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Oil prices and economy in 2023



THE TIMES KUWAIT REPORT

Higher international oil prices that prevailed through much of 2022 has seen revenue flows to the state treasury soar, giving Kuwait's economy a much-needed boost. Analysts estimate that revenues will now exceed KD25 billion by the end of fiscal year 2022-23 that ends on 31 March, and that the windfall income will not only wipe off the projected deficit in the current fiscal, but also deliver a surplus budget for the first time since 2015.

Last November, the parliament belatedly approved the budget for fiscal year 2022-23 that envisioned a revenue of KD23.4 billion, expenditure of KD23.5 billion, and a deficit of KD100 million. The budget was based on the premise of oil maintaining an average price of US\$80 per barrel for the fiscal year. However, the higher trend in oil prices that prevailed throughout 2022 has meant Kuwait's actual realized surplus could be significantly higher than that projected in the budget.

The recent release of third-quarter Balance of Payments (BOP) data by the Central Bank of



Kuwait (CBK) has also revealed the country's current account for 2022 is on track to register its largest surplus in nearly a decade. The report noted that higher oil prices and oil production, as well as stable income from

Kuwait's overseas investments were the primary drivers of the record surplus of around KD15 billion accrued during the first three quarters of last year.

Lending further support to the optimistic

view on Kuwait's economy, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in its assessment on the country's finances noted that over the short-term, Kuwait was likely to maintain the upward trend in economic recovery that was witnessed in 2022. In its final communique, following a visit to Kuwait in mid-December, the IMF team stated that the overall real GDP growth, which rebounded from minus 8.9 percent in 2020 to 1.3 percent in 2021, is expected to increase further to above 8 percent in 2022.

During the visit the IMF mission, which held discussion with officials from CBK, the Ministry of Finance, and assessed data from other relevant entities, concluded that despite potential downside risks from slowing global demand for oil, and externally-induced volatility in oil prices and output, the robust growth witnessed in 2022 could continue, although at a more subdued pace in the year ahead. The IMF explained that inflation has been contained through monetary tightening policies of CBK, and continued state subsidies and price controls had ensured limited passthrough of higher global food and energy prices to consumers.

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Kuwait Motor City hosts Formula regional racing

Kuwait Motor City (KMC), in cooperation with Kuwait International Automobile Club, is hosting for the first time the second and third round competitions for both the Middle East Regional Formula Championship (FR) and the UAE Formula Racing Championship (F4).

Announcing this, the Director General of KMC, Muhammad Al-Abd Al-Razzaq said the two rounds will start on 27 January and end on 1 February. Each round of the two championships includes three races with a total of 12 races, he added.

Al-Abdul-Razzaq also disclosed that the competitors have started their preparations for the championship, indicating that this



race is the first event of its kind to be held in Kuwait circuit accredited by the International Motorsports Federation, which is classified according to the highest standards (grade 1). He also invited the public to attend and enjoy



the atmosphere of competition, especially as the region is witnessing for the first time the Formula Regional (FR) races. He explained that the first round of the two tournaments was in Dubai and the fourth round will also be in

Dubai, while the fifth and final round will be held in Abu Dhabi.

Executive Director of Top Speed, Davide Degobi, noted the superb facilities provided by Kuwait in holding the championships, and expressed his pride in working with the Kuwaiti authorities and for being with the competitors. Meanwhile, Fouad Bouarja, Director of International Relations and Motorsports at the club, said that the club is in continuous cooperation with the city administration to host the global event. Bouarja added that the club continues to focus on young racers by training and qualifying them for various races for a Kuwaiti team that can eventually participate in Formula racing events.

PAM suspends files of firms delaying worker payments

Public Authority of Manpower (PAM) has announced that files of firms that do not transfer the salaries of their registered employees on time would be automatically suspended until the situation is rectified to the satisfaction of all concerned. The authority confirmed that suspension can be avoided by depositing salaries



before the seventh day of the due date. PAM clarified that this was not a new measure, but that the automatic suspension was introduced from 19 March 2020, at the start of the pandemic period, to remedy the negative effects of the pandemic on business owners and workers.

The report added that the automatic

suspension is in accordance with the local laws and PAM's regulations to control the labor market, and is in line with the standards of international organizations and entities concerned with human rights and related to the rights of workers.

PAM added that the measure is meant to alert employers of the need to transfer salaries to local financial institutions. In addition, the authority stressed that the suspension does not prevent the renewal of employment on suspended files, and does not stop the transfer on an unsuspended file, which confirms that the employment is not harmed or that they violate the residence law.

However, the suspension will not allow re-employment or issuance of new work permits to the violating employer, because the suspension is a punitive measure due to failure in fulfilling financial obligations to the workers. In addition, business owners who have technical problems when transferring their labor wages to local financial institutions should review the reasons for rejection from the electronic system to reconcile their situation.



Citizens constitute less than quarter of labor market

The percentage of Kuwaitis in the labor market reached 22.2 percent, according to the latest official figures, indicating that the rate of increase is less than 1 percent annually, during the past five years, since the implementation of the replacement plan in 2017, which succeeded in achieving the bulk of its goals. Represented by Kuwaitization of jobs in government agencies, according to specific percentages.

According to latest data from the Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) on labor market demographics in Kuwait, out of a total of 1,977,019 workers in the labor market, 438,803 (22%) were Kuwaitis and the remaining 1,538,216 (78%) were non-Kuwaitis.

In 2017, the percentage of citizens in the labor market was 17.7 percent, which increased to 18.4 percent in 2019.

A gender-wise segregation of the labor pool shows that 1,543,584 (78%) were male workers, while women constituted 433,435 (22%). Nationality and gender-wise, the number of citizens working in both the public and private sector was 184,953 males (42%) and 253,850 females (58%). On the other hand the number of male non-Kuwaitis in the labor market was 1,358,631 (88%) while their female counterparts accounted for only 179,585 (12%).

Other figures from the CSB data-set show that the number of non-Kuwaitis in the labor market dropped from nearly 1.6 million in 2020 to 1.4 million in 2021 due to the exodus of expatriates following the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic. However, since then the figure on non-Kuwaitis in the labor pool has returned to nearly pre-pandemic levels, reaching over 1.5 million workers in 2022.

LuLu Hypermarket launches 'LuLu India Utsav'



LuLu Hypermarket, the unchallenged retailing leader in the region, launched the 'Lulu India Utsav' promotion on 25 January at the Al-Rai branch. The promotion was inaugurated by the First Secretary of Politics and Commerce at the Indian Embassy, Smita Patel, in the presence of LuLu Hypermarket's top management in Kuwait, sponsors of the event, and a large gathering of shoppers and well-wishers of the brand.

The week-long promotion that ran from 25 to 31 January in all outlets of the hypermarket, offered unprecedented bargain discounts on all Indian products, including fresh fruits, vegetables, meat, fish, groceries, and other items. wide ranges of Millets from the brand BLISS TREE was officially launched by the chief guest during the Event and announced the introduction of its range of products available in Lulu for its loyal customers. During the launch, Mr. Mohamed Haris, Director, briefed dignitary about the new product and its benefits. The new products launched will be available in all

the Lulu Hypermarkets for the shopping, he added further. In addition, special prices and offers were available on all Indian branded garments. A highlight in the garment section was a special stall dedicated to indigenous handloom garments.

Adding to the enthusiasm surrounding the 'Lulu-India Utsav' (Festival) were several exciting events and competitions aimed at attracting maximum interaction with shoppers and visitors. These included patriotic musical performances by students from various Indian schools, and a lively music performance by the Indian music band, Bhangra.

A special 'Indian Arts and Crafts' competition for students of Indian schools in Kuwait was also held during the promotion period. The competitions were divided into three categories — Drawing Seniors, Drawing Juniors and Crafts. The first, second, and third place winners of each category in the 'Arts and Crafts' competitions were presented with LuLu Gift Vouchers worth KD100, KD75

and KD50 respectively, as well as LuLu Merit certificates. In addition, each participant in the competitions received consolation prizes and participation certificates.

Another impressive attraction for all visitors to the hypermarket outlets was the 'India Wall', where an entire wall of the hypermarket was dedicated to exhibiting the artistic drawings and creative crafts of students from the 25 Indian schools participating in the Arts and Crafts competition. Also, as part of the promotional

event, there were large cutouts and images of traditional Indian monuments, as well as special selfie counters that allowed visitors to click images against iconic Indian backdrops.

However, the major highlight of the seven-day long event was the Indian Food Festival that highlighted the amazing variety of Indian foods and the diversity of Indian cuisines. Special Indian food counters and sampling kiosks were available at all branches of the hypermarket, allowing lovers of Indian food to relish the tastes of Indian cuisines from various states. Among the major suppliers and sponsors of the promotion were major Indian food brands, Eastern, Kitchen Treasures and Double Horse.

The LuLu-India Utsav once again underlines the hypermarket's keenness to highlight foods and products from various countries of the world, and its unwavering commitment to provide shoppers with the widest selection of quality products from around the world at highly competitive prices.





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Indian Embassy celebrates 74th Republic Day

Indo-Kuwait relations, a friendship that has stood the test of time



Deputy Foreign Minister, Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi with Indian Ambassador H.E. Dr. Adarsh Swaika



THE TIMES KUWAIT REPORT

Indian Ambassador H.E. Dr. Adarsh Swaika hosted a grand reception at the Crowne Plaza Hotel on 26 January to celebrate the 74th Republic Day of India. Addressing the large gathering of diplomats, special invitees and members of the Indian community, Ambassador Swaika noted that 26 January marks a historic milestone in India's journey since it was on this very day in 1950 that the Constitution of India came into effect.

He added that "the Indian Constitution is a living document which has responded to the needs of the time. Equitable development has been the cornerstone of various socio-economic policies in India. Democracy, pluralism and unity in diversity are the traditional ethos of Indian society. India is home to all religions of the world where anyone is free to preach and practice his faith and religion. All these constitute fundamental tenets of the Indian Constitution."

Elaborating on India the republic, the ambassador noted that India was home to one of the oldest living civilizations and is considered the mother of democracy and the ancient belief of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (the world is a family) has become a beacon of our foreign policy as well. You can see its embodiment in the Indian foreign policy approaches and practices.

Pointing to the logo of the ongoing Indian Presidency of G-20, the ambassador pointed out that the presidency's theme of 'One Earth, One Family, One Future' was inspired by this philosophy. India's recent tenure as the non-permanent member of the UN Security Council was focused on 'Reformed Multilateralism' and other themes of global relevance. India's ongoing Presidency

of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), of which Kuwait is one of the newest entrants, is geared towards harnessing innovations, start-ups, traditional medicine systems etc for the greater benefit of SCO countries.

Noting that the Indian developmental story in recent years continued to attract the attention of the international community, he highlighted some important facets of India as follows:

A country with the world's largest working population with an objective of 'AtmaNirbhar Bharat' i.e a self-reliant India with its flagship scheme of 'Make in India';

- World's fastest growing major economy that is projected to become the 3rd largest economy in the world by 2030.

