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Quitting While on Top

BY PETER SINGER
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES KUWAIT

Last month, Jacinda Ardern, New Zealand's 42-year-old prime minister, resigned her office, despite the support of a solid parliamentary majority and no challenge to her leadership from within her party. New Zealanders have to go back only six years to find a precedent. In 2016, John Key surprised everyone when, at the age of 55, he made way for his deputy to take over.

A year ago, Ashleigh Barty became the first Australian to win the Australian Open in 44 years. She was 25 years old and the top-ranked women's tennis player in the world for more than 100 weeks. Two months later, she announced her retirement. Likewise, Björn Borg, the Swedish tennis champion, retired in 1983 at the age of 26, and Anthony Kim, a rising star of golf, was also 26 when he stopped playing competitively.

Why do they do it? Borg and Barty have given similar reasons. At first, Borg said, he had enjoyed playing and achieving the goals he set for himself. By the time he retired, however, the fun had gone out of playing tennis at that level.



“Getting to the highest level of a worthwhile activity is an exciting challenge, and overcoming challenges can be enjoyable; but staying at the top as long as one can is a different matter.”

“Basically, over the years, I was practicing, playing my matches, eating, and sleeping,” he said. “But there's other things besides those four things.”

Barty announced her retirement in a video conversation with her friend and former doubles partner, Casey Dellacqua. Tennis, she said, “has given me all of my dreams, plus more, but I know

that the time is right, now, for me to step away and chase other dreams, and to put the rackets down.” Her happiness, she continued, had ceased to depend on her results on the tennis court, and she no longer had the physical drive or the emotional desire to continue to challenge herself at the very top level.

“It's important that I get to enjoy the next phase of my life as Ash Barty the person, not as Ash Barty the athlete.” In announcing her resignation, Ardern expressed similar feelings. It had been, she said, “the most fulfilling five and a half years” of her life.

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Kuwait, first venue for 'Invest in Saudi Arabia' forum



Ambassador of Saudi Arabia, H.E. Prince Sultan bin Saad bin Khaled Al-Saud, confirmed that during the official visit of the Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prince Faisal bin Farhan to Kuwait last week, discussions were held with Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Salem Al-Abdullah, on ways to work together in various fields, and to hold meetings of the Joint Coordination Council between the two countries, which is scheduled in the next two months, as a continuation of previous meetings.

Speaking during the ceremony held in honor of the visiting Saudi foreign minister last week, Kuwait's Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Protocol Affairs, Dhari Al-Ajran revealed that a forum titled 'Invest in Saudi Arabia' will be held in Kuwait on 13 February, coinciding with the official visit to Kuwait next week

by the Saudi Minister of Investment Eng. Khalid bin Abdulaziz Al-Falih. The forum will highlight investment opportunities in Saudi Arabia and the facilities being granted to foreign investors in the kingdom.

Elaborating on the forum, Ambassador Prince Sultan bin Saad noted that major projects currently under implementation in the kingdom, including the mega NEOM project, will be presented at the forum to inform and attract investors from Kuwait. He added that the Investment Ministry in Saudi Arabia chose Kuwait as the first station to hold the forum in view of the strong relations between the two brotherly countries, and to provide investors in Kuwait with an early opportunity to invest in the kingdom.

The ambassador went on to point out that Saudi Arabia is today witnessing an urban renaissance in various fields, and that the kingdom had become an attractive investment destination for businesses from around the world. In addition, Saudi Arabia has become a global economic power as a member of the Group of Twenty, and is working to be among the top five countries economically. He revealed that the kingdom now expects to accomplish its Vision 2030 development plan five years ahead of schedule in 2025.

Moreover, the ambassador welcomed guests who will perform their Hajj this year, indicating that the ministry is keen on facilitating the affairs of pilgrims, as well as launching a digital platform in preparation for the annual Hajj season. He also referred to Saudi's decision to update entry visas through Saudi Airlines and for visitors to obtain an electronic visa, to help increase the number of tourists to the kingdom.



CEFREPA celebrates 40th anniversary

French Center for Research in the Arabian Peninsula (CEFREPA) recently celebrated its 40th anniversary in the region, under the patronage of the French Ambassador H.E. Claire Le Flecher, and in the presence of several diplomats and academics.

The ceremony highlighted the center's research into the ancient history of Kuwait, and the discoveries it made in this regard over the past many decades. During a press conference held on the occasion, Director of CEFREPA, Dr. Makram Abbas stated, "We are celebrating the 40th anniversary of our center, which was founded in Sana'a in 1982 by the famous French archaeologist Christian Robin."

He added, "We are commemorating the founding of this center here, given its importance to Kuwait and the Arabian Peninsula as a whole. Moreover, this center is not only interested in antiquities, but also in all human and social sciences. We try to study everything that is produced in the Arabian Peninsula, based on an accurate scientific methodology."

With regard to the latest discoveries found in Kuwait, Mr. Abbas explained that between 2012 and 2013, the French excavation team discovered traces of a monastery and a church. In addition to the site of the castle, in which remains of people from the army of Alexander the Great were discovered, which reflects the existence of a common civilization between East and West. He also talked about the discoveries made in the regions of Najran, Al-Hama and Al-Ula in Saudi Arabia, where there are archaeological teams working to highlight the importance of this geographical region of the Arabian Peninsula.

The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Center for Scientific Research affiliated to the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in France, and Kuwait continue to support the French Center of Research in its endeavors. He also thanked the National Council for Culture, Arts and Literature and the Ministry of Information for their support.



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Al Ansari Exchange Kuwait integrates Kuwait Mobile ID into its mobile app

Al Ansari Exchange Kuwait, a leading foreign exchange and worldwide money transfer company, announced its partnership with the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) to integrate the Kuwait Mobile ID interface into the Al Ansari Exchange app. This will enable seamless online registration and verification processes, and faster customer onboarding.

Kuwait Mobile ID was incorporated into the company's digital solutions to help boost its technology-driven growth strategy and ensure complete access to reliable and convenient services for its network of customers. With the latest integration, Al Ansari Exchange's customers in Kuwait can now take advantage of seamless registration and verification processes to use its digital service offerings and send money around the globe at any point.

Vivek Nair, Country Head of Al Ansari Exchange Kuwait, stated "In light of Kuwait's 2035 vision to transform into a financial and trade hub regionally and internationally, we are pleased to work with PACI to integrate the Kuwait Mobile ID interface into our mobile application. With this venture, we look forward to achieving streamlined onboarding procedures, enhanced security and higher user interest to consistently strengthen our leading position in the remittance and currency exchange sector."

The Kuwait Mobile ID from PACI is a mobile-based digital identification derived from the Civil ID that features identity verification, e-services authentication and use of trusted digital signatures for documents and transactions, among others. Al Ansari Exchange Kuwait, with its diverse set of capabilities, is well-positioned to provide its users with a secure and reliable digital experience while promoting digital advancements across its operations.





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Ambassador Dhari Al-Ajran accorded grand farewell



THE TIMES KUWAIT REPORT

A grand farewell reception was held by the Dean of Diplomatic Corps and Ambassador of Tajikistan H.E. Dr. Zubaydullo Zubaydov, on the occasion of the end of tenure of Kuwait's Assistant Foreign Minister for Protocol Affairs, Ambassador Dhari Al-Ajran.

On behalf of the entire diplomatic fraternity Ambassador Zubaydov extended his thanks, gratitude and appreciation to Ambassador Dhari Al-Ajran for his generous support and constructive cooperation with the diplomatic community to help fulfill their duties and activities during their tenures in Kuwait.

Ambassador Zubaydov wished Ambassador Al-Ajran success, and beseeched God Almighty to grant him health, happiness and prosperity. A poem recited on the occasion in honor of Ambassador Al-Ajran, expressed the thanks and appreciation of the diplomatic community to the outgoing Chief of Protocol.

In his emotional address to the gathering, Ambassador Al-Ajran thanked the entire diplomatic fraternity for the continued support and warmth towards him and to Kuwait. He especially expressed his thanks to the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, Ambassador Zubaydov, and to all heads of diplomatic missions in Kuwait for the honor granted to him through the occasion. He added that he had always strived to maintain his relations with ambassadors and to provide them with all facilities in the ministry of foreign affairs and abroad.

