be a global financial crisis even if the Treasury did manage to stop paying interest on federal debt. The debt would still exist; the interest would still accrue. Anyone who wanted to trade debt for cash could do so on the open market. With no new debt being issued, the price of old debt (‘defaulted’ or not) might rise, bringing interest rates down (as happened during the 2011 ‘debt ceiling crisis’ despite a downgrade from Standard & Poor’s). Why? Because everyone would know that they would be paid up soon enough. Yes, the stock market might take another dive. So what? It has been doing that for months already.

Finally, here is a real magic trick. Treasury





# Effective advice needed to manage obesity

Medical practitioners asking people with obesity to lose weight often offer suggestions that are generic or vague, and sometimes not even supported by science. A report on consultations between obese patients and their doctors revealed that in many instances the advice given by doctors was "abstract or superficial or not very practical".

The study, by researchers at the Primary Care Health Sciences at the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom, observed that doctors need clear guidelines on how to talk to patients living with obesity about weight loss, in a way that helps patients avoid amplifying stigmatizing stereotypes and provide effective and individualized guidance to lose weight.

As part of their study, researchers examined hundreds of audio recordings of consultations between people with obesity and general practitioners. They found that the advice given by doctors rarely included

effective methods for weight loss and in the majority of cases involved telling patients just to eat less and exercise more.

The study pointed to existing shortcomings in medical education where it tends to focus on treating diseases rather than preventing them. For instance, nutrition, despite its importance to overall health, is often not even included in many medical school curriculum. Additionally, physicians very rarely have the time or inclination to advise patients in-depth on behavioral and lifestyle changes.

The researchers reported that superficial advice was common, with suggestions such as a person needing to "change their lifestyle", but without specifying how or what changes to make. The study reported that only 20 percent of the consultations saw doctors give patients detailed advice on how to carry out weight loss programs.

The researchers found that when doctors did offer specific advice relating to weight

loss, it was often not backed by science and was unlikely to result in real weight loss. Advice such as making small changes in behavior and taking the stairs more are not backed by research, the researchers said.

The researcher suggested that weight-loss advice needs to be practical and tailored to each individual patient. What works for one may not work for another. For example, you cannot get somebody who is not exercising to go from zero to exercising five times a week. Whereas if you tell them to start with once or twice a week and then gradually increase their pace, it is more likely to work.

Also, when it comes to specific recommendations, it is not about what is ideal, it is about what is practical and what is scientifically proven to be workable. Some physicians may ask the patient to go on a ketogenic diet or to cut out all carbs to lose weight. But there is no evidence to show this works, or that it is consistently applicable for all people. Studies have shown that a lot of carbohydrates are healthy and needed by the body; what needs to be avoided is some of the processed carbohydrates and added sugars.

The study recommends that patients and doctors should find the time to have a detailed conversation on weight loss management in order for it to be effective.

However, doctors report a number of barriers to having a conversation. They include being unsure of the best advice to give and a lack of knowledge about effective weight loss strategies.

Another common myth that the study found when it came to weight loss was that doctors often advised patients to have the 'right mindset' to lose weight. But this kind



of language is problematic, noted the study. The idea that it is someone's choice to have obesity or carry all that weight around is part of a biased narrative against obesity and obese individuals.

Obesity, like heart disease or cancer, is a disease and needs to be treated as such. You cannot expect people to just have the right mindset and treat their heart disease or cancer. Equally so we should use science and research and evidence-based treatments for obesity. Also, when it comes to practical advice for losing weight, an individualized approach that considers the circumstances of the person who has obesity, is required.

You do not become obese overnight and you cannot lose all the weight overnight either. Obesity is multifactorial and just following a restrictive diet alone is not very effective. To be successful, you have to identify the factors that contribute to weight gain and help the patient restructure the behaviors to achieve a healthy weight. That ideal scenario should combine nutritional counseling and education with behavior modification and lifestyle change.



## Aerosol type influences airborne viruses

Viruses such as SARS-CoV-2, influenza virus and others spread from person to person essentially by hitchhiking on aerosols — which are suspensions of fine solid particles or liquid droplets in air or other gasses.

In the case of virus infections the aerosols can contain liquid droplets that a virus infected person expels when coughing, sneezing, or simply exhaling, and this can be inhaled by someone else. This is a reason that healthcare providers often advise people to ventilate rooms effectively and filter indoor air, as the lowering of aerosol particle concentrations in homes, offices and public transport vehicles can reduce the risk of infection.

Although it is not clear how long viruses in aerosols remain infectious, some studies have suggested that the humidity and temperature of the air may play a role in virus persistence. Another factor that has been underestimated so far is the chemical composition of exhaled aerosols, in particular its acidity and its interactions with the indoor air. Until now, no research had yet been conducted on the effect the acidification of aerosols post exhalation has on the viral load they carry.

A team of researchers from ETH Zurich, EPFL and the University of Zurich in Switzerland have now investigated exactly that. In their study, the research team shows for the first time how the pH of aerosol particles changes in the seconds and hours after exhalation under different environmental conditions.

Further, they show how this impacts the viruses contained in the particles.

According to the study, the exhaled aerosols acidify quickly, and the rapidity with which this acidification takes place depends on the concentration of acid molecules in the ambient air and the size of the aerosol particles. Using nasal mucus and lung fluid synthesized specifically for the study, the team examined the micro droplets. They found that in typical indoor air, it took these droplets only about 100 seconds to reach a pH of 4, which is roughly equivalent to the acidity of orange juice.