Ambassador Swaika also highlighted that 2023 was declared as the International Year of Millets by the UN in March 2021 based on a proposal mooted by India. India has since been at the forefront of this campaign with different events being planned domestically and across the world. "The Embassy will also be organizing a 'Millet week' in February and a millet month in June this year," said the envoy.

He praised the bilateral relations with Kuwait, noting that they are indeed historical and time-tested underpinned by constant trade, economic and people to people linkages over the centuries. Most importantly, the leadership of both countries highly value the importance of this multifaceted relationship.

current level of bilateral relations was only a tip of the iceberg. He said "Kuwait with its 2035 developmental vision and India with its rising global and economic profile, have a lot more to cooperate and collaborate. This is where friends of India in Kuwait, and friends of Kuwait in India, apart from the governments of both countries, have an important role to play."

He also applauded the role of the Indian community for their stellar contribution in being the bedrock of India-Kuwait partnership adding, "As Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi aptly put it in his recent address at the 17th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention, you are the true 'Rashtradoots' (ambassadors) of India who continue to serve not only India but your home away from home, Kuwait."

Speaking on the occasion, the chief guest for the evening and the Deputy Foreign Minister, Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi praised the flourishing bilateral relations between Kuwait and India. He highlighted the distinguished relations between the two friendly nations, who demonstrate equal keenness to continue developing them. He added that his participation in this historical ceremony of the Indian embassy on the occasion of its Republic Day, proves the excellent bilateral ties between India and Kuwait.

He added that Kuwait was among the first countries to enter the Indian market through investments in many fields. He referred to the contributions of the Kuwait Fund for Economic Development, which financed many projects in infrastructure and other development projects of India. Highlighting that approximately one million Indian nationals currently reside in Kuwait, he said that they contributed significantly to the development of Kuwait, through their work in the government and private sectors.

“Highlighting that approximately 1 million Indian nationals currently residing in Kuwait and said that they contributed significantly to the development of Kuwait, through their work in the government and private sectors.”

- Preferred Foreign Investment destination with US\$85 billion of FDI inflows in 2021-22
- Global Pharmacy of the world as world's largest vaccine and generic medicines producer
- Third in the world in number of Start-Ups (84,000+) and Unicorns (107)
- First in lowest manufacturing costs globally
- Has the world's largest renewable energy expansion program
- Recorded the largest number of digital transactions in the world, and so on.

He further elaborated that the bilateral relations with Kuwait covered cooperation in a wide spectrum of areas. India was the 4th largest export destination for Kuwait and 6th largest with respect to its imports. Cooperation in the energy sphere continues to be the fulcrum of economic cooperation. Collaboration in education is well known with 25 Indian schools running in Kuwait with an enrollment of over 50,000 students. The strong and vibrant Indian community in Kuwait of approx one million is a living bridge between the two countries.

Ambassador Swaika stressed that the

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Indian Embassy hoists flag to mark Republic Day

After two years of muted virtual celebrations, due to health restrictions brought on COVID-19 pandemic, the Indian Embassy celebrated the 74th Republic Day of India last Thursday, 26 January in pomp with the enthusiastic participation of a large number of Indian community members, in the country.

Ambassador of India H.E. Dr. Adarsh Swaika unfurled the National Flag, which was followed by the singing of the National Anthem and the reading out of the Indian President's address to the nation.

Speaking to the gathering, Ambassador Swaika highlighted the strong bilateral relationship between India and Kuwait

and assured that the Embassy is always ready to render help to its nationals. He also informed about the various services conducted by the Indian associations in Kuwait.

A cultural program, involving students from various Indian schools, as well as members of cultural groups, including

Gujarathi Samarpan, Rhythdhun group, Rhythm scape, Punjabi Bangra group and Muhammadee Scout of Bohra Community, was held on the occasion, underlining the vast cultural diversity that prevails in the country. Various Indian restaurants in Kuwait provided refreshments to the public who attended the celebrations.

UNODC reports fewer victims of TIP being detected

Latest Global Report on Trafficking in Persons launched on 24 January by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), revealed that fewer victims of trafficking in persons (TIP) are being identified even as the COVID-19 pandemic and other crises are increasing vulnerabilities to exploitation.

The number of victims detected globally fell by 11 percent in 2020 from the previous year, driven by fewer detections in low- and medium-income countries. The pandemic, in addition to reducing opportunities for traffickers to operate, may have weakened

law enforcement capacities to detect victims. "This latest report shows how the pandemic has increased vulnerabilities to trafficking in persons, further undercutting capacities to rescue victims and bring criminals to justice," said UNODC Executive Director Ghada Waly. "We cannot allow crises to compound exploitation. The UN and the donor community need to support national authorities, most of all in developing countries, to respond to trafficking threats, and to identify and protect victims especially in states of emergency."

The seventh UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons covers 141 countries and provides an overview of patterns and flows of trafficking in persons at global, regional and national levels, based on trafficking cases detected between 2017 and 2021. The findings are further informed by analysis of 800 court case summaries and accompanied by detailed

suggestions to policy makers to help formulate effective responses.

Fewer cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation were detected during the pandemic as public spaces were closed and related restrictions may have pushed this form of trafficking into more concealed and less safe locations, making it harder to identify victims.

Globally, the number of convictions for trafficking offenses also fell by 27 percent in 2020 from the previous year — with sharper decreases registered in South Asia (56%), Central America and the Caribbean (54%) and South America (46%) — accelerating a longer-term trend registered by UNODC since 2017.

The report also details how war and conflict offer opportunities for traffickers to exploit. Most victims resulting from conflicts originate in and are trafficked to countries in Africa and the Middle East. Breaking down trafficking in persons statistics by region, the report shows

higher levels of impunity in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Countries in these regions convict fewer traffickers and detect fewer victims than the rest of the world. At the same time, victims from these regions are identified in a wider range of destination countries than victims from other regions.

The 2022 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons also examines court cases showing that female victims are subject to physical or extreme violence at hands of traffickers at a rate three times higher than males, and children are subjected almost twice as often as adults.

At the same time, women investigated for trafficking in persons are also significantly more likely to be convicted than men. This suggests that the justice system may discriminate against women, and/or that the role of women in trafficking networks may increase the likelihood that they are convicted for the crime.

Lexus Hosts Kuwaiti Artist Reem Al-Bader

With a long-term objective of supporting Kuwaiti talents and empowering the youth for the future, Mohamed Naser Al Sayer & Sons EST Co. and Lexus has hosted a popular Kuwaiti artist Reem Al-Bader for L-Finesse Art Gallery to feature her most exquisite painting collection.

The opening ceremony of the event was attended by Chief Guest His Excellency Ambassador of Japan Mr. Morino Yasunari, along with Mr. Mubarak Naser Al Sayer Board of Director at ALSAYER Holding, Bengt Shultz Chief Operating Officer, Mr. Mahmoud Abou-Zahr Senior Business Director Lexus Division, Mrs. Bedour Al Sayer, Marketing Manager – Lexus Kuwait, senior Management members, valued Lexus customers, representatives from the press and media.

Reem Al-Bader is a Kuwaiti artist and creator raised in an environment that truly cherishes art, which is clearly reflected in her work. Her brush portrays the beauty of cultures in a way that transcends reality. Reem also uses drawing to therapize and teach through connecting feelings with colors. She started her artistic journey at the Formative Arts Institute in Kuwait and participated in numerous exhibitions with the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, and was one of the founders of the local brand "Fann".

Mubarak Naser Al Sayer commented that "At Lexus we are delighted to break new grounds to empower extraordinary talents from Kuwait and benefit them to elevate their potential to new heights. We will continue our endeavors associating with the aspiring youth and individual with distinct skills for Lexus brand as it aims to be more than the leading luxury car brand, and to inspire innovative lifestyle."

According to Mahmoud Abou-Zahr "We welcome Reem Al-Bader to our L-Finesse Lexus



boutique to display her exceptional work in the field of arts. Lexus being the leading luxury brand in the region has a no compromise philosophy when it comes to design, look and feel, hospitality etc. Lexus has taken bold steps during the past decade to transform the designs of cars to a whole new level to be captivating from all angles, for example LS 500 is a great piece of art."

Globally Lexus International partners with top-of-the-line judges and mentors to nurture creators from around the World for Lexus Design Award. Launched in 2013, the LEXUS DESIGN AWARD is an international competition for up-and-coming creators from around the world. The Award seeks to contribute to society by supporting designers and creators whose work shows potential to shape a better future.

Artist Reem expressed her sincere appreciation towards Lexus brand for the inspirational efforts in the field of design and arts acknowledging the

true spirit of attention to detailing in addition to 'Omotenashi' way of Japanese hospitality. "I personally believe that art & Lexus have more opportunities together. I am excited to see the reaction of customers in this unique event viewing my art collection surrounded in L-finesse. I believe L-finesse is a great choice to connect with an audience passionate about arts and lifestyle, located in one of the most modern shopping destinations Assima Mall" said Reem Al-Bader.

Bedour Al Sayer, Marketing Manager – Lexus Kuwait said "The most distinguished paintings will be displayed at L-finesse and available to be viewed by guests online. The event will last for 1 week from 24-31 January 2023 and customers while visiting L-finesse will have the opportunity to view the beauty of the paintings up close as well as explore the world of Lexus, Japanese craftsmanship, all to offer guests Lexus brand promise of 'experience amazing.'"

Lexus L-finesse design seeks to give physical form to the Lexus experience. It dynamically unites the seemingly contradictory elements of "leading-edge" and "finesse" through the seamless anticipation of customer needs and desires that is central to Lexus's design philosophy.

Lexus designed products display "Incisive Simplicity" yet at the same time, "Intriguing Elegance" They are modern and striking yet warm and humanized.

Hackers target bank accounts, defraud customers

According to media reports several dozen bank accounts in Kuwait have in the past two weeks been targeted by hackers who have managed to swindle their victims of hundreds of dinars, using their credit card information.

Various amounts ranging from KD300 to over KD1,500, become victims to fraud by semen subjected to fraud by hackers victim of hackers through fabricated payments on their credit cards in the past two weeks. The banks informed the Cybercrime Investigation Department about the customers' complaints and exposure to fraud, which were processed through e-mail and remote access through mobile applications. The fraudulent operations have become widespread, in which the aim is to steal bank data through phone calls and text messages.

Most of these hacking operations were carried out through email messages, purportedly sent from the Ministry of Communication, or courier companies such as DHL or Aramex. The email messages would claim that the recipient's shipment had arrived, and that this must be processed by clicking on the notification link and paying a fee of KD1.5

dinars. Once the customer clicks on the bank account data, especially the information that comes by mail to accept payment, money ranging from KD300 to as high as KD1,500 gets deducted from their accounts.