Pointing to several interesting facets of his long and successful tenure as head of protocol at Kuwait's foreign ministry, Ambassador Al-Ajran disclosed that he had the honor to work with seven foreign ministers of Kuwait over the past 14 years. He indicated that the most challenging phase was during the tenure of the former Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid, while he was the foreign minister, during which period Kuwait hosted several high-profile international summits and conferences.



He went on to state that there are around 140 diplomatic missions in Kuwait, and that the Protocol Department is directly responsible for these missions 24 hours a day. He added that this obligation strengthened the cordial relationship between the diplomatic community and the protocol management team at Kuwait's Foreign Ministry. Elaborating on this topic, Ambassador Ajran added, "At the end of my tenure, I informed the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah that he has at his disposal a well-trained and experienced team of protocol staff, ready and willing to uphold and provide the highest standards of international protocol to the diplomatic missions in Kuwait, as well as to visiting state guests."

Pointing out that a successful leader is one who leaves his post but continues to work through the influence his leadership role has created among team members over the years, he indicated that Kuwait's protocol management team is fully capable and competent to complete any protocol duties entrusted to them with efficiency and in full professionalism.

Recalling that more than 20 international and regional conferences were hosted by Kuwait during his tenure in the ceremonies department, he asserted: "These events were managed with utmost success and transparency by the protocol management team through coordination and cooperation with the diplomatic missions in Kuwait." He went on to add, "Although I have left the foreign ministry, my spirit continues to linger



Noting that there are many talented personnel among the youth working at the foreign ministry, he urged them to persevere and commit themselves to their duties so as to develop their professional acumen. He also highlighted the role played by Kuwait's Diplomatic Institute, which has since its inception qualified and successfully graduated many young nationals in the diplomatic field. The institute continues to provide the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with an effective supervision and training tool for the country's diplomatic personnel, so as to enable them to adapt and perform in an ever changing international climate.

On a personal note, Ambassador Al-Ajran said that his busy schedule at the Protocol Department did not affect his relations with his children, as he always tried to find a work-life balance that allowed him to keep his work away from his private life at home. Earlier in the evening, Ambassador Zubaydov extolled the professionalism and

commitment to work and to his country of Ambassador Al-Ajran, by stating: "I am honored and pleased to welcome all of you to this ceremony, which we are holding in honor of Assistant Foreign Minister for Protocol Affairs, Ambassador Dhari Al-Ajran, on the occasion of the end of his tenure at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kuwait."

"On this occasion, it gives me great pleasure to congratulate my brother, Ambassador Al-Ajran, on his honorable career, his noble approach and stances during his work in the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and on his good efforts and achievements, which are recognized for their distinction."

He went on to add that all the ambassadors, whether in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or colleagues in the diplomatic missions accredited to the State of Kuwait, will testify to Ambassador Al-Ajran's deep love for his country and his devotion to His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince, and to the people of Kuwait."

Concluding his speech, Ambassador Zubaydov said, "Ambassador Al-Ajran performed his work and exercised his duties with all professionalism and sincerity in order to serve the State of Kuwait, and to strengthen relations with all other friendly and brotherly countries. We, as ambassadors of our country to the State of Kuwait, have always felt and been touched by the support and assistance of Ambassador Al-Ajran, as he was keen to provide all that was required for diplomatic missions to carry out their work, tasks and various activities in the best and most complete manner."

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Nawaf Alrudaini

A Retrospective on Tourism and Recreation

Nourah Al-Oseimi
Exclusive to The Times Kuwait

With the easing of COVID-19 travel restrictions worldwide, those of us who can afford it are finally able to plan proper vacations and holidays with ease. The options are vast and there is so much in God's green Earth for us to see.

I have also observed with interest the resurgence of tourism across the MENA region and the GCC more specifically. Riyadh Season in Saudi Arabia, FIFA World Cup in Qatar — an event that sparked an unprecedented love for football in my heart, Dubai... enough said, I guess.

And yet, I could not help but wonder why the tourism sector in Kuwait has not picked up as much as that of our neighbors. I do not claim to understand the specifics or what we could be doing to potentially change and enhance this industry in our beloved hometown. Instead, I opted to speak to someone who understood the ins and outs of this sector like the back of his hand.

I reached out to Nawaf Alrudaini, 47, a seasoned expert with a degree in Commercial Recreation Management from Appalachian State University and 19 years of experience in the tourism industry having formerly worked in some of our country's most renowned tourist attractions — The Scientific Center, Sheikh Jaber Al Ahmad Cultural Center, Sheikh Abdullah Al Salem Cultural Center, and Al-Shaheed Park Museums.

Nawaf recollected the earlier days of his career when he first started at the Scientific Center. "The way it was managed, it was unique. The entire team, from top to bottom, were passionate to begin with, they were knowledgeable. Once you start at the top, and you see how passionate the top people are, it affects you. It was a family environment, we worked as a very close-knit group."

"The cultural centers are beautiful places; the projects are beautiful, and the potential is superb." And to showcase these centers' potential, Nawaf emphasized the importance of excellent marketing and communication skills.

"I studied tourism, my main focus was the hospitality part and throughout my career I focused as well on marketing and communication." Indeed, the majority of Nawaf's career across these tourist attractions was largely in a marketing/public relations/communications role. So, what is the connection between two and two?



"Very good question, and it took you a while to come up with it." I stare in shock. Nawaf, unfazed, continues. "When these centers initially opened, there were opening ceremonies, there was a lot of hype and buzz when they first launched, but some of that has not been sustained. People forget that you exist over time, so you have to remind them that you are there and give them reasons to visit you again, and that's the role of marketing and communication."

"You need programs and activities, outside the core exhibitions available in the centers, to market and attract new visitors. When I have these opportunities, I take advantage of that and promote them very well."

Nonetheless, I've always felt that these centers are geared towards a certain audience and do not necessarily have mass appeal. Are Kuwaitis interested in a touristic experience that also serves as an educational one?

"There is demand for experiences like that. It was clear when I first started and I believe there's still ongoing demand otherwise the opening of these cultural centers wouldn't have happened."

So, how do we ensure that successful touristic projects are launched and that the success of these projects is sustained?

"The ideal scenario is to have a Tourism Authority to regulate all activities related to this industry in Kuwait. To promote Kuwait overseas and to regulate projects from within. They can also set a clear plan and strategize for the future of Kuwait's tourism sector. They shouldn't implement any projects directly, instead, they can serve as a regulator."

"Winter Wonderland is a great example of that. The land on which that project was developed is owned and regulated by the Touristic Enterprises Company, and it was contracted to a private company to operate, and we see how successful that project is."

Indeed, it is so successful that this writer has not been able to secure tickets for months.

"We also have opportunities to enhance accessibility when



we upgrade our transport and travel infrastructure, Kuwait has the opportunity to be a travel hub within this region. A new international airport terminal is currently under construction and this will strengthen our national carrier's position as a link between us and the rest of the world. We can take advantage of this. It starts as people coming in for a layover, which then turns into a short stay and ideally it turns into a long stay."

I pause and reflect on Nawaf's comments... as wonderful as it may be to open up Kuwait to a more global audience, I cannot help but consider the demand for recreational activities for local residents and how we are always looking for fun things to do on our weekends.

"We have incredible cultural attractions that honor our history as a nation, places like Al Mubarakiya and Yom Al Bahar Heritage Village. We have a responsibility to preserve these landmarks with historical significance, and introduce fresh ideas to keep people interested in visiting them."

"The challenge is that sometimes we find one formula that works and we keep recycling it, the key in an industry like tourism, and most industries, is innovation."

Nawaf, the ultimate cruise aficionado, began describing to me how we can tap into some of our underutilized islands as potential ports for international cruise lines.

"Cruises are a great way to drive both domestic and international tourism. And they can be a way to support local businesses because when travelers disembark from the ship, they'll want to explore different places, attractions and restaurants."

I asked Nawaf if that is the reason people travel a lot, are they searching for something new and different?