The pH value is a measure of acidity: a neutral solution has a pH of 7; the pH of acidic solutions is less than 7; that of basic solutions is greater than 7. Many viruses, such as influenza A virus, are acid-sensitive; exhaled aerosol particles can absorb volatile acids and other airborne substances, among them acetic acid, nitric acid or ammonia, from the indoor air, which in turn affects the acidity of the particles. The research team also found that the acidic environment can have a decisive impact on how quickly viruses trapped in exhaled mucus particles are inactivated.

The two kinds of virus were found to have different acid sensitivities: SARS-CoV-2 is so acid-resistant that at first the experts could not believe their measurements. It took a pH of below 2, i.e., very acidic conditions such as those in undiluted lemon juice, to inactivate the coronavirus. Such conditions cannot be reached in typical indoor air. Influenza A viruses, on the other hand, are inactivated after just one minute in acidic conditions of pH 4. Freshly exhaled mucus particles reach this level in less than two minutes in typical indoor environments.

Adding the time it takes to acidify the aerosol to the time it takes to inactivate the flu viruses at a pH 4 or lower, it quickly becomes clear that 99 percent of influenza A viruses will be inactivated in the aerosol after roughly three minutes. However, SARS-CoV-2 is a different story: since aerosol pH hardly ever falls below 3.5 in typical indoor spaces, it takes days for 99 percent of coronaviruses to be inactivated.

The study shows that in well-ventilated rooms, inactivation of influenza A viruses in aerosols works efficiently, and the threat of SARS-CoV-2 can also be reduced. In poorly ventilated rooms, however, the risk that aerosols contain active viruses is 100 times greater than in rooms with a strong supply of fresh air. The research suggests that indoor rooms should be ventilated frequently and well, so that the virus-laden indoor air and basic substances such as ammonia from emissions of people and indoor activities are carried outside, while acidic components of the outside air can enter the rooms in sufficient quantities.

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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

# A Better Year for Stock Markets?



**Jim O'Neill**

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

Although it has been almost a decade since I gave up a full-time job in finance, markets – and market oddities – still fascinate me, especially when they send signals that run against a widely held consensus among analysts and investors. Given all the disappointments in 2022, the outlook for the new year is quite downbeat. Major corporations are announcing layoffs, and the International Monetary Fund is forecasting that at least one in three countries will experience a recession this year.

The reasons for such pessimism are not hard to find. The big inflationary surprises of 2022 triggered a massive and rapid tightening of monetary policies in most major economies, and key central banks have continued to talk tough. Although the US Federal Reserve reduced the size of its interest-rate hikes from 75 basis points to 50 bps in December, it has made clear that more rate hikes are likely – and that a rate cut is not in the cards for 2023. Making matters worse, many other problems, like Russia's war in Ukraine, continue to simmer, threatening supply chains, markets, and economies around the world.

At some point in my career, I was introduced to an old almanac that offered an endless array of heuristics about US stock markets' past performance. One nugget that always stuck with me is the five-day rule: If the S&P 500 index makes a net gain during the first five trading days



of the calendar year, equities will perform well for the year overall. When I asked my colleagues to check it for the 1950-2014 period, they found that it held true more than 80% of the time.

Well, in the first five days of 2023, the market rose by just over 1%, which means there is over an 80% chance that it will be positive on the year – at least according to the five-day rule. But before you rush to buy your favorite stocks, let me add a few obvious caveats. First, the stock market tends to rise more than it falls: down years are nowhere close to as frequent as up years. This is not particularly surprising, considering the prominent role that equity markets play in finance.

Second, the five-day rule is not airtight.

There is almost a 20% chance that a rising market during the first five trading days ends up being down on the year. Ultimately, economic conditions, not some hoary heuristic, will determine the outcome. After all, why should the first five days be determinative of anything? It is understandable that many retail and institutional investors would want to signal confidence for the year, but there is no underlying economic reason why this period should be considered especially predictive.

Nevertheless, other recent developments offer some cause for hope. Commentators may soon change their tune, and that could make investors more open to embracing a different collective narrative than the one that has been

influencing their behavior so far. I can see three reasons why that could happen.

First, despite the war in Ukraine, many commodity prices – including natural gas – fell significantly in the second half of 2022. That not only increases the probability that inflationary pressures will ease; it also means that companies and consumers' disposable income is not as vulnerable as was previously assumed. Equally important, several high-frequency indicators for late 2022 and early 2023 have been better than expected, notably in Europe.

Second, other inflation indicators have also been better than expected on both sides of the Atlantic, including the most recent US wage-data series. While the Fed and many other central banks insist that they will remain hawkish, I am reminded of something a famously successful US hedge fund manager once told me: The only thing you can know about the Fed is that it will change its message when the evidence changes. If the inflation picture continues to improve faster than Fed officials expect, they will change their view.

Finally, one must not forget China, which suddenly abandoned its zero-COVID policy in December. Notwithstanding the massive surge in infections and hospitalizations, the end of lockdowns sets the stage for a big cyclical bounce in the Chinese economy – even with all the other structural challenges that Chinese authorities must confront. Recall that there was a similar post-lockdown rebound in many other countries (even the United Kingdom, despite all its other problems).

Investors will seek further clues in what happens next. If markets manage to remain slightly more bullish through the end of the month, I suspect many commentators' views will also shift. Then it will be time to consider whether things are really looking up – or whether the five-day rule is best ignored.

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