Since the hacking method employed is not very sophisticated, banks have been able to recover most of the swindled money as very basic, banks have been able to recover most of the withdrawn amounts, through coordination with major credit card companies such as VISA and Mastercard, who stopped the transaction before it was completed.

Banking officials note that if the victims did not provide all their bank details or provide full consent to the transaction it was possible for banks to recover the stolen amount within 10 to 45 days. However, if the victim had shared with hackers the OTP code sent by the credit card companies it becomes difficult for banks to recover the amounts misappropriated, as it then becomes a case of the victim approving the transaction.

Banks called on all customers to take precaution with suspicious apps and electronic links, indicating that simply downloading the app or clicking on the link exposes the customer's confidential banking data to the risk of theft and loss of money. Banks also added that they are taking all efforts to confront the rapid increase of phishing operations, and spending millions annually in order to fortify their systems through strong cyber security programs and systems to protect customers and electronic payment operations, but customers also have to do their part and protect their



banking data and confidential information received on mobile devices.

Hackers use various tricks to obtain customer data by promoting mined applications that promise users attractive profits and returns, or by imitating apps of major companies to persuade customers to enter their banking data and passwords. DHL and Aramex have previously warned of attempts to defraud online shoppers through the unauthorized use of their names and trademarks in email communications and graphics that appear to come from them. The companies have confirmed that they do not ever ask customers to provide their personal information or payment data through traditional mail or electronic emails.



Jazeera Airways partners with GNTA to promote Georgian tourism

Jazeera Airways partnered with the Georgian National Tourism Administration (GNTA) and Convention Bureau of Georgia to organize a roadshow promoting travel and tourism to Georgia. The event was attended by Ambassador of Georgia H.E. Konstantin Zhgenti, local travel agents and Jazeera Airways business partners from Kuwait.

Speaking at the event, Ambassador Zhgenti said: "We welcome all developments that promote friendly relations between Georgia and Kuwait, especially people to people relations, as well as economic and business cooperation. He added that direct flights by Jazeera between Georgia and Kuwait have helped to develop our relations, especially in tourism which is a very important field in our bilateral cooperation. The ambassador pointed out that the roadshow demonstrates how aviation and tourism can cooperate successfully in this. I am pleased that Georgia is a very popular tourist destination in Kuwait and I hope that more and more Kuwaitis will support the Georgian tourist authorities and visit Georgia in future."

A visa free destination for Kuwaiti citizens, Georgia offers a rich culture, dense history and diverse landscapes making it ideal for both history and culture lovers. It also offers adventure sports for thrill seekers and green valleys for those that enjoy relaxing scenic views making it the perfect place for individuals and families, both in summer as well as winter.

Jazeera Airways operates direct flights from Kuwait to Tbilisi, Georgia. While Tbilisi boasts great culture and food, there are also several other cities in Georgia that are a must visit such as Kakheti, Kutaisi and Gauri.

The flight duration is just under two and half hours, making it a convenient destination to plan a quick getaway from Kuwait, said VP - Sales for Jazeera Airways Bharathan Ravindran. He added: "In 2018, Jazeera Airways launched direct flights to the Georgian capital Tbilisi, addressing a growing demand for direct connectivity to this top leisure destination. It has been great to see the success of this route with travelers from Kuwait. We continuously aim to strengthen our network of trade partners and agents while promoting our different destinations and it is a pleasure to host this roadshow in cooperation with the Georgian National Tourism Administration and Convention Bureau of Georgia."

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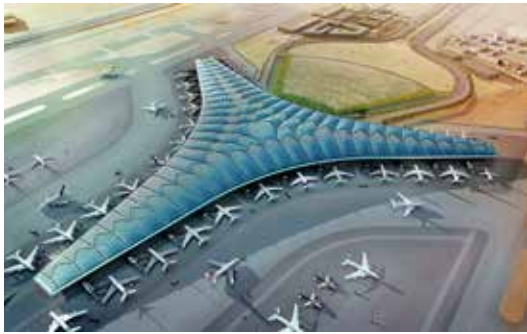


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High employment, low service at DGCA



Over the past 15 years, the number of employees in the Directorate-General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) have increased five fold, even as services provided to travelers by civil aviation authorities have deteriorated significantly.

Records show that currently there are over 7,800 employees engaged by the DGCA, many of whom are political appointees who were fostered on the Authority through the

influence of lawmakers and ministers. One minister alone is said to have appointed over 1,600 employees during his brief tenure as a minister. The lucrative jobs at the DGCA, which involves high salaries and perks besides limited working hours and shift timings that guarantee hefty allowances, have enticed many nationals to resort to influential intermediaries to seek appointment in the facility, which has caused the number of employees to increase significantly.

However, despite the presence of this army of civil aviation workers, visitors to the country on arrival at Kuwait International Airport (KIA) get the impression that they have landed at a developing country airport, with poor facilities, lack of amenities, and civil aviation workers who are rude, inefficient and incompetent.

The large number of civil aviation staff are not only redundant considering the size of airport, the number of passengers, and the

services provided at KIA, but are also high compared to the much larger passenger volumes and size of many regional and international airports.

For instance, while the DGCA in Kuwait has over 7,500 employees to cater to the 12 million passengers who transit KIA annually, in the much larger Hamad International Airport in Doha there are only around 3,800 employees to handle a passenger volume in excess of 35 million passengers annually. Data from airline and airport industry sources also show that Tokyo Haneda Airport has only about 2,729 employees to provide services to an estimated 26 million passengers that arrive and depart through the airport each year. Similarly, Beijing Capital International Airport in China, which caters to over 36 million passengers annually, has only 1,555 employees.

Despite the small number of workers in these large airports, they are able to offer

excellent and efficient service to passengers, as well as provide travelers with ease of movement within the airport, and efficient transportation services from and to the airport. These airports are also able to provide travelers with relaxation spaces, duty-free shopping zones, and entertainment and dining areas, the likes of which passengers at KIA can only dream for.

In the meantime, several high level management and supervisory posts at the DGCA remain vacant due to political wranglings delaying appointments. Reports indicate that the posts of the head of the General Administration of Civil Aviation and the general manager, have been vacant for three months. Furthermore, the position of Deputy Director General for Financial, Administrative and Legal Affairs has been vacant for four years, which has affected the issuance of decisions, reports and procedures for the movement of appointments in the administration.

Oil prices and economy in 2023

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

However, the IMF cautioned that while higher oil prices and output in 2022 significantly improved the overall fiscal and current account surpluses in 2022, the outlook for 2023 is tempered with uncertainties and risks. Among the potential downsides from the external environment highlighted by the Fund were, the very real possibility of the current slowdown in global economic activity sliding into a full-blown recession in 2023, as well as fallout from ongoing geopolitical crises.

Moreover, delays in implementing key fiscal and structural reforms, as identified by the Fund and other international and local economic entities, could hinder progress toward urgently needed economic diversification programs and amplify the risk of prevailing procyclical fiscal policies — such as the increasing spending witnessed during economic boom periods and the belt tightening during hard times.

Although the oil price hike witnessed in fiscal year 2022-23 boosted government revenue and helped the country maintain macroeconomic stability, it also highlighted Kuwait's continued overreliance on fluctuating global demand and fickle international prices for oil to propel its economy. Additionally, the higher oil price based economic recovery witnessed in 2022, once again underscored the criticality of weaning the economy away from its overwhelming dependence on

hydrocarbon reserves and revenues.

Nevertheless, buoyed by the surge in revenues in 2022 and continued high oil prices, the government was scheduled to announce a draft budget for fiscal year 2023-2024 that begins on 1 April. Plans in the new budget reportedly included increases in current expenditures in line with the government's aim of improving the lives of citizens, and implementing of financial and economic reforms so as to diversify the economy, raise non-oil sector's contributions to the budget and enhance competitiveness, as well as realign prices for public services to better reflect actual costs, introduce more efficient collection of state revenues, and reassess prices for lease of state lands and real estate, among others.

However, the hopes in political circles that the robust public finances would help the new government to usher in sorely needed policy changes and infrastructure projects, were dashed early last week. Last Monday, in a surprise move, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah tendered the resignation of the cabinet to His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, citing the impasse in relations with legislative authority during the first session of the 17th legislative term of the National Assembly.

The government's resignation, barely three months after its formation in October, was reportedly precipitated by opposition

lawmakers pressuring the executive for a debt relief bill, under which the state would buy the personal loans of citizens, but which the government maintained was not viable. Parliamentarians had also sought to question two ministers over lapses in their respective ministries in the past. The cabinet's resignation has once again stalled planned financial and economic reforms and policy changes, in addition to dampening enthusiasm and interest among local, regional and international investors to invest in the country.

In the meantime, on the global economic front, oil prices began 2023 on an upward trajectory, with markets expecting a 'soft-landing' for the global economy with inflation abating in several markets and oil demand growing, following China's abrupt decision to make an U-turn and scrap its zero-COVID policy. The hope is that despite fears of global recession, the revival of the Chinese economy would help drive global growth and consequently oil demand in the year ahead.

Expectations of oil prices remaining in the higher spectrum throughout 2023 were also boosted on the supply side by the European Union's (EU) decision to place an embargo on Russian oil, and the resolution by the group of G7 wealthy nations to impose a price cap of \$60 per barrel on Russian oil exports from December, as well as an additional embargo on Russian refined oil products starting from February. Moreover, the reaffirmation by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its non-OPEC allies to maintain their two million barrels per day (mb/d) oil production cuts throughout 2023, could witness a tightening of supplies and stabilizing of oil prices.

Prognosis of higher global oil prices over the next 12 months also found support from the potential decline in oil production in the United States, as evidenced by the fall in number of oil rigs operating in the country, which, at the end of 2022, dropped to their lowest levels since November 2021. Additionally, in the face of domestic and global economies roiling from the impact of aggressive rate hikes in 2022, the US Federal Reserve is likely to temper its next expected interest rate hikes on 1 February, by a smaller percentage point than the 0.25 percentage point hike predicted earlier.

Lower US interest rates make oil less expensive in other global currencies, which OPEC and other oil exporters hope could fuel a pent-up buying spree by countries that had delayed or limited their oil purchases in 2022. For their part, oil analysts, overly cautious when it comes to predicting global factors that could influence oil prices in 2023, said that Russian responses to the

embargoes on its oil and oil products, as well as the commitment by OPEC+ members to conform to mandated production cuts, will be key determining factors in how oil prices move in 2023.

Russia has already announced that it will ban oil exports to any country participating in the G7 price cap and has also indicated it could reduce its oil outputs by up to 700,000 barrels per day in response. For its part, OPEC+ has reaffirmed its October supply cut decision and stated it would continue holding crude output down by 2 million barrels per day (bpd) throughout 2023.