"People often look to travel abroad during holidays because they're looking for new experiences. Other than malls and cinemas, which they visit every weekend, there are no ongoing recreational activities that families can enjoy locally."

As our conversation was coming to a close, I wanted to know what Nawaf's hopes and expectations are for this particular industry.

"We need more tourism projects as impactful as Winter Wonderland and even bigger in the future. We need to start planning for future years and what we expect from this industry. Do we want to drive domestic tourism or international tourism? I think we should focus our efforts more locally at first and invest in more touristic infrastructure for locals to enjoy. Once we establish Kuwait as a touristic haven for the locals, only then should we start looking to attract tourists from abroad. Kuwait is full of passionate and creative people. We have so much potential."

I sensed how invested Nawaf was in this industry and his unwavering dedication and desire to see it succeed. When our conversation came to an end, I left feeling a renewed sense of hope and excitement for what the future of tourism may look like in Kuwait knowing that strong-willed men and women like him are advocating for positive change.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article reflect Nawaf Alrudaini's experiences in previous posts he has held across different organizations. They do not reflect any ongoing or current activities in any of the places mentioned above. Alrudaini expressed his respect and appreciation for these experiences and wished all the centers mentioned above continued success and growth.

Nourah Al-Oseimi is a 30-year-old Kuwaiti who holds a master's degree in business administration. Nourah has worked in different places such as the Central Bank of Kuwait, the United Nations, and the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences. She serves as a free-lance contributing writer to The Times Kuwait Newsmagazine. Her column, Essentially Kuwaiti, features an in-depth look at exceptional Kuwaiti men and women and their efforts towards the realization of a New Kuwait.



French Embassy launches French language programs

Cultural, scientific and educational cooperation between France and Kuwait has been going on since 1969, alongside the mutual desire to continue improving these distinguished relations, said French Ambassador, H.E. Claire Le Flecher while launching new French language programs in Kuwait.

She added that this desire to improve relations allows the French Institute in Kuwait and the French Research Center for the Arabian Peninsula in Kuwait to enhance the learning opportunities that intensify the French relations with the cultural and scientific community and civil society in Kuwait.

The ambassador went on to point out that the French language has been taught in Kuwait since 1966, and currently nearly 1,000 teachers teach the French language in public and private institutions in the country. She noted that a regional training program initiated by the embassy is part of the dynamic bilateral cooperation between the two countries.

For his part, the Assistant Undersecretary for Public Education at the Ministry of Education, Osama Al Sultan, said: "We



have several programs with the French government, the latest of which has commenced at Gulf University. He added that more than 40 Kuwaiti teachers are currently enrolled in this intensive course, in addition to about 40 teachers from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt".

Al-Sultan added that the introduction of the French language in the intermediate stage is still under discussion, pointing out that it needs updating curricula, training the

teachers, and modernizing schools.

Speaking on the occasion, Chairman of the Board of Trustees at the Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST), Nawaf Arhama, expressed his happiness to participate in the joint educational program with the French Institute and the French Embassy, stressing that culture and education for the university are not only academic degrees, but go beyond that to build knowledge.

Director of the French Institute in Kuwait,

Benoit Katala, added that a cooperation agreement was signed last March with Kuwait's Ministry of Education to enhance the teaching of the French language, which includes introducing the language in seventh grade instead of the 11th grade.

Katala added that the agreement enables 10 to 15 schools to expand the teaching of the French language from the seventh grade, which will begin to be implemented in September 2023.



Delays in civil ID issuance hassles expats

Delays in issuing civil cards for expatriates by the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) has caused inconveniences and hassles for many people who have not yet received their new or renewed card.

Despite the authority collecting KD5 with each application from expatriates for the renewal of a Civil ID card, or for issuing a new card, the delivery of cards is currently limited to only citizens and children under the age of five.

Various reasons have been cited for the delays in card distribution, including shortage of cards, and the push by the government for digital transformation, which has led to the presence of the digital civil ID (My Identity).

However, the problems faced by many expatriates stems from the fact that the digital 'My Identity' is not recognized by many international authorities outside the country, and even by some entities within the country. Expatriates point to several instances where the digital ID has not been accepted as a There are several.

While the use of the digital 'My ID' card is fully valid for travel into and out of Kuwait and for most government transactions within the country, many residents and expatriates complain of specific instances where the digital ID is not accepted as valid proof. For instance, some foreign embassies require the original civil

ID when submitting an application for a visa, after Kuwait discontinued the use of a residence sticker in the passport of foreigners.

Moreover, someone who is obtaining residence for the first time is asked for the serial number on the civil ID card, when they attempt to download the 'My Identity' app on mobile phones. However, this number is not issued until the physical card is issued for the first time.

Also, during security campaigns, the police ask for the civil card to prove the legal status, but sometimes the expatriate may not have a smartphone or his phone has a problem, or its screen is not clear, which leads to unnecessary hassles and complications for the involved expat.

Additionally, some government agencies outside Kuwait do not acknowledge Kuwait's digital 'My ID' app and require the person to show the original civil card in order to prove that



he is a resident of Kuwait, especially since there is no residence sticker on his passport.

Expatriates hope that the delays, in some cases extending over eight months, will be resolved by the concerned authorities in the near future, and that the situation will return to the pre-pandemic period when the card was issued within a few days following request for a renewal.





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Thought “ for the week

Curiosity will conquer fear
even more than bravery will.

- James Stephens

Exploring the good and bad of tofu



Ask Mira: Eating Right to Live Happy & Healthy

Eating tofu every day is perfectly safe for vegetarians, vegans or omnivores. This delicious plant-based protein can be added to just about any stir-fry, soup, or pasta and makes a fantastic replacement for meat in a vegan diet.

Tofu is made from soybeans, which are in the bean family. The tofu-making process is quite simple. Tofu-makers steam soy milk and add a coagulating or thickening agent, which turns the milk into curds. Then, they press a lot of the water out of the curds, turning them into firm blocks.

Tofu is a decent source of vegetarian and vegan protein, it is low in saturated fats, calories, and high in very important dietary minerals, like calcium and magnesium, iron and B-Vitamins. It contains all nine essential amino acids, making it a 'complete protein' for the body.

A block of firm tofu weighing approximately 120 grams contains:

- 165 calories
- 5.3 g of carbohydrate
- 11 g of fat
- 3 g of fiber
- 15.5 g of protein
- 420 mg of calcium
- 65 mg of magnesium
- 3.3 mg of iron
- 280 mg of phosphorus
- 180 mg of potassium
- 2 mg of zinc

Soy contains heart-healthy isoflavones, which benefit blood vessels and can improve blood flow. Isoflavones have many other properties, including anticancer, antioxidant, and antidiabetic. These properties reduce the risk of osteoporosis, menopausal symptoms and boost brain functions.

And, because tofu is a complete plant protein source, it is a super food for those who aim to build muscles as it has

all nine essential amino acids that the body cannot produce on its own.

Nevertheless, it has been shown that isoflavones, which are a form of phytoestrogens (plant-based estrogen like compounds), can interfere with thyroid activity and should be taken with care, especially if you are prone to hypothyroidism.

In addition, tofu contains substances with properties similar to vitamin B12, but which your body cannot utilize in the same way as natural vitamin B12. Relying only on tofu for supply of vitamin B12 can lead to vitamin B12 deficiency in your body.

In conclusion, soy in its whole form such as edamame, tofu and whole soy milk, is healthier than red meat in the sense that soy provides an excellent source of protein, fiber, vitamins and minerals — without the cholesterol and saturated fat found in meat. But as every food that has controversial reviews, moderation is still the best approach to follow.

Until next time ...

Eat like Mira
Create healthy habits, not restrictions

To subscribe to my diet programs,
don't forget to log in to:
www.eatlikemira.com.



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

Vegetarian diet, a new lifestyle trend in Kuwait



Recent studies and research in Kuwait indicate an increase in the number of people opting a vegetarian diet for various reasons. Among the reasons for the spread of vegetarianism are the influence of social media, travel and contact with other countries and cultures.

Head of the Nutrition Awareness Department at the Ministry of Health, Dr. Sana Abdullah Al-Majed, confirmed that although there are no statistics on the exact percentage of vegetarians in Kuwait, a significant number of people now practice vegetarianism in its various forms, and for different reasons.

Vegetarianism may not be as common in Kuwait as in many other countries, but that has not prevented many restaurants and cafes, and supermarkets in Kuwait from offering a selection of good vegetarian choices. From milk alternatives such as soy milk and almond milk to tofu, vegetables, fruits, legumes, as well as products that contain vegetable gelatin instead of animal gelatin are now readily available across Kuwait. A future in Kuwait where there is great demand for vegetarian foods is a strong possibility given the spread of the vegetarian diet.

However, nutritionists and dietitians advice vegetarians, especially those new to the diet, that they must ensure their diet includes a variety of foods that provide all the nutrients the body needs for its proper functioning.

Vegetarian meals are usually low in calories and contain high nutritional value with less amounts of saturated fat and cholesterol sources. Hence this lifestyle may contribute to reduced cholesterol levels, low blood pressure and loss of weight. The vegetarian diet also contains lots of dietary fiber and vegetarians are less susceptible to some types of cancer, especially colon cancer. Hence a lifestyle change to vegetarianism is beneficial if the change is well researched and well planned.



Types of vegetarians:

There are mainly six types of vegetarian diet that people choose to follow:

Vegan or Pure Vegetarians: Do not have any kind of meat, birds, fish or any kind of animal products such as eggs, milk and honey.

Lacto-vegetarians: Do not have any kind of meat, birds, fish and eggs but consume milk and its products.

Ovo-vegetarians: Do not have any kind of meat, birds, fish, or dairy products, however they have eggs.

Lacto Ovo-vegetarians: Do not have any kind of meat, birds or fish, however, consume eggs and milk products.

Pollotarianism: They do not consume any red meat or fish, however they eat poultry and birds.

Pescatarian: Do not have any kind of meat, birds and eggs but allow fish.



Sri Lankan embassy celebrates 75th anniversary of country's independence

Sri Lankan Embassy celebrated the 75th anniversary of the country's independence last week at the Regency Hotel with a grand reception showcasing the country's rich cultural heritage. Minister of Public Works and Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy, Amani Sulaiman Bugamaz, who was the chief guest on the occasion, joined Sri Lankan Ambassador-designate Kandeepan Bala to cut the ceremonial cake.

Guests were treated to a dazzling cultural show by the renowned Rasika and Nisha Cultural troupe from Colombo, which demonstrated the rich heritage and legacy of Sri Lanka and reflected the country's multi-ethnic society. Several ambassadors, Kuwaiti dignitaries, Sri Lankan nationals and special invitees were among those who attended the celebration.

In his welcome address, Ambassador Bala expressed his government's sincere appreciation to His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince, His Highness the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister for their continued support to strengthen Sri Lanka-Kuwait bilateral relations, which were first established 51 years ago in 1971.

"Kuwait is home to over 100,000 Sri Lankan expatriates and the presence and contribution of our people over the past years has become a driving force of our multifaceted ties with the State of Kuwait," said Ambassador Bala. He added that the country has been successful in diversifying deployment of migrant workers from the traditional sectors to many fields of professional and skilled employment in Kuwait."

Talking about the Joint Ministerial Committee, he said it is one of the key bilateral engagements where Kuwaiti and Sri Lankan authorities meet and deliberate on matters of mutual interest. Kuwait Fund has also been one of the



important sources that supports a number of important infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka, contributing to the socio-economic development of our society. Bilateral trade and tourism have registered respectable figures in recent years, showing clear signs of recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Air connectivity has also improved, with both Sri Lankan Airlines and Jazeera Airways increasing the frequency of their daily flights."

The ambassador also congratulated fellow Sri Lankans in Kuwait and wished them a happy celebratory season. "I also recognize that this season is very special for our friends in Kuwait as the month of February marks national celebrations in the country. I take this opportunity to extend warm congratulations to all our friends in Kuwait," he noted.

Elaborating on the historical setting of the occasion and the country's development since independence, the ambassador stated: "Today's event marks the 75th anniversary of the Independence of Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka emerged as a sovereign nation in 1948, having experienced around five centuries of colonial rule. The process of nation building has been... like every other nation experienced, tedious and

challenging. Successive governments in the post independent years have strived to ensure universal access to education and healthcare to the citizens and the results of such farsighted vision is quite conspicuous in the modern days.

"Also, realizing the importance of international relations, the first priority

of the nation building process of the post independent Sri Lanka was to forge relations with our immediate neighbors and the big powers. And as of date we have established diplomatic relations with over 175 countries. Sri Lanka continues to be a constructive contributor to the many regional and international organizations. Our active role in Non-aligned Movement, the Commonwealth of Nations, Colombo Plan, and Bandung Conference are testimony to our nations' contribution to the many multilateral and regional bodies.

"I also wish to thank the private and corporate sector business entities for their trust and recognition of Sri Lanka's able, educated and trainable workforce who continue to contribute to the state of Kuwait. These are just a few reflections of the growing relations between Sri Lanka and the State of Kuwait which continue to strengthen our multifaceted ties," said the ambassador in conclusion.

Lawmakers propose work-free days during Ramadan

Ahead of the upcoming holy month of Ramadan, Parliamentarian Muhammad Hayef Al-Mutairi has submitted a proposal to suspend work at ministries and other government entities, as well as in public and private institutions, during the last ten days of Ramadan.

The proposal highlights the last ten days of Ramadan as having a status and virtue over other nights of Ramadan observance. In addition, Al-Mutairi explained that the holiday during these nights brings many benefits and interests to the state and society, including confronting absenteeism at work and an

easing of traffic congestions. He also said that this move would also create an opportunity for those who want to travel to perform Umrah, in addition to other holiday benefits from the economic perspective.

In a related news, MP Hamdan Al-Azmi submitted another proposal to implement the online education system during the holy month of Ramadan in all levels of public and university education, provided it is made optional for students.

Al-Azmi added that the proposal considered that physical attendance during Ramadan is a burden to the teaching staff and students at various educational levels, in addition to the severe traffic congestion caused during this period. He added that the proposal was feasible considering that the country successfully implemented the distance education system during the coronavirus pandemic.



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Building bridges to inspire and empower communities to thrive



T'apping into the Untapped', a podcast by Mercedes Vazquez on social media platform Spotify, recently hosted Christy Watkins and Guillermo Christensen as exceptional guests in a panel conversation around some of the world's most pressing issues that need to be tackled so as to enable a responsible and thriving future. The discussion provided an integrated security approach to cybersecurity, combating ransomware, gender inclusivity and importance of a level-playing field.

Christy Watkins is the Public Affairs Counselor of the United States in the State of Kuwait, and Guillermo Christensen is a Partner at K&L Gates, a cybersecurity and national security expert and a former official of both the CIA and the FBI in the United States.

The exclusive interview that took place during Guillermo's visit to Kuwait, was part of the initiative by 'Tapping into the Untapped' to build bridges between continents while inspiring and empowering communities to advance, flourish and thrive.

"The US State Department and the US Government are prioritizing cybersecurity," noted Ms. Watkins at the start of the podcast.

Christy and Guillermo also shared their personal journey and story as well as their motivation to pursue a career in foreign service. As Christy explained: "The US foreign service has been a natural fit for me. It has been a great experience being able to push foreign policy but also to learn about how other Governments and how other people think."

Guillermo then added his experiences while pivoting from working for the

Government, to diplomacy to cybersecurity, which he hoped would help, inspire and empower younger generations to pursue a career in diplomacy and cybersecurity.

Turning to ransomware, Guillermo noted that companies of all sizes and scales, from Small and Medium Businesses (SMB) to very large corporations, are being subject to an organized crime of ransomware. He added, "Ransomware is an epidemic of crime that is affecting companies, sometimes individuals and certainly governments across the world. Ransomware criminals have turned their criminal activity into a very profitable business that is well-organized and globalized with affiliates all over the world."