Meanwhile, on the demand side, while the cold spell during winter in the northern hemisphere is expected to support consumption over the next few months, the trajectory for oil demand will be shaped more by global economic growth, and more specifically growth or the lack of it in its three main drivers, the US, China and Europe. For its part, the IMF in its forecasts on economies of the US, China and Europe, has already warned that all three are slowing simultaneously and that 2023 will be "tougher than the year we leave behind".

In addition, while two wild-cards, Russia and China, could influence the global oil outlook in 2023, a third, unobtrusive, but nevertheless significant player, could be India, the world's third largest importer of oil. Indian imports of oil are especially pertinent to oil exporters in the Middle East, especially Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and to a lesser extent, Kuwait, which have traditionally been among the major oil suppliers to India. However, lured by the offer of Western-embargoed Russian oil at a discounted price, India has been steadily buying Russian oil in 2022. Indian record import of 1.9 mb/d of oil from Russia in December, made Moscow the top oil supplier to India for the third month in a row.

In the meantime, according to data from the latest 'Oil Market Report' by the International Energy Agency (IEA), global oil demand is set to rise by 1.9 mb/d in 2023, to a record 101.7 mb/d, even as world oil supply slows to 1 mb/d with an overall non-OPEC+ rise of 1.9 mb/d offset by an OPEC+ drop of 870,000 barrels per day, largely due to expected declines in Russia.

Given the overall uncertain outlook for oil prices in 2023, the question among many economic and political analysts in Kuwait is, whether the current political climate will enable the country to fully realize the potential gains that higher oil prices could portend in 2023, or whether it will be able to tide over yet another possible fall in oil prices and the likelihood of the world slipping into recession in the year ahead.

Monsignor Aldo BERARDI appointed as new Bishop to Kuwait

In view of the pastoral care of the Catholic faithful residing in Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar, His Holiness Pope Francis has appointed Monsignor Aldo BERARDI O.S.S.T., currently Vicar General of the Order of the Holy Trinity for the Redemption of Captives (the Trinitarian Order), to succeed the late Bishop Francis Camillo Bailin, who died on 12 April 2020, as the Apostolic Vicar of Northern Arabia.

The official announcement to this effect is to be made in Rome on Saturday, 28th January 2023. Born on 30th September 1963 in Longeville-les-Metz (France), Monsignor BERARDI was ordained a priest in 1991.



From 2007 to 2019 he worked in the Vicariate of Northern Arabia. The Apostolic Nunciature in Kuwait thanks Bishop Paul Hinder who has been Apostolic Administrator and wishes him every blessing in the future. At the same time, the Apostolic Nunciature warmly welcomes the appointment of the new Apostolic Vicar and asks the priests and faithful of the Vicariate to join in prayer for the important mission that awaits him.

Trusting in the intercession of Our Lady of Arabia, we pray that the Lord will grant him many years of continued pastoral service in the Gulf.

Turkish Embassy, IWG organize Turkish Cultural Day



International Women's Group (IWG) and the Embassy of Turkey organized a Turkish Cultural Day under the title, 'Taste and Flavour of the Turkish Tea', on 22 January at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, in the presence of Fadia Saad AlAbdullah Al Sabah, Suhaila Al Sabah, and Ambassador of United Kingdom H.E. Belinda Lewis.

The event was held on the occasion of the registration of Turkish tea on UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage as a symbol of identity, hospitality and social interaction.

Speaking on the occasion, President of the International Women's Group and wife of the Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Ghada Shawky, thanked the Ambassador of Turkey H.E. Tuba Nur Sönmez and the Turkish embassy for organizing the special event.

She also highlighted Turkey's rich cultural heritage that is endowed with both Western and Oriental elements, which are reflected in the 19 UNESCO World Heritage sites spread across the country. Mrs. Shawky also mentioned Turkey's scrumptious cuisine, and expressed her gratitude to have the opportunity to try the famous Turkish tea.

For her part, the Turkish Ambassador thanked the IWG for the collaboration saying, "IWG is a vibrant, diverse, vocal and active community of women that help bridge our differences within Kuwaiti society in a sisterly way. It should then come as no surprise that when we decided to organize such an event with an eye to promote the role of women in the field of culture, we looked no further than IWG as a local partner".

Ambassador Sönmez thanked His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince for their contribution to

improving and strengthening the position of women in every field of Kuwaiti society. She underlined the fact that cultural similarities between Kuwait and Turkey plays a role in facilitating friendly interaction, "Tea culture in Kuwait and Türkiye is an important social practice that shows hospitality. It also helps build and maintain social ties. It is used to celebrate important moments in the lives of communities," said the ambassador.

Her Excellency also mentioned that, in Kuwait, guests are welcomed in gatherings and Divaniyes with Çay (tea), It is often

served alongside traditional deserts and delicious dates.

Ambassador Sönmez stressed the role of women in culture saying that culture and women are inseparable; women play an invaluable role in advancing cultural heritage. "Turkish tea' and 'the tea culture' might be the theme of today's gathering, however, as a proud woman Ambassador, I would like our cultural day to serve as an occasion to convey a powerful message about women and culture". The event continued with a short film about Türkiye. Representative of the Turkish Tea Enterprises (ÇAYKUR), the leading state-owned tea company in Türkiye made a presentation about the journey of tea from farm to consumer table. The attendees were served traditional Turkish tea and Baklava and enjoyed a performance of traditional dances and live music.

In addition to being served traditional Turkish tea, the attendees enjoyed a special raffle, door gifts and a sumptuous buffet including various Turkish specialties prepared by the chefs of the Crowne Plaza, completed an outstanding and highly enjoyable event



Dasman Diabetes Institute organizes a two-day scientific workshop

Dasman Diabetes Institute (DDI), founded by Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), recently held a two-day workshop titled "Scientific Writing and Clinical Methodology". The workshop was presented by Prof Abe Fingerhut MD, FACS (hon), FRCPS (g), FRCS (Ed) hon Co-Editor-in-Chief of Annals of Laparoscopic and Endoscopic Surgery.

During the workshop, Prof Fingerhut showcased and discussed various topics including, but not limited to: Systematic Approach to Writing and Publishing, General Principles for Structure and

Content, Statistics and Study Design, Critical Appraisal and Special Aspects of Writing a Surgical Paper in addition to other related subjects.

The workshop was well attended by 115 people that included internal and external researchers, in addition to academics, scientists and healthcare professionals from Kuwait University, Ministry of Health and other institutions in Kuwait. Attendees were given accredited certificates of attendance with CME points.

Commenting on this workshop, Dr. Qais Al-Duwairi, Director-General of Dasman



Diabetes Institute stated "holding such scientific workshops and activities stems from the Institute's mission which is "To address the diabetes epidemic in Kuwait through focused diabetes, research,

integrated prevention, training, education and treatment". It also incorporates the Institute's vision which is "To be the leading diabetes institute in the MENA region and to be recognized internationally".



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Farewell reception held for ambassadors on end of tenure

Acting Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and Ambassador of Palestine, H.E. Rami Tahboub, held a farewell party for the ambassadors of Malaysia and Liberia, as well as the Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Resident Coordinator, Dr. Tariq Al-Sheikh, at the end of their tenure in Kuwait.

The Acting Dean of the Diplomatic Corps praised the efforts made by his colleagues to develop the relationship of their country and its institutions with Kuwait, wishing them success in their upcoming assignments.

He expressed his deep thanks to the Embassy of Tajikistan for organizing the celebration, noting that the dean of the



corps, who is outside the country, delegated him to honor his colleagues whose duties

had ended. He also thanked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for its permanent cooperation with diplomatic missions and accredited international organizations, and for providing them with all facilities to complete their tasks.

In turn, the Resident Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Resident Coordinator, Dr. Tariq Al-Sheikh, praised his tenure in Kuwait and the support he described as distinguished by Kuwait for the United Nations and its organizations, stressing that Kuwait is a strategic partner of the United Nations. He said, "I did not feel alienated throughout my stay in Kuwait. I felt

that I was among my family because of the support, love and generosity I received from the Kuwaiti people."

For his part, the outgoing Malaysian ambassador to Kuwait, H.E. Dato' Salamat, said, "This gathering will remain an important part of my life as a government employee. We are diplomats. We come and go. As we leave, what we leave behind is used as a legacy and as measures to determine our success." He added, "Since my arrival, trade exchange between my country and Kuwait has doubled from \$448.6 million to \$838.3 million. Many things can be done to explore opportunities in Kuwait, especially food security."

He continued, "During my tenure, I had the opportunity to meet many wonderful, talented, and engaged people from all walks of life. Personally, every day my admiration for Kuwait grows. This country has made that experience once in a lifetime for me, and I will always cherish the memories here."

Ambassador of Liberia H.E. Jeff Dowana also praised the friendship he received from the diplomatic community and his country's relations with Kuwait. He also thanked the leadership for their exceptional support and cooperation during his tenure in this country.



Al Muzaini Exchange to sponsor Kuwait Cricket



Al Muzaini Exchange Company has become the official associate sponsor of Kuwait Cricket for the 2023 Kuwait Cricket Club (KCC) season, which includes being the main sponsor of the Kuwait women's national cricket team, and the official sleeve sponsor of the Kuwait men's national cricket team.

A contract to this effect was signed by the KCC Board President, Haider Farhan and General Manager of Al Muzaini Exchange Company, Hugh Fernandes. Following the signing ceremony, Al Muzaini was presented with the new official Women's cricket jersey and Men's cricket jersey with the Al Muzaini logo, which will be worn by the players throughout the rest of the season while representing the country nationally, as well as internationally.

The signing ceremony was held at the Kuwait Olympic Council of Asia on 23 January, in the presence of KCC Board General Secretary Emad Al Jassam, esteemed members of management and a list of delegates from Al Muzaini, as well as key players from the Kuwait national men's and women's team, the head coach, and coaching staff.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Fernandes said, "This is an incredible moment for Al Muzaini Exchange to be a part of the Kuwait



national cricket team. Being a passionate fan of cricket myself, I have been following the growth of cricket in Kuwait and it has been extremely impressive. It was a wonderful moment for all of us to see Kuwait upsetting some big guns in the recent Asia Cup Qualifiers. I believe that it won't be long before we see the country participate in major tournaments with millions around the globe watching and being entertained by the extremely talented players of Kuwait.

"Moreover, we are immensely happy and proud to be the main sponsor of the Kuwait National Women's cricket team. Al Muzaini Company believes in the power of young women and know that they are capable of achieving great things. We want to support all women across the country and encourage them to take up the sport, to compete and achieve incredible things. There are a lot of future stars that are waiting to shine when given the opportunity. And with great backing from the management of Al Muzaini, we are sure that the sport will only move forward."

He concluded by adding that Al Muzaini looks forward to having a great relationship with Kuwait Cricket and shall actively participate in activities associated with the growth of the sport in the months to come.