"They have expanded their business model by renting or leasing their service, in what we call, ransomware-as-a service. Very similar to what big companies do where they rent you space on their cloud infrastructure, hackers and criminals are providing you their illegal expertise as a service, including collecting the ransom, distributing it and then distributing the profit. They are doing this at scale where some of them are taking in profits of hundreds of millions of dollars a year."



Part of Guillermo's visit to Kuwait also included a meeting with women in technology and cybersecurity in Kuwait. During the meeting, Guillermo underlined the opportunities for women to enter the cybersecurity workforce, where women are still underrepresented globally — women account for only 2 out of 10 cybersecurity professionals despite representing almost half of the global workforce according to the World Bank. The discussions on existing opportunities in the industry left all the participants energized.

Mercedes then added that as an interlink in taking an integrated approach to security, it has become increasingly clear that inclusivity is key to peaceful, secure, sustainable development. Christy then shared: "When we take a look at the success of women, what we have seen is when women have access to good jobs, steady income, good healthcare, a level-playing field, this is good for everyone. It is good for their children, it is good for their family and it is good for the economy. When we talk about inclusion, we are talking about women having the same opportunities as men, around the world."



Deployment of new Filipino domestic workers put on hold

Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) in the Philippines has put on hold the deployment of first-time Filipino domestic workers to Kuwait, until more safeguards are in place for

their protection and welfare

Announcing this, Migrant Workers Secretary Susan Ople said that the application of first-time migrant workers, specifically for household services in Kuwait, will be deferred until significant reforms regarding protection of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) are implemented.

Ms. Ople, who is now in Tokyo to assist President Marcos in his meeting with Japanese shipowners, said that Filipinos wishing to work abroad as domestic workers have several

countries to choose from, and should not worry about the new advisory on deployment to Kuwait.

"Hong Kong remains a strong alternative and is much nearer to home, and we also have Singapore, where we have very good relations with our counterpart ministry," she added.

Expressing optimism that significant changes can still be made to the existing bilateral labor agreement that the Philippines has with Kuwait, Ms. Ople clarified that the reason the government had not decided on a

total ban on deployment, was because there were many OFWs who have already worked in Kuwait for several years who still want to go back to their old employers or seek new ones. She added, "We have also been informed through diplomatic channels of the willingness of the Kuwait government to engage in bilateral labor talks."

We are preparing well in advance for these talks, bringing with us an accumulation of abuse done over the years, hence the need for significant changes," Ople said.

Lulu Exchange partners with eNET to launch value added services on its mobile app

Lulu Exchange – one of Kuwait's leading financial services companies, announced its strategic partnership with payment services company eNet to provide customers of LuLu Money transfer app with services such as mobile phone payment and recharge, apart from recharge of fuel cards, online cards and game cards, and installment payment services for school fees.

The agreement was signed between Mr. Sabah Khaled Al-Ghunaim, Chairman of the Board of Directors, Automated Services Network Company and Mr. Adeeb Ahamed, Managing Director, LuLu Financial Holdings, in the presence of the CEO Khaled Al-Ghunaim and Executive Manager Afif Makhai and Mr. Sreenath Sreekumar,

General Manager of LuLu Exchange.

Mr. Adeeb Ahamed said that LuLu Exchange is constantly rolling out services aligned with its vision to innovate value and inspire experiences. "Our technology-led payments platform enables us to partner with the right institutions to enable our customers to meet their diverse payment needs, digitally. We are happy to associate with eNET which is known for its high standards and customer first approach, in providing value added services to the people of Kuwait through our payments app."

Mr. Sabah Khaled Al-Ghunaim expressed his pride in the cooperation and partnership with Lulu Exchange as a well-established financial institution, with a wide customer base in the

State of Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf, in providing various payment services to its subscribers through the LuLu Exchange application.

It is worth noting that the Automated Services Network Company – eNET, is the first company of its kind in Kuwait that provides automatic payment services to citizens and residents, from paying bills to local telecom companies, to filling prepaid cards with filling gasoline, paying financing installments, in addition to paying school fees and charitable donations. The company also provides a variety of entertainment services, from buying internet cards and games to renewing satellite station subscriptions, etc., through several channels (website, mobile application, self-service machines)



which are located in more than 80 per cent of Kuwait's complexes, in addition to more than 2,500 points of sale.

Having commenced operations in 2012, LuLu Exchange is among the leading and most trustworthy financial service providers in Kuwait. The company is a part of LuLu Financial Holdings, an ISO:9001 certified finan-

cial services conglomerate which has a reputation for providing the highest quality service to consumers. The company's mobile app, LuLu Money, is among the most highly rated payments app in the country, enjoying a double-digit growth month-on-month. For details, visit www.luluexchange.com



D-illusions

Meryl Mathew
Special to The Times Kuwait

When two hearts beat together with a single vision they create amazing things that neither one cannot create on their own. Such is the story of Vibin and Ria, two passionate dancers who recently spoke to The Times Kuwait in an exclusive interview on their personal and professional journey, performing together and creating epic shows that have been widely applauded.

While Vibin was never technically trained in dance during his childhood in India, his passion for dance led him to be inspired by dance legends such as Michael Jackson and the Indian dance virtuosa Prabhu Deva. He practiced their moves over the years before eventually developing a style of his own. It was only during his college days that he began his formal training in dance by joining Kalabhavan, the acclaimed center



for performing arts in the Indian state of Kerala. There he received plenty of opportunities to participate in dance performances at the state and national level. And later, when he moved to Kuwait with a full-time job in IT, he still pursued dance. It was his sheer determination to have something of his own which led to the birth of D-illusions, which today is a well-established and recognized dance academy in Kuwait that trains children and adults of all ages in urban hip hop. They also lead dance performances at many well-known events in Kuwait.

Ria on the other hand began her training in classical dance at the age of five and continued training until the age of 10. Later when her teacher directed her towards western dance, she decided to train in breakdancing. This was when she moved to the Indian city of Pune for her degree where she came across many other talented dancers and dance troupes. While in Pune she got the opportunity to work with Bollywood dancers who performed at grand weddings, taking her to several venues. When she moved to Kuwait for work, she continued to learn dance in the evenings with few other dance groups in the country, until one day she was introduced to Vibin and D-illusions.

"I started attending Vibin's classes and I found

Creating the impossible through dance



it very challenging. Vibin was teaching hip hop during the classes. Each time I went to his class I had this grumpy face because it was so difficult, but I used to enjoy the challenge. Initially I felt like I'm not good enough, but I never skipped a class and continued to practice. So that's how I started off with D-illusions, and from then to now I have improved a lot," said Ria.

Elaborating on the story and growth of D-illusions over the years, Vibin said: "D-illusions started with only five members in 2007 — myself, Imtiyaz, Bader, Samer and Delma. We got together to practice and plan for small shows." They had a few events when they began dancing as D-illusions and later as their popularity grew, they started to teach dance professionally. Vibin believes that it is only through God's grace that D-illusions has been growing every year. Today D-illusions teach dancing at multiple venues such as the Indian School of Excellence and at Carmel School in Kuwait, and organize large-scale musical events such as the annual VIBE show, which serves as a platform for students of D-illusions to perform before a large audience. VIBE has become a much-anticipated event in the Indian community's cultural calendar by the participants, their parents and the community at large. D-illusions also have several online viral dance videos to their credit.

Ria believes that it is possible for anyone to learn a style of dance, but it depends on the individual, their passion, their body style and age. She adds that people who want to learn and become a dancer must be willing to give time towards practice and believe in themselves. There are many different styles of dance, so she recommends new dancers to choose something they are truly passionate about and commit to it. "I was originally trained in classical dance,

but later I moved to breakdance simply because I felt more passionate towards that style. I love all types of dances but Bollywood, Afro and Bachata are on the top of my list. It's because I love them that I always find the time to train and try to master them to the best of my ability. So, the style you choose to train in also matters if you want to learn irrespective of the age."

Vibin on the other hand believes that dance is both possible as well as impossible to learn for an individual at any age because it depends on the drive a person has. Also, all styles of dance cannot be mastered at any age. "Some dances such as classical or ballet need years of training and a strong foundation to be perfect, hence it is recommended to start at a young age, ideally at the age of five. Then there is some amount of God given talent as well," said Vibin.