Kalyan Jewellers' patrons win 2 kg gold at Dubai Shopping Festival

Kalyan Jewellers, one of the most trusted and leading jewellery brands in the GCC and India, announced its participation in the 28th edition of the iconic Dubai Shopping Festival (DSF). As part of the raffle draw conducted by Dubai Shopping Festival, eight lucky patrons from Kalyan Jewellers have won mega prizes so far. The lucky customers will take home 2 Kgs gold in winnings for their participation in the festival.

As part of its association with the Dubai Shopping Festival, Kalyan Jewellers customers stand a chance to win up to 25 Kgs gold in festive giveaways. With every gold jewellery purchase worth AED 500 and above from Kalyan Jewellers, customers are entitled to get one raffle coupon and every diamond and pearl jewellery purchase worth AED 500 and above they are entitled to get two raffle coupons. The festival's mega draw will be held on January 29th and patrons still have a chance to win more gold.

Mr. Ramesh Kalyanaraman, Executive Director, Kalyan Jewellers said, "We are delighted to so far have eight of our customers, win big at this year's Dubai Shopping Festival. We would like to congratulate the patrons on winning the raffle draw and taking home big wins. The Dubai Shopping Festival is a highlight of the year for both residents and visitors of Dubai, and we are thrilled to be able to offer such amazing prizes to our patrons. It gives us immense pride and honour to be part of such an iconic global event and be active contributors to its success. At Kalyan Jewellers, we aim to offer world-class shopping experience to our customers, while also ensuring that they register maximum gains on their purchases. With two more weeks to go,

we are thrilled and excited for the upcoming winner announcements."

The Dubai Shopping Festival is a month-long celebration of shopping, entertainment, and culture in Dubai. This year's festival attracted millions of visitors from around the world, who took advantage of the discounts, promotions, and events offered by participating retailers. Offering shoppers with a plethora of prizes, the iconic festival will culminate on 29th January 2023.

Customers will also be able to avail the benefits of Kalyan's 4-Level Assurance Certification on gold jewellery. While jewellery retailed at Kalyan Jewellers goes through multiple purity tests and are all BIS hallmarked, the 4-level assurance certificate promises customers payment on the value of purity mentioned in the invoice during exchange or resale. Also, it ensures free lifetime maintenance of ornaments at any Kalyan Jewellers' showroom in the country.

Kalyan Jewellers will offer its patrons Muhurat, the bridal jewellery line curated from across India along with exclusive sections featuring Kalyan's popular house brands such as Tejasvi (Polki jewellery), Mudhra (handcrafted antique jewellery), Nimah (Temple jewellery) and Glo (dancing diamonds). Other sections at the showroom include Ziah (Solitaire-like diamond jewellery), Anokhi (uncut diamonds), Apoorva (diamonds for special occasions), Antara (wedding diamonds), Hera (daily wear diamonds) and Rang (precious stones jewellery). Kalyan Jewellers will draw from its portfolio of over one lakh contemporary and traditional designs and will offer selections for everyday as well as bridal wear and festive occasions.



EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

For the Common Good



Mariana Mazzucato

Mariana Mazzucato, Founding Director of the UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, is Chair of the World Health Organization's Council on the Economics of Health for All.

After leaders of government, business, and civil society met at this year's World Economic Forum meeting in Davos, the observation that we are living in the age of a "polycrisis" has spread. The simultaneous occurrence of multiple catastrophic events is a cornerstone of today's socioeconomic and geopolitical climate.

In the face of challenges as immense as global warming, broken health systems, a growing digital divide, and financialized business models that are driving income and wealth inequality ever higher, it is no surprise that disillusion with politics is mounting – ideal conditions for populists promising quick fixes. But the real solutions are complex and will require investment and regulation, as well as social, organizational, and technological innovations, not only by government or business, but also by individuals and organizations across civil society.

Governments, believing that policy can at best fix market failures, often do too little too late. Even public goods (like funding of basic research and development) are seen as fixing a positive externality problem, while carbon taxes are fixing a negative externality problem. Achieving transformative change that produces inclusive and sustainable growth requires less fixing and more shaping and creating of markets. This requires complementing the notion of public goods with that of the "common good," which is not just about the what, but also the how.

The common good is an objective to be reached together through collective intelligence and sharing of benefits. It builds on the idea of the commons, but goes further by focusing on how to design the investment, innovation, and collaboration needed to reach a shared objective. Common goods are the product of collective interactions and investment that require shared ownership

and governance models. As a result, the rewards arising from such activities must be shared collectively. The common good also addresses the need for effective international governance, emphasized in the notion of global public goods informed by my brilliant colleague, the late Inge Kaul, who helped inform the work of our Global Commission on the Economics of Water.

In his May 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, Pope Francis argued eloquently for common-good thinking in an ever-changing world. This is not just abstract idealism. The common good offers a useful framework both for setting shared goals and for working out how to achieve them. Francis talks about the need for subsidiarity (the principle that particular issues are best addressed at the most local level possible), and that we view the world through the eyes of the most vulnerable.

“The common good is about intense collaboration, collective intelligence, the co-creation of both ends and means, and a proper sharing of risks and rewards. Mission-oriented industrial and innovation policies show how these principles can be put into practice.”

The priority for all social, economic, and political change, according to Francis, should be to protect the essential conditions that sustain human life. Decision-making for the common good means defending the dignity of the socially, politically, and economically marginalized – not just with words but with policies and new forms of collaboration. It means building a network of solidarity through which the unheard can partake in critical decision-making processes.

These objectives can be advanced through a new growth model pursued with those who have been excluded, not simply implemented on their behalf. Co-op organizations, for example, have proved effective in bringing people of limited means together and giving them opportunities for agency that they would not have had otherwise.

Francis also understands that, with some economic sectors now exercising more power in certain domains than governments do, it is the state's obligation to defend the common good on everyone's behalf. Countering this trend and tackling our biggest challenges will require a fundamental change in political economy. Whereas the principle of the common good currently is seen as a corrective for the current system's excesses, it should constitute the system's central objective.

Money is not enough. Equally important is the type of collaboration we foster. In the case of COVID-19, we made massively successful collective investments in the research to create vaccines. But we did not ensure that the final result translated into a "common good": namely, a fully immunized global population. All too often, we are lazy about partnerships. Just because you have "partnered" does not mean that you are

working well together for the common good, which requires also setting the objective together and aligning risks and rewards. All parties must be on the same page about the "what" in addition to the "how." That is how you not only develop vaccines but also make them accessible to all.

With a common-good approach, each step of the process is almost as important as the final result. In the United States, the government funnels billions of dollars of public investment into health R&D each year (\$45 billion from the National Institutes of Health alone in 2022), but then allows all the profits to be kept in private hands. When the "rewards" from a collective effort materialize – often as profits for business, or as valuable knowledge – they should be shared to the same extent that the risk was shared. As I show in my book *Mission*

Economy, there are many ways to do this. Intellectual property or pricing conditions could be attached to public support, or profit sharing could be required, such as through an equity model. Collective ownership structures can also help share value more equitably with all members of society. These arrangements all offer opportunities to challenge the undue concentration of power in the hands of a few privileged individuals and firms.

Nor are these problems confined to health. The digital economy has been expanding on the back of massive public investments for years. Because most of the data is controlled by a few powerful companies, key technologies such as artificial intelligence are reproducing pre-existing biases and injustices. To counter this, we need to design a more inclusive and transparent framework – requiring, for example, that digital services' terms and conditions meet certain ethical standards.

Finally, we must encourage a greater appreciation for the power of collective intelligence. In the same way that ESG (environmental, social, and governance) metrics help companies report on their organizational culture and behavior, a common-good approach would require more robust reporting on inter-organizational and public-private dynamics to capture the whole ecosystem of collaboration (or parasitism, as the case may be).

The common good is about intense collaboration, collective intelligence, the co-creation of both ends and means, and a proper sharing of risks and rewards. Mission-oriented industrial and innovation policies show how these principles can be put into practice. A government or international body sets a clear target – often in consultation with other stakeholders – and then creates the conditions for intense public-private collaboration to get there. Critical to this process is trial and error. While the direction of travel must be clear, there also should be plenty of room for bottom-up experimentation.

The common good is a shared objective. By emphasizing the how as much as the what, it offers opportunities to promote human solidarity, knowledge sharing, and collective distribution of rewards. It is the best – indeed the only – way to ensure a decent quality of life for everyone on an interconnected planet.

EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

The Next Globalization



Mark Leonard

Director of the European Council on Foreign Relations, is the author of *The Age of Unpeace: How Connectivity Causes Conflict*.

Is globalization coming back to life? That was the big question at the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos, where WEF founder Klaus Schwab asked whether it is possible to have cooperation in an era of fragmentation.

For the past decade, the steady demise of 'Davos Man' — the avatar of global business and cosmopolitanism — was the big story here, owing to the 2008 financial crisis, Brexit, Donald Trump's election, democratic backsliding around the world, COVID-19, and Russia's war in Ukraine. All were seen as signs that globalization had gone too far and would be thrown into reverse.

But the mood at this year's meeting was slightly more optimistic. Despite much concern about conflict and economic strife, the world seems to be doing a little better than global elites expected when they last met in May. The Ukrainians are valiantly resisting the Russian invaders, the West is united, Europe has managed to keep the lights on this winter, and some think we might still avoid a recession.

Moreover, beneath these important short-term developments is a more profound shift toward a new form of globalization, albeit one that will be quite different from what preceded it. While the globalization of goods seems to have peaked, services are becoming ever more globalized, owing to the revolution in telework during the pandemic.

There is also an accelerating revolution in energy, driven partly by the war in Ukraine. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz predict that the widespread adoption of renewables and hydrogen power will be as significant as the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century. At the same time, advances in artificial intelligence are opening vast new possibilities, while also creating tensions over microchips and renewed fears about joblessness and rogue robots.

Developments in all three areas — telework, renewables, and AI — will bind countries together in new networks of interdependence. As a recent McKinsey Global Institute report shows, 'no region is close to being self-sufficient'.

But the re-globalization glimpsed in Davos will be fundamentally different from previous iterations. First, while the old model was about corporate profits, the new one is about national security in all its dimensions.



Western countries have portrayed the war in Ukraine as a defense of the liberal, rules-based order against unilateral aggression by Russia (and, by extension, China). They are therefore busy decoupling from Russia and rethinking their economic ties with China. In Davos, Canadian Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland was just one of many policymakers who stressed the need for 'friend-shoring'.

But to many outside the West, Europe and America are just as guilty of disrupting the global order as Russia and China are — and with enormous consequences for their own security and prosperity. The way they see it, the West made a decision to turn the

and the fight against nuclear proliferation in Iran and North Korea.

As the French bank BNP Paribas learned in 2014, when it was fined more than \$8 billion for violating US sanctions, such policies have become a global drag net whose effectiveness relies on the outright politicization of global systems that were previously considered neutral (in principle if not in fact).

Now that the genie has been let out of the bottle, others are also politicizing the global framework of rules and norms. The European Union, for example, is considering a new carbon tariff on imports, and it has

were, respectively, at the center of the first two waves of globalization, this new one will be multipolar and thus multi-ideological. China has not only closed the economic gap with America, but has surpassed it as the biggest trading partner to most countries in the world. That implies a major shift in the balance of economic power.

This new dynamic suggests that the world will be divided not only by nationalism but by fundamentally different ideas about order. Davos attendees got a flawless illustration of this when Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky beamed in to deliver a speech calling on the world to rally against Russia's unprovoked war. While half the audience cheered enthusiastically, the other half appeared unmoved. Even if many sympathize with the Ukrainians, they fear that the conflict is being used to precipitate a Cold War 2.0 that will divide the world into democracies and autocracies.

That is the last thing most political leaders want. In private discussions, African, Middle Eastern, and Latin American leaders complain that their countries already suffered a loss of sovereignty and control during the first Cold War. For them, there is little to be gained from having to pick sides yet again.

Even America's allies are against having to choose. I spoke to a Japanese tycoon who is very worried about China's current foreign policy but also vehemently opposed to decoupling. And in his own speech to the conference, Scholz declared that the world of 2045 would not be bipolar but multipolar.

Ultimately, Schwab may be right to hope for cooperation in our time of fragmentation. But we must bear in mind how the next globalization will differ fundamentally from the last one.

“ The dollar-based financial system which was seen as a global public good that would spread prosperity to every corner of the world, is now increasingly seen as a cudgel with which America enforces its ideological and strategic preferences. ”

war into an economic conflict (through the most ambitious and far-reaching sanctions package in history) with devastating consequences for billions of people.

Back in Davos's halcyon days, the dollar-based financial system was seen as a global public good that would spread prosperity to every corner of the world. But now it is increasingly seen as a cudgel with which America can enforce its ideological and strategic preferences. The sanctions on Russia follow the same pattern of Western policies used to prosecute the 'war on terror'

already taken measures to prevent data on its citizens from being stored beyond its borders. The United States, for its part, has only doubled down, such as by imposing sweeping bans on the sale of strategically important technologies to China. The result is not simply a balkanization of knowledge. All countries are now going to greater lengths to guard against the risks of interdependence.

Another trend that will differentiate the next age of globalization may prove even more consequential. Whereas Britain and America



Tourists flowing boat in the Punkva cave which is part of the longest cave system in the Czech Republic in Moravsky Kras, Czech Republic.

Charming Czechia

the land of spas, caves and culture

The Czech Republic, historically known as Bohemia, has a long and storied history that goes back to the establishment of the Duchy of Bohemia in the 9th century. In the centuries since then, Czechia has gone through various dynastic and political iterations, and name changes. It went from being the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918, to the People's Republic of Czechoslovakia in 1948, and Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in 1960 under communism. In late 1989 the country became a democracy again through the Velvet Revolution, and in 1992, the Federal Assembly decided to break up the country into two countries, the Czech Republic and Slovakia on 1 January 1993.

Today the country is known as the Czech Republic, but is increasingly being recognized simply as Czechia. A land-locked country with a hilly terrain that endows it with a mostly temperate continental and oceanic climate, Czechia has a picturesque landscape, the beauty of which could easily be enjoyed for a lifetime. In fact, many people who come to the country decide to make it their home. However, for most people who visit for a few days, they invariably depart with the feeling that the time spent in this idyllic land was not enough.

While it is not possible to encapsulate all there is to see in this land into visiting a few cities and towns, for those on short visits there is no other alternative. So, for all those hard-pressed for time, we have condensed some of the not-to-be-missed places and sites in this wonderful fairy-tale land.



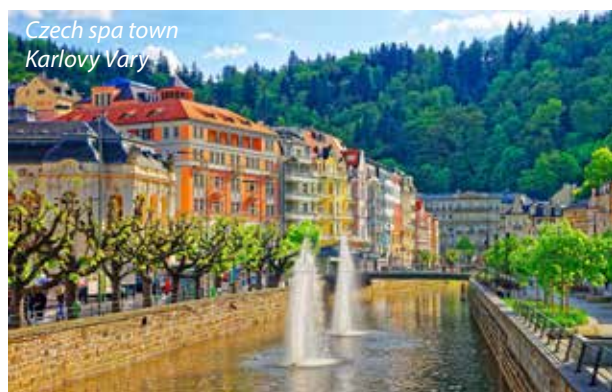
Prague: For those who have never been to Prague, an absolute must-see in this charming city that also serves as the capital of the country, is the Prague Castle. By many accounts, Prague Castle is the largest castle area in the world. Its three courtyards and a number of magnificent buildings cover more than 18 acres, so be prepared to see a lot and do a considerable amount of walking.

Charles Bridge is also a sight that every visitor to the city should see. This Gothic bridge of stone connects the Old Town and Lesser Town. It was actually called the Stone Bridge during its first several centuries of existence. Its construction was commissioned by Czech King and Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV and work began in 1357.

Museums and Galleries: The rich artistic heritage of Prague and the Czech Republic can be admired in Prague's many museums and galleries, including the National Gallery, Municipal Gallery and the National Museum. These cultural institutions contain extensive collections of art of all styles and eras, ranging from fine art to sculpture, and spanning over two millennia.

Spas: Czechia's three most famous spa towns — Karlovy

Vary, Mariánské Lázně, and Frantiskovy Lázně — also known as Carlsbad, Marienbad, and Franzenbad respectively — are located in the region of Bohemia, along the country's western edge. Each of these spas still boast the ornate architecture and regal charm of their 18th to early 20th century heydays, and they also still offer the authentic water treatments that had the elite of those times flocking to Bohemia.



Today, many doctors still prescribe the area's carbonated waters as treatment for everything from sinus and joint problems to obesity, digestive tract issue, infertility, and even gum disease. You will need to note that the unique mineral content of each town's water makes them effective for different ailments, so patients are typically prescribed a visit to a specific town.

Kutná Hora: At first glance, Kutná Hora seems like a quiet Central Bohemian town like any other. However, it is one of the most visited destinations in the country and a unique highlight of Czechia. On a daily basis, hundreds of people flock to see the Sedlec Ossuary — a Baroque chapel made entirely of human bones. Between 40,000 to 70,000 skeletal human remains are held in this macabre monument of death.



Once a competitor in wealth to Prague, Kutná Hora is famous for its silver mines and the Czech Museum of Silver provides a closer look at this as well as the chance to descend into the actual silver mine which is now a part of the museum.

Český Krumlov: If you are looking for a fairytale city, Český Krumlov is an ideal choice. This little town in the South Bohemian region has one of the best preserved medieval city cores in the whole of Europe. The red rooftops, colorful houses, dramatic castle views and picturesque river panoramas make Český Krumlov a charming destination.



Holašovice, located 30 kilometers north of Český Krumlov, is a place where time has stopped. This small village is a unique example of a medieval settlement with rows of lovely historic houses that remained almost intact throughout the centuries.



Brno: Although Brno is the second biggest city in Czechia, it retains a laid back atmosphere and has managed to avoid becoming a tourist trap. The city is a fascinating mix of architecture, where one street can feature Gothic, baroque, art nouveau and functionalist buildings standing next to each other.

The imposing St. Peter and Paul Cathedral is a good location to begin sightseeing before proceeding to the 13th century Špilberk Castle, which dominates the skyline. The brightest architectural jewel of the city is undoubtedly the Villa Tugendhat — a UNESCO-inscribed masterpiece of modernism built by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.

Right underneath the lively St. James Square lies the silent kingdom of death — the enormous Brno Ossuary that is home to more than 50,000 human bones. It is the second largest ossuary in Europe after the Catacombs of Paris.

Caves and Karsts: And then there are the caves of Czechia to visit, especially if you are a spelunker. Stalagmites, stalactites and dripstone await the visitor to these caves that were formed by the Karst topography of the land. Karsts are formed from the dissolution of soluble rocks such as limestone, dolomite, and gypsum over the eons by water trickling down from the surface.

Moravian Karst: The largest and most beautiful karst area in central Europe is a place where visitors have their breath taken clean away. The main attraction here is the famous Macocha Abyss, some 138 meters deep and steeped in terrifying myths and legends. Without doubt the Moravian Karst is one of the natural wonders of the Czech Republic, which will wow every visitor.

Punkva: This is an underground river in the area of the Moravian Karst, and is almost thirty kilometers long. You can travel along it on motor boats and experience a bit of adventure in the bowels of the rocks with stalactite decorations. Among other things, you will see the so-called Masaryk House, reputedly the most beautiful of the areas in the Punkva Caves, which are part of the longest cave system in the Czech Republic.



EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Energy Security, Energy Transition impacts Paris Agreement



Dr. Sa'd Shannak

A scientist at the Qatar Environment and Energy Research Institute at Hamad Bin Khalifa University in Qatar.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) defines energy security as the continuous and uninterrupted availability of energy sources at an affordable price and on a timely and sustainable basis. One must also differentiate between long-term energy security to supply energy under economic development and environmental requirements, and short-term energy security as a way of enabling the existing energy system to respond promptly to sudden changes in the supply-demand balance. It is worth mentioning that both long- and short-term energy security requires a complex, rigorous and comprehensive set of aligned initiatives, policies, and regulations to meet market-specific objectives in projecting a secure energy pathway for the nation.

However, energy transition, according to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), is a pathway toward the transformation of the global energy sector from fossil-based to zero-carbon. Renewable energy and energy efficiency measures are examples of options that can potentially achieve 90 percent of the required carbon reductions. Additional policy framework and market instruments, information technology and smart technology are needed to accelerate the decarbonization pathway.

Historical changes in the world of energy systems have been triggered recently by conflicts. It is widely recognized that during conflicts, supply chain disruptions affect different sectors of the economy including energy. These disruptions are hindering energy supply and affecting its prices. With oil prices hitting their highest levels since 2008, several communities are suffering what has been described as a cost of living crisis with rising energy bills impacting households, businesses, and entire economies. The world continues to navigate a supply chain crisis post-pandemic along with its transition to greener energies. Overall, climate and energy leaders are



sending mixed signals which creates more energy policy confusion and might derail energy transition and focus investments on energy security.

In Europe, several initiatives have been announced and numerous plans have been proposed to rapidly reduce the reliance on foreign natural gas and its sourcing apportionment. As it is quite challenging to achieve this, given the share of current foreign natural gas in the EU markets, EU activists and attorneys advocated investment in nuclear power and natural gas as green options, thus securing more funding for those segments. According to the IEA, the EU could increase its nuclear production by 20 terawatt-hours (TWh) by the end of the year as a potential source of hydrogen. Though, any additional nuclear capacity will not contribute to the energy mix before 6 to 10 years.

Belgium and Germany, in their efforts to strengthen their independence of energy supply, have decided to delay their nuclear phase out by 10 years, initially scheduled for completion by 2025. Germany has also pledged around \$217 billion to decarbonize its energy supply by 2035.