He added, "You do not need professional training if you have the interest; take me for



example, I never trained professionally at a young age, I used to practice and learn on my own, but I had the strong passion to take it forward as my career hence even without much professional foundation I have still reached where I am today."

Vibin's passion lies in urban hip hop which is the base of D-illusions. The many kinds of hip hop such as lyrical, animation, popping and locking are his best friends. He recommends people to find their voice through dance because dance is all about showing your emotions.

Asked whether the passion for dance brought them together as a couple, Vibin replied: "Dance was most definitely a strong reason behind the decision to spend a lifetime together. At that time when Ria had joined my classes, I had an interest in learning Bachata and when I learnt that Ria was interested as well, I invited her to join me to attend classes together. This was how we found each other at a place where we wanted to spend a life together."

"In fact, it's the energy and connection we shared from Bachata that led us to explore other likes and dislikes of each other as well. We knew, if we could share something like this together then perhaps a life together would not be so bad. So, these Bachata classes gave us some room to get to know each other's comfort zone. Honestly, it's difficult for me to imagine a life with someone who would not understand my passion for dance and I know Vibin feels the same way, so it just clicked for us," added Ria.

Speaking about VIBE and how they felt after its grand success in 2023, the two explained: "The name VIBE originally came from the meaning 'vibration from the dancers' and six editions later in 2023, the audience still feels the same passionate vibration." This is only because every year Vibin has tried to make the show better than the previous years. Prior to the Covid pandemic, the 2018 edition was the last grand VIBE performance by D-illusions. But when Covid struck things changed and everything became online. So, Vibin and Ria were just waiting to have another event.

Thus, after months of planning in 2023 they finally had a grand show that was greatly applauded by everyone and although this was Ria's first VIBE experience, she played an important part of VIBE 2023 alongside Vibin. "I just could not have done it without her, because this time I had her to take care of the costumes and makeup and teach some choreography as well, while I focused on the show and making everything perfect," explained Vibin.

He added, "This year VIBE had an overall participation of 130 dancers of all ages. Pulling

off a show like this was not easy as there were a lot of elements to put in place. In fact, we could not have done it without the wholehearted participation of each dancer and backstage volunteer. There is so much talent in Kuwait and all I have tried is to have a platform for them to showcase their talent. Hence the success of VIBE is not me but everyone who participated. A specific mention is also required for their parents as well because they do everything for their kids to look great on the stage, from their costumes, to making sure that they are at every practice session. The dedication parents have is greatly admirable. This year VIBE was thus dedicated to all the parents."

Since they became parents recently, Vibin and Ria truly understand how parents feel when their kids perform. Being a performer and planner for VIBE in 2023 for the first time, Ria said her involvement was a stressful yet beautiful

experience. "When it comes to a show, for every dance each costume needs to be unique, and makeup needs to suit the dance. From designing the outfits, to getting it stitched, alongside teaching the kids to dance with Vibin was a memorable experience for me and I can't wait to do it all over again," said Ria.

It was indeed admirable to see such fire in their eyes, as Ria and Vibin narrated their story to me. Ria mentioned that while she did quit her full-time job during her pregnancy, she never quit dancing, in fact her dance videos from the time she was 3-4 months pregnant is every woman's true admiration.



As for Vibin, the admiration his students and co dancers have for him is something I have experienced firsthand during their VIBE success celebration and indeed that love is something only truly gifted trainers receive.

At the close of the interview Vibin and Ria expressed dedicating the success of VIBE to everyone who supported them. Cheslee who handled the light and sound, Joysten, Ansel, Aswin who handled the photos and video. SB Media who handled the video coverage. Joshin, Babcy, Mriga, Reet, Gharima, Thara, Angel, Jaffer who handled the backstage and Thamer, Ridhu, Samson, Diana who played various other roles.

Meryl Mathew is a Freight Development Specialist by profession, a writer by passion and a creative learning trainer. She involves herself in a lot of multicultural events across Kuwait. You can find her on Muckrack (meryl-mathew) and on Instagram @Meryl_elizabeth_mathew or @create.kuwait

Global tax developments outpace tax laws in Kuwait

The Middle East operations of PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) — the second largest professional services network in the world and one of the 'Big Four' accounting firms globally — held a symposium titled, 'Back to Work – Exploring the Changing Tax and Commercial Landscape in the State of Kuwait'. The event, which was part of the brand's annual tax symposiums, was held on 8 February at the Grand Hyatt.

Senior tax officials and analysts, as well

as specialized experts from PwC exchanged insights on the rapidly changing and evolving tax landscape in Kuwait and the Middle East in light of regional and global developments.

The symposium also discussed tax challenges, tax agreements (zakat) and the national labor support tax, with a focus on family businesses, transfer pricing, the second pillar, and the financial and legal aspects of international reporting standards.

In his keynote address to the symposium, Partner and Head of Tax Sector at Pricewaterhouse, Sherif Shawqi, explained that the aim of the conference was to keep abreast of developments taking place globally in the field of tax application. He went on to note that Kuwait has not kept pace with the many tax laws introduced in recent years by the World Trade Organization that are already applied in neighboring countries, and the country lags other states in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) bloc when it comes to various developments in the field of tax application.

Shawqi pointed out that this lapse on the part of Kuwait leads to several difficulties in tax applications, especially since many Kuwaiti companies have projects and businesses outside the country, which necessitates keeping pace with tax-imposing



applications to avoid problems or obstacles in other countries.

The conference also covered the legal aspects of imposing taxes and international developments with regard to taxes, and the second pillar of the WTO, as well as highlighting the tax challenges and problems faced by many companies.

Joyalukkas celebrates Valentine's with 'Be Mine Heart to Heart' collections

Joyalukkas, the 'World's Favorite Jeweler' has announced specially crafted jewelry designs and offers for the Valentine's Day celebration. Craftsmen from the Joyalukkas team have worked on creating several exclusive and exquisite jewelry designs under its popular, 'Be Mine Heart to Heart' collection range to help shoppers celebrate their love. In addition to the designs, every shopper will also be entitled to a free gift voucher worth KD20 on every purchase worth KD250. This special gift offer will be valid on the diamond, polki, or pearl jewelry purchases from any Joyalukkas outlet.

Announcing the Valentine's Day celebration offer, Managing Director of Joyalukkas Group, John Paul Alukkas, said: "Our aim is to make every jewelry shopper's experience a memorable one. To make this Valentine's Day celebration extra special



we have worked with our craftsmen to design jewelry that will help shoppers express their feelings towards their loved ones. We have also added an attractive offer to make it extra attractive for shoppers. Simply put,

our customers can now shop for something exquisite for their loved one and also get rewarded with a gift voucher to double their joy."

This incredible offer is available across all Joyalukkas showrooms till 14 February.

Kuwait responds to US State Department remarks on human rights

In response to a report by the United States State Department critical of human rights in Kuwait, the Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights, Talal Al-Mutairi, stated that these observations were that of the US State Department, and that Kuwait was under no obligation to fulfill them.

The foreign-ministry official made these comments while speaking during a lecture by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to development. He added that Kuwait is fully committed to the provisions of international human rights agreements, including the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which aims to preserve women's rights.

Al-Mutairi pointed out that Kuwait had made clear on signing various international conventions its reservations on select articles in the agreement that were not in line with Islamic laws, and that these reservations continue to exist. Kuwait, he noted, was in full adherence to all articles in the convention that were in line with the country's constitution.

Stressing Kuwait's cooperation with the International Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, he added: "No date has been set for its discussion by the International Commission for Human



Rights, and we are fully ready to discuss the report submitted three years ago, and Kuwait is ready to respond to international experts in accordance with the general framework of the Kuwaiti constitution and national laws on human rights."

The UN lecture highlighted that the right to development is a right for an individual, a group, and is not defined by numbers or statistics, but is achieved by the extent of what a person achieves in terms of personal development in all aspects. The government elucidated that the right to development in the country is presented in the reports submitted by Kuwait within the framework of its membership in international conventions on human rights, as well as in the universal periodic review in the Human Rights Council and in the United Nations General Assembly.

Zain shares joys of national celebrations with Kuwaiti people

Zain, Kuwait's leading digital service provider, announces that it is the official sponsor of the February Kuwait Festival 2023. The event, organized by Rotana throughout February, features many stars from the GCC and Arab world, and is held at the Arena Kuwait, 360 Mall in celebration of Kuwait's National and Liberation days.

Zain is proud to strategically support this national festival since its inception as part of the company's commitment to being actively present in the projects that celebrate Kuwait's national holidays in February and March. Every year, the Kuwaiti community eagerly awaits this grand event as it features some of the top artists from Kuwait, the GCC, and the Arab world.

The company is keen on sharing the joys of this cherished time of the year with the community by supporting such events that reflect the love of Kuwaitis for their nation. This year marks the 62nd anniversary of Kuwait's independence and 32nd anniversary of its liberation.

The concerts of February Kuwait Festival 2023 began with Nabeel Shuail and Asala Nasri on Friday 3 February, and Mohammed Abdu on Saturday 4 February. The festival is set to host the following artists next: Mutrif Al Mutrif and Angham on Thursday 9 February, Majed Al Muhandis and Nancy Ajram on Friday 10 February, Aseel Abubaker and Nawal



Alkuwaitiah on Thursday 16 February, and Abdullah Alrwaished and Alissa on Friday 17 February.

Zain has long considered itself a key partner of the Kuwaiti community, especially in such joyous times of national celebrations. The company's support to this festival comes to show its commitment in sharing the joys of Kuwait with the community in which it operates. Zain will spare no efforts in being an integral part of the many occasions that are of interest to the local community.



DDI conducts awareness outreach at British Embassy

Dasman Diabetes Institute (DDI) recently held a diabetes testing event at the British Embassy in Kuwait, as part of the institute's community outreach program.

Elaborating on the program, Director of Public Relations and Media Services at Dasman Diabetes Institute, Tarek Aleryan said that DDI held the testing using its new mobile

clinic, which is a fully equipped vehicle that has facilities to conduct basic and preventive medical testing, such as blood glucose, pressure, and vital signs, in addition to many other tests. He added that the Institute believes in the importance of conducting early checks and spreading awareness on diabetes to contribute to the prevention of this disease and its complications.

During the awareness and medical testing campaign, booklets, leaflets, flyers, and other informative material on topics such as the healthy plate, intermittent fasting, how to prevent diabetes, insulin doses, and several other subjects were distributed to the embassy staff.

He noted that the Institute had earlier organized a similar campaign at Dasman Bilingual School, where random checks for students and faculty were offered. Aleryan added, "The Institute spares no effort in spreading awareness among all segments of society, considering the importance of the role played by the Institute through these awareness outreach programs in combating diabetes in the country."



BF9 Industry Day- Summit and Exhibition

The BF9 (Business Forums -9) organized and held their annual joint event for the BF9 Summit and Exhibition. The event was previously BF6, but with the birth of the Lebanese, Portuguese, and Spanish business councils, the platform has now evolved to being BF9.

The 9 Business Councils include The American Business Council – AmCham Kuwait, the Australian Business Group, the British Business Forum, the Canadians in Kuwait, the French Business Council, the German Business Council, the Lebanese Business Council, the Portuguese Business Council, and the Spanish Business Council.

Industry Day Summit started with a presentation done by Dr. Khaled Mahdi, General Secretariat of the Supreme Council of Planning and Development who spoke about Kuwait's history as a trading hub, its evolution as a country, and modern Kuwait.

As the panel discussion heavily highlighted renewable energy, Eng. Waleed Roy, Head of the Science Technology



Partnership and Agreements Office at the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) held a presentation on Kuwait's current Energy Map highlighting that Kuwait's primary energy supply is exclusively based on oil and gas (currently), as 90% of the country's revenues come from oil and oil derivatives export.

The second session of the summit was opened by Eng. Nayef Alhaddad Manager of Research and Strategic Planning at the

KAPP. Eng. Alhaddad spoke about the public-private partnership (PPP) framework from Kuwait in detail, Eng. Alhaddad spoke about the PPP project cycle of Kuwait: 1. Preparation of the project proposal, 2. Assignment of transaction advisor, 3. Preparation of the feasibility study, 4. Announcement of the project and EOI, 5. Preparation and release of the request for quote (RFQ) documents, 6. Evaluation of submitted SOQs, 7. Preparation and release

of the request of proposal documents (RFP), 8. Selection of preferred bidder and negotiations and lastly 9. The signing of the PPP agreement and financial closure.

Eng. Alhaddad's presentation was followed by the opening of the second highlighted topic of the day, done by Dr. Mussaad Al-Razouki, Chief Development Officer of Kuwait Life Sciences who presented on the current healthcare trends, challenges, and opportunities for Kuwait. Dr. Al-Razouki highlighted the lifestyle of the population has had an increase in demand in the healthcare sector, including the increase of male smokers in the country which is projected to be at 33% by 2025.

Dr. Al-Razouki then moderated the healthcare panel which included Dr. Faisal Al-Refaei, Chief Operating Officer of the Dasman Diabetes Institute, Dr. Vassillis Bakoyiannis, General Manager of Roche Diagnostics Kuwait, Head of Levant and Iran at Roche, and Tamer Elsallab, Head of Gulf and Levant at Viatri.

Banks urge telecoms to introduce measures to reduce scams

Kuwait Banking Association (KBA) has called on telecommunications companies in the country to freeze the telephone lines of those who have left the country to prevent scammers from exploiting the numbers for use in fraudulent operations.

Posting on its official Twitter handle, the KBA noted that fraud operations that afflict the country can be solved to a certain extent by freezing the phone lines of those who leave the country. Many of these lines remain active because of their outstanding balance, which scammers then exploit to conduct their fraudulent operations.

According to the tweet, the radical solution is "in the hands of telecommunications companies first" to reduce scammers, and then to raise awareness among the public about new scamming schemes, through periodic media campaigns in several languages.

Last week, the Ministry of the Interior (MoI) warned the public of a new fraud that originated outside Kuwait, whereby the perpetrators

impersonated security officers using phone numbers and electronic communication programs. In a statement issued by its General Department of Relations and Security Media, the MoI called on the public to exercise caution and beware of such fraudulent calls



in order to avoid falling victim to these operations. The communicate also urged people to quickly inform competent authorities if they receive such suspicious calls. Officials stated that these contacts are being monitored and tracked down by concerned authorities in the ministry to take the necessary measures.

Kuwait, Philippines discuss deferment of OFW

Chargé d'Affaires at the Philippines Embassy, Jose A. Cabrera III, met with Kuwait's Assistant Foreign Minister for Asia Affairs Ambassador Sameeh Issa Johar Hayat, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kuwait, on 9 February, to discuss various aspects of the decision by the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) of the Philippines to defer the deployment of first-time Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) coming to work as domestic helpers in Kuwait.

Ambassador Hayat expressed disappointment with the DMW decision and conveyed the desire of the Kuwaiti government to resolve the matter as soon as possible in an amicable manner.

For his part, Mr. Cabrera said that the DMW has indicated that the deferment applies only to domestic workers who have not yet been previously employed in Kuwait and are being deployed to Kuwait for the first-time. He added that the DMW is studying reforms and measures to strengthen measures and mechanisms that help ensure the welfare and safety of domestic workers, particularly those working in Kuwait for the first time.

They also discussed the schedule for the Joint Committee Meeting (JCM) between the two countries that is provided for under the 2018 agreement on the employment of domestic helpers to Kuwait.

They agreed that the friendship between the Philippines and Kuwait should be strengthened through increased cooperation and that all concerns should continue to be addressed in an expeditious

and amicable manner to achieve mutually acceptable results.

In a related news, the head of the Kuwaiti Union for the Recruitment of Domestic Workers, Khaled Al-Dakhnan, said the government of the Philippines stopping the deployment of first-time domestic workers to Kuwait was an expected decision in light of various happenings in recent times that this category of workers suffer from without any real and lasting solutions by the concerned authorities in Kuwait.