Furthermore, the EU is committed to building two liquefied natural gas terminals to substitute foreign natural gas. There are plans in place to postpone the planned closure of coal-fired power plants since coal is becoming more economically competitive than gas. As gas prices have skyrocketed, countries might be considering turning back to other affordable options such as coal, which would result in slower recovery and structural change in global power. This can be interpreted as climate change

targets that the EU pledged during COP26 no longer being top priority.

Indeed, many of the current recovery plans focus on the energy supply and security aspects, namely before the cold winter weather sweeps over Europe and demand for heating increases, but what are the implications on the Paris Agreement? The EU has been at the front line of international efforts to combat climate change by limiting global warming to well below 2°C and pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5°C. In late 2020, the EU and its member states presented its updated and enhanced nationally determined contributions from 2018 (40% emissions reduction by 2030), with the new target being to cut emissions from 1990 levels by at least 55 percent by 2030. So, would all these targets continue to hold?

This complexity has persistently resulted in higher oil price volatility. Oil prices have hit another record high as oil and gas costs rise amid concerns of a global economic shock from the current conflict. The US suggested a ban on Russian energy and advised other countries to increase supplies, although that could have enormous ramifications around Europe and the world. Furthermore, the current Biden administration has made several calls for the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to put more oil in the markets. In light of the current chaotic geopolitical context, the crisis has spilled over to other sectors as numerous everyday items from food to petrol and heating, are already rising at their fastest rate to increase all over costs of living.

The major use of oil and gas is not

only for fuel and electricity generation, as there are many other essential uses in our daily life such as electronics, construction, medical, agriculture, household, clothing, etc. Hence, it is more likely that the oil and gas industry will remain part of the global energy mix for some decades to come. While there is a huge momentum to embark on a low carbon pathway to meet climate change objectives, the IEA expects demand for oil to increase 11 percent and reach 103.5 million barrels of oil per day (mb/d) by 2040 from the historical record of 92.5 mb/d as in 2015. This is very well aligned with the useful nature of the oil and gas industry as it is not only a fossil fuel supply source but also a fundamental enabler of renewables. It backs it up whenever needed because of the intermittent nature of renewables. It is also the path to future technologies such as hydrogen.

Overall, energy supply is a long-term strategic thinking issue and should not be affected by technology trends or geopolitical events. More importantly, energy security and energy transition go hand in hand. Thus, building energy transition requires energy security and vice versa in the short and long-term actions to strengthen the stability of supply and to curb the impact of possible future disruption in the market. Currently, most political discussion is over the energy supply side; reducing energy supply from fossil fuels as well as redefining investments going into oil and gas to meet climate change objectives. However, less attention has been paid to the demand side. Climate change is fundamentally a consumption-based issue and more focus should be oriented toward the demand side by advancing energy efficiency and tackling infrastructure bottlenecks.

It is well established now that there are many controllable and uncontrollable drivers affecting the energy sector including climate, geopolitics, supply and demand, etc. The seriousness of managing the sector in this dynamic ecosystem, has made it imperative that policymakers begin to mainstream multi-sectoral and multi-objectives in development policies and strategies.

[The views expressed are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the Hamad Bin Khalifa University's official stance.]

Zain wins 'Best Telecom Company' in Kuwait award

Zain, Kuwait's leading digital service provider, was named 'Best Telecom Company' and 'Best Digital Transformation Telecom Company' in Kuwait for the year 2022 during the annual excellence awards hosted by business magazine International Finance in Dubai.

Zain participated in the awards ceremony held in Jumeirah Emirates Hotel, attended by H.E. the Consul General of Kuwait in Dubai and the Northern Emirates Ali Salem Al Thaidi and Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer Waleed Al Khashti.

This is the fourth recognition from International Finance Magazine, highlighting Zain's leadership in the local market and

its continuous efforts to empower digital transformation within the nation's most vital industries in both the public and private sectors. The awards shed more light on the company's outstanding success, innovation, and relentless pursuit of excellence to serve its customer base, which is the biggest in Kuwait.

In a statement issued on the occasion, the company said: "Zain is proud of this recognition from International Finance Magazine, which also reflects the achievements of Kuwait's private sector organizations in contributing to the national economy. This year's awards, which celebrated its 10th anniversary, honored top companies and institutions that have delivered success, innovation and



excellence, as well as those that have made a vital contribution to the vibrancy of business within Kuwait and the region.

"This recognition further strengthens Zain's role as a leader in the Kuwaiti private sector and reinforces the company's commitment in maintaining the values of its brand. Zain will continue its pledge to provide exclusive services to meet the needs of its customers and facilitate their personal and professional needs.

"Zain always aspires to new levels of excellence in all services it offers to its customers. The company affirms its continuous efforts in meeting customers' needs and aspirations to deliver its promise and offer the best services and latest technologies."

EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Second Green Revolution Will Be Digitized



Maximo Torero
Chief Economist of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Farming is one of the world's oldest and most far-reaching endeavors. Meeting the growing food demands of the global population — projected to reach ten billion by 2050 — amid accelerating climate change presents an unprecedented high-wire act that requires human ingenuity, good governance, and technology.

The last time the agriculture sector went through a seismic shift like this was when new technologies, such as high-yielding wheat and rice seeds, chemical fertilizers, and irrigation technologies, kicked off the Green Revolution in the 1960s. In the following three decades, cereal production in famine-prone Asia doubled, and wheat and rice became cheaper, even though the population increased by 60 percent during this period.

Unfortunately, the Green Revolution brought with it a host of environmental costs. Lax regulations and generous subsidies made fertilizers and pesticides cheap, and farmers, with no training, used them excessively, leaving soil damaged and waterways polluted. As new crops took over, traditional plant varieties were lost, contributing to biodiversity loss.

The rise of robotics and artificial intelligence might help usher in a second, even greener Green Revolution. Robots are already harvesting crops, weeding, and collecting data to improve soil management. Soon, they will be as common in farm pastures and greenhouses as they are in medical labs or Amazon warehouses. The hope is that AI can help meet food and climate goals by adding more precision to agriculture, thus allowing farmers to grow more and waste less.



AI-powered programs, like IBM's Watson, combine data on weather patterns, crop yields, and market prices to advise farmers regarding the best time to plant, the precise amount of fertilizers to use, and when to harvest for peak ripeness. Researchers at Microsoft and Wageningen University in the Netherlands are growing cucumbers with the help of algorithms, combining the efforts of humans and AI to boost yields while using fewer natural resources.

In California, a state that grows irrigated fruits and vegetables at a large scale, such technologies mean real savings in seasonal labor requirements. For example, a \$150,000 'grape-gobbling robot' can sort two tons of grapes in 12 minutes, replacing 15 human workers, as well as reducing the use of fertilizers, pesticides, and water, while producing higher yields.

In the past, agricultural automation was characterized by large industrial farms using heavy machinery to boost yields.

Mechanization on this scale increased producers' dependence on fossil fuels and the unbridled use of chemicals. The steep cost also meant that small farmers, especially in poorer countries, lacked access, creating an uneven playing field.

Digital technologies are changing this to benefit both large-scale and small-scale farms. Farmers have taken a page from ride-sharing apps like Uber, using GPS tracking devices and fleet-management software that allows small producers to share assets required for agricultural mechanization. Some companies, like TROTRO Tractor in Ghana and Tun Yat in Myanmar, allow small farmers to share the cost of renting a tractor they could not afford alone.

Digital support can also upgrade traditional mechanization, even if it is not advanced technology. For example, GPS devices that track cattle ('smart collars') and transmit data about animals' health and movements can determine the amount of feed to dispense and automate the feeding process, improving productivity.

The great advantage of robotics is its potential for cost-effectiveness, allowing small farmers to compete with their larger counterparts. Like computers and smartphones, these machines, once manufactured in large volumes, should become much less expensive, thus paving the way for wider use.


But robotics and AI-based tools, which favor highly skilled farmers over low-skilled ones, have the potential to deepen existing inequality. They could further alienate the world's poorest people, especially those who live in rural areas and eke out a living on a small plot of land without access to markets or financial services.


To ensure that agricultural automation, from tractors to drones, is inclusive, governments should invest in essential infrastructure, including electricity and broadband connectivity in rural areas. They should also provide training on these digital tools to create a new class of skilled farmers who can operate more advanced technologies — and can create new, high-skill opportunities for rural youth.

To be sure, technology alone will not right the world's wrongs when it comes to delivering food more sustainably or making farming more efficient and equitable. Nor can it transform agriculture overnight. From California to Kenya, robotics and AI are still expensive and tend to favor larger farms over smaller ones. Moreover, greater use of robotics could encourage the expansion of monoculture farming systems, as robotic machines require uniformity to function efficiently. That would lead to a loss of genetic diversity.

Robotics and AI in agriculture are still at an early stage of development. Thoughtful policy and rigorous impact assessments of its adoption are required to realize the Second Green Revolution's full potential.

Robots are not substitutes for human farmers. But in a future with billions of extra mouths to feed, they can make food more sustainable, available, and cheaper to produce. It is high time to give machines a chance.







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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT



Taliban Cannot Defeat Women



Gordon Brown and Yasmine Sherif

Gordon Brown, a former prime minister of the United Kingdom, is Chair of Education Cannot Wait's High-Level Steering Group.

Yasmine Sherif is Director of Education Cannot Wait.

In the weeks since the Taliban's December 2022 decree banning young women from attending university, Afghans have shown that they will not take this latest outrage lying down. Brave female students have launched a campaign of resistance, risking beatings, arrest, or worse, and their male counterparts, including many professors, have shown solidarity by walking out of their exams.

As much as the Taliban tries to crush girls' and women's rights, they are unlikely to achieve a final 'victory'. Afghan girls and women enjoyed a right to education in the years prior to the Taliban's return to power in 2021, and now neither intimidation nor prison sentences will silence them. They have experienced what it is to be free, and they will not accept the alternative.

The Taliban have already been warned that if they exclude women from work performed by NGOs providing food and health care, these organizations will have no choice but to leave the country — a message reinforced this week

by United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed. But another way to effect change is to threaten the Taliban regime with the full force of international law. The Taliban's brutal and inhumane treatment of women and girls warrants investigation by an international tribunal. The regime is clearly in breach of the international conventions dealing with children's and women's rights to which it has agreed. No other country in the world bars women and girls from receiving an education, and no other country has such draconian forms of state-led gender persecution.

I have spoken to many Afghan students in my capacity as UN Special Envoy for Global

offing for some time. After the Taliban takeover in 2021, universities introduced gender-segregated classrooms and entrances, and declared that female students could be taught only by women professors or old men. Then, in October 2022, the Taliban issued sweeping restrictions on the subjects that women were permitted to study. Veterinary science, engineering, economics, journalism, and agriculture were all deemed off limits.

But the authorities have been sending mixed signals, which suggests that the regime is not united behind the new restrictions. For example, while thousands of girls and women were allowed to sit for university entrance

in other areas, girls are still allowed to attend regular schools, in open defiance of the Taliban's injunctions. One can also infer internal fissures from the ban on women NGO workers, a policy that the minister of public health claims does not apply to the health sector.

These examples all suggest that the authorities are not legislating from a position of strength. Rather, they are acting out of fear of women's empowerment. After all, there is no other credible justification for such policies. Islam encourages education, and all of Afghanistan's neighbors offer schooling for girls. They understand that girls' education is not only in line with Islamic teaching but also essential to economic prosperity.

Moreover, Afghanistan itself has a history of benefiting from girls' education. The country's own past shows that if the Taliban continue down the road of repression, Afghans will have only half the doctors, nurses, and teachers they need. And if half of Afghanistan's human capital has been squandered, the economy, which desperately needs to be rebuilt, will remain among the worst-performing in the world.

During my many pre-2021 visits to Afghan schools where girls were being taught, I saw firsthand that there was widespread enthusiasm for universal education, both in rural areas as well as the cities. The Taliban's many bans fly in the face of fundamental human aspirations. People everywhere want more freedom, not less.

The Taliban's policy on girls' and women's education represents neither the real Afghanistan nor the true Islam. It is urgent that the international community, and especially the Muslim world, come together to support young Afghan women as they stand up for their rights.

“ The world's poorest and most vulnerable children know that they are now shouldering the heaviest burden in the global fight against one of the greatest injustices of all — the denial of girls' and women's rights. ”

Education, and words cannot capture the frustration they feel. The world's poorest and most vulnerable children know that they are now shouldering the heaviest burden in the global fight against one of the greatest injustices of all — the denial of girls' and women's rights. Afghan girls have been denied access to schools, banned from public spaces, prevented from traveling without a male escort, and forced to wear burqas that cover them from head to toe.

The university clampdown has been in the

exams three months ago, that decision was soon followed by one barring them from matriculating. This likely speaks to a tension between the religious leadership and an education ministry that would prefer to see girls in the classroom rather than sitting at home.

Divisions within the regime are also reflected in the unevenness of policy implementation. In some parts of the country, education is continuing underground or in home schools, with little resistance from the authorities, and



Medical breakthroughs in 2022

While 2020 and 2021 may go down in the world's collective memory as two harrowing years of infections, deaths and economic disruptions caused by the global pandemic unleashed by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, 2022 will be remembered for the triumph of human ingenuity and solidarity, even if belated, in overcoming the virus.

The year 2022 also saw a wealth of other advances in medical research, including a new way of assessing potential dementia symptoms; an insulin-mimicking molecule that may in future help treat diabetes; innovative treatments using stem cell transplants; and, the use of certain psychedelic drugs for treating deep-rooted depression and anxiety, among others. Here we look at some of the medical breakthroughs in the year gone by.

Breakthrough treatments in Alzheimer's Disease: Over 55 million people around the world live with one form or another of dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, which is the most prevalent form of dementia. While there are some treatments that target certain symptoms of dementia, such as memory loss and anxiety, there is currently no cure for Alzheimer's disease and related neurodegenerative conditions. As such, the discovery of a new early warning system to identify the disease could be a remarkable development in treating Alzheimer's.

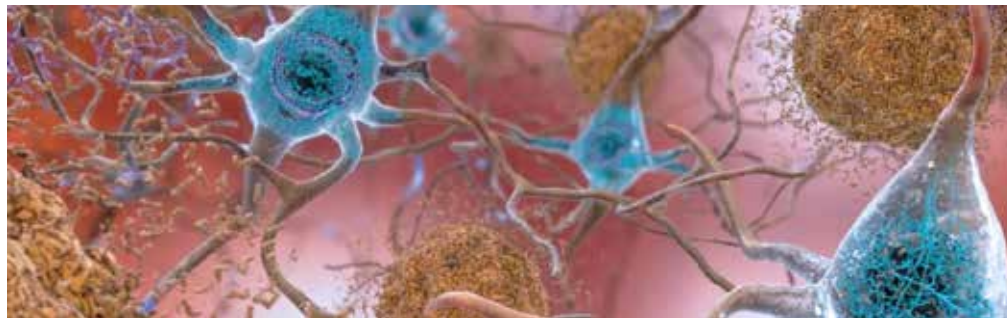
Since the discovery in 2006 that an overaccumulation of beta-amyloid protein in the brain could trigger memory loss and thinking processes characteristic of Alzheimer's, the 'amyloid hypothesis' has informed and guided research into treatments for the disease. The amyloid hypothesis maintains that beta-amyloid proteins form sticky plaques in the brain that disrupt communication between neurons, and thus affects memory and thinking.

However, in July 2022, researchers at Vanderbilt University in the United States claimed that some of the images in the seminal study conducted in 2006 had been manipulated, and could affect the credibility of the prevailing amyloid theory.

But proponents of the hypothesis maintained that the findings from the 2006 paper were very specific and, contrary to some reports, have not significantly affected the progress or direction of research into Alzheimer's.

They point out that had the findings from the 2006 study not been reproduced in numerous Alzheimer's cases since then, it would have been identified as controversial and lose credibility among the medical community. They add that the fact the hypothesis has been vindicated in findings worldwide, is the major reason why it has predominated and guided the direction of studies into treatments for the disease.

Supporters of the hypothesis also note that the recent development of the drug, lecanemab, which attacks the accumulation of beta-amyloid in the brain, and has shown clear promise in recent clinical trials as a potential early treatment for Alzheimer's, attests to the importance



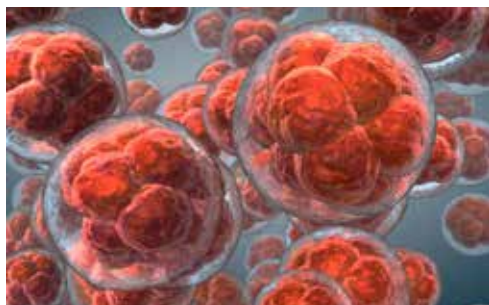
of conducting further research, rather than abandoning the hypothesis.

Scientists admit that beta-amyloid plaques are not the be-all and end-all of dementia research, especially considering that beta-amyloid accumulates in the brains of healthy people as well. However, what makes this protein disruptive in some cases but not others is what remains unclear.

Researchers are also looking into alternative or additional pathologies in Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia, including the role of tau, another protein implicated in dementia, which, some experts say, may be a better indicator of Alzheimer's disease progression.

In other research into the debilitating disease, in September 2022, a separate study on animals suggested that brain inflammation caused by a dysfunction in the blood-brain barrier could be a likely cause of Alzheimer's disease. And in November 2022, another study argued that disruptive swelling along axons, which form the link between neurons, may be the true cause of Alzheimer's symptoms.

Stem-cell treatments: One emerging treatment for dementia is stem cell therapy. Stem cells have the potential to differentiate and 'specialize' into cells with different functions, thus providing healthy cells to replace those that have experienced 'damage'.



Stem cell research made great strides in 2022, with scientists looking at the potential of stem cell treatment in many incurable or difficult-to-treat diseases.

In April 2022, a study showed how implanting induced pluripotent stem cells in rats with Parkinson's disease-like motor symptoms helped reverse those symptoms by replacing damaged neurons. [Pluripotent cells that have the capacity to self-renew by dividing and developing into the three primary germ cell layers of the early embryo.]

Stem cell research has also reached other interesting levels in 2022. In August of last year, two different research teams reported having successfully created embryo models in the laboratory, using not sperm and egg cells, but stem cells to do so. The embryo models managed to develop rudimentary structures, including a beating heart, blood stem cell circulation, a head region with folds, and the beginnings of a gut tube. These developments were viable enough to encourage researchers to continue further studies along this line, in particular, since it steers clear of controversial experiments with potential ethical implications.

Other researchers managed to create brain organoids — models of brain tissue — from stem cells in the lab last year. These models could help scientists learn more about rare neurological conditions, or use models of brain tissue to better understand the way in which viruses, such as SARS-CoV-2, might attack and affect the brain, as well as to further dementia research.

Psychedelic Drugs: Another research avenue that has been gaining ground in 2022 is the use of psychedelics in the treatment of anxiety and depression. Data gathered from international studies show that hundreds of millions of people around the world live with anxiety or depression, which can severely affect their quality of life.

The standard treatments for these mental health conditions include psychotherapy and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), as well as medications known as anti-depressants such as serotonin, which help rebalance the levels of key chemicals in the brain. However, according to some estimates, up to 30 percent of adults living with major depressive disorder have treatment-resistant depression, which does not respond to standard lines of treatment. And around 50 percent of adults with generalized anxiety disorder do not respond to first-line treatments, such as antidepressants.

In a bid to find more effective ways of addressing the symptoms of hard-to-treat depression and anxiety, researchers have turned to a sometimes-controversial line of inquiry, namely psychedelics, particularly ketamine, LSD, and psilocybin, the psychoactive compound in 'magic mushrooms'.

These drugs are, for the most part, illegal for personal use in most countries, but researchers are permitted to study their effects in humans under closely supervised, clinical trial conditions.

Results of some of these studies have been intriguing.

Research studies note that since the human brain has a negativity bias — meaning it tends to hold onto negative memories and emotions — this may exacerbate the negative thinking that occurs in anxiety and depression. A study in October 2022 concluded that infusing ketamine can ease depression symptoms in as little as 4 hours by 'updating' negative beliefs that people with severe depression hold about themselves and the future.

Notably, patients started to show an optimism bias in belief updating 4 hours after the first, single infusion. At one week of treatment, the optimism bias in belief updating correlated to clinical antidepressant effect. And in November, another study found that a single, 25-milligram dose of a synthesized formulation of psilocybin also relieved the symptoms of treatment-resistant depression, although the exact way in which psilocybin acts on the brain remains unclear.

However, the researchers were quick to warn that while their studies indicate that psychedelics may be a potential treatment for anxiety, they also come with a series of caveats. Although ketamine infusion is available, it is not commonly used, and is reserved only for treatment-resistant depression, under strict medical supervision. Ketamine is also designated as a 'controlled substance with inherent risks'.



Also, with regard to psilocybin, while it did help reduce depression symptoms in most of the participants, about a week after the treatment, the most commonly reported side effects were suicidal ideation and intentional self-injury.

The researchers warn that these treatments need to be done only by professionally trained, licensed, or certified practitioners who understand the power of these drugs to create a mind-altered state. In the course of studying psychedelic treatments, a few questions remain: What are the safest doses and delivery methods? Do the benefits outweigh the risks? And who would most benefit from these interventions?

We hope that in 2023, the world will make scientific advancements that take us closer to finding answers to these and other intriguing questions that could transform healthcare practices for the betterment of humanity everywhere.



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