He added that the recent murder was one of the main reasons for the moratorium decision, but it was not the only reason for the decision. He noted that the Philippine embassy had recently expressed its deep dissatisfaction with the accumulation of Filipino domestic workers in rescue shelters maintained by the government, with approximately 485 domestic workers having to stay there due to problems they suffered from their employers. But the government has so far not offered any effective and speedy resolution to the problems of these workers.

Al-Dakhnan continued: "Unfortunately, in these cases, the labor recruiting office is not summoned to attend the investigation, while it is summoned only at the time of paying the workers' travel tickets. The repatriation expenses and other losses are borne by the Kuwaiti and Philippines labor recruiting offices, but they have no say in the discussions between the employer, worker, the government and other entities.



IBPC holds Meritorious Awards function

Indian Business Professional Council (IBPC) held a 'Meritorious Awards' function for Indian schools and students at the Indian Embassy auditorium on 4 February.

The event, patronized by the Indian Ambassador H.E. Dr. Adarsh Swaika, was attended by principals, dignitaries, students, parents, and IBPC members and specially invited guests, as well as by nearly 200 people on a virtual live streaming network.

The ceremony began with the lighting of the traditional lamp by the Indian Ambassador

along with top office bearers of IBPC. Sunit Arora, director of the event then began by welcoming the guests and relating the history of these awards. He pointed out that the awards show the commitment of IBPC towards education and knowledge by inspiring and recognizing Indian school children for Class 10 and 12th standards.

Vice chairman of IBPC, Kaiser Shakir then gave an inspiring welcome speech in which he encouraged the students by giving tips for their future endeavors. He also briefed about

the IBPC's forthcoming activities.

Ambassador Sawaika captivated the attendees with his motivational speech. He wished all the children the best in life and urged them to have a clear goal in life. He also highlighted the importance of bilateral ties between India and Kuwait.

The selection criteria of the awardees were based on Indian CBSE board exam standards, with students scoring 95 percent and above chosen for 12th standard awards, and 97 percent and above marks for the 10th standard awardees.

There were a total of 99 students who qualified this year for the awards. There were four gold medalists and eight silver medalists who also received cash prizes this year. Indian Education School (Bhavans) won the 10th standard trophy, while the 12th standard trophy went to Indian Community School. A vote of thanks was delivered by Soly Mathew, secretary of the IBPC Executive Committee who thanked the Chief Guest, IBPC Education & Career Guidance Committee, Co-sponsor IIT IIM, and other sponsors, students, parents and media.

Kuwait offers condolences, provides aid to Turkey



Death toll from the two powerful earthquakes that struck southern Turkey on Monday jumped to 18,342 people by Saturday, while at least 74,242 others were injured.

Revealing the true magnitude of the tragedy, the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) of the Ministry of Interior in Turkey stated in a statement on Saturday: Two magnitude 7.7 and 7.6 earthquakes, centered in Kahramanmaraş province, struck southern Turkey and northern Syria on Monday, 6 February and affected more than 13 million people across 10 Turkish provinces, including Adana, Adiyaman, Diyarbakir, Gaziantep, Hatay, Kilis, Malatya, Osmaniye and Sanliurfa.

The statement added that a total of 75,780 people were evacuated from quake-hit areas, and that 6,810 personnel from foreign countries were dispatched to the disaster zone. A total of 97,973 family tents have been set up to shelter the survivors, the statement pointed out.

On Saturday, Minister of Amiri Diwan

Affairs, Sheikh Muhammad Al-Abdullah, visited the Turkish embassy where he conveyed the condolences of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and the government and people of Kuwait.

In his condolence message to the government and people of Turkey, the Amiri Diwan chief expressed profound sorrow of the State of Kuwait to the devastating earthquakes that rocked Turkey last Monday, inflicting enormous death, destruction and injuries to people and buildings around the nation. The Minister of Public Works, Electricity and Water, Amani Bogmaz, also visited the Turkish embassy on Saturday to offer condolences and beseech God to have mercy on souls of the martyrs.

Earlier in the week, on Wednesday, Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah arrived at the Turkish embassy to offer his condolences to the Turkish government and people on the destructive earthquake.

In a message he inscribed in the condolences ledger at the embassy, Minister Al-Sabah expressed deep sorrow and sincere solace on this grave calamity that killed hundreds, left thousands missing, injured many and demolished properties. He reiterated Kuwait's sympathy and solidarity with the Turkish people and its support to help them overcome ramifications of this crisis. He also offered Kuwait's condolences to the families of the victims, wishing those injured a swift recovery, and for those missing to be found.

In other related happenings on Saturday, the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) said that it is keeping in touch with international organizations to deliver relief aid to earthquake-hit people in Turkey. Noting that team of KRCS volunteers was already in Turkey providing humanitarian aid to needy families, the Society added it was working with United Nations (UN) agencies, and with humanitarian partners, including government and nongovernmental organizations, to deliver aid to Turkey.

A statement from KRCS pointed out that

the humanitarian efforts by KRCS in Turkey reflects Kuwait's unwavering commitment to dispatching relief aid to all people in need across the world. The statement added that KRCS has so far sent more than 100 tons of relief and humanitarian aid to quake-hit areas in southern Turkey.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Social Affairs, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Interior, launched a television campaign on Saturday titled, 'Kuwait by your side', to help people in Syria affected by Monday's earthquake. The campaign, which is being live-streamed on Kuwait Television from 12 noon until midnight, has been tasked by the Cabinet to collect donations as part of Kuwait's continuous humanitarian role.

Minister of Social Affairs and Community Development and Women and Children's Affairs Mai Al-Baghli had previously stated that this campaign aims to ease the suffering of those affected by the deadly earthquake that killed thousands in Syria and Turkey and destroyed buildings and houses.

Quitting While on Top

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

But "I know what this job takes," she added, "and I know that I no longer have enough in the tank to do it justice. It's that simple."

Getting to the highest level of a worthwhile activity is an exciting challenge, and overcoming challenges can be enjoyable; but staying at the top as long as one can is a different matter. As Borg said, there are other things in life than tennis, and that is true of life in politics as well.

The Harvard Study of Adult Development has tracked the lives of some of its research subjects for more than 80 years, seeking answers to what makes them happy and healthy. Some of its results have just been released in *The Good Life*, by Robert Waldinger and Marc Schulz. Although any one-word answer to such questions is bound to be an oversimplification, the authors nevertheless are prepared to say that the key to both health and happiness is good relationships.

Almost everyone who retires says that they want to spend more time with their family. Sometimes, of course, that is just a cover for less honorable reasons for quitting; but in the case of Arden and Barty, it was probably an important factor.

Arden was just the second prime minister, after Pakistan's Benazir Bhutto, to give birth while in office. She has occasionally shared moments with her child on social media, but she will now be able to spend more time with her daughter, and her partner, who has been a stay-at-home dad. For Barty, the desire to become a mother may have played a role, for she is now pregnant with her first child.

Social norms are changing our ideas about a good life. We are paying more attention to work-life

balance than we used to do, and rightly so. We are far more open than we used to be about mental health; footballers now acknowledge facing mental-health issues, something that previously would have been considered humiliating. More people are recognizing that career success is not to be equated with living a good life. We should also ask what our career is doing for the world. Perhaps there are better things we could be doing. The website 80,000 hours has some suggestions. Not everyone can choose to change the course of their life. Some face limited employment opportunities, with few options if they are to continue to feed and house themselves and their dependents. Political leaders may be reluctant to leave office because they believe they can do more good than those who will replace them.

When that belief is well-founded, rather than a form of self-deception fueled by the addictive nature of power, as it often is, staying in office may be what they should do. The rest of us, however, have choices, and we should frequently be asking ourselves if we are living the best life we can — both for ourselves and others.



PETER SINGER

Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University, is Founder of the charity 'The Life You Can Save'. His books include *Animal Liberation*, *Practical Ethics*, *The Life You Can Save*, *The Most Good You Can Do*, and *Ethics in the Real World*.

By arrangement with Project Syndicate

Making your 80,000 hours impactful

You have about 80,000 working hours in your career: 40 years x 50 weeks x 40 hours. With so many hours dedicated to work, your choice of career could determine whether you can make a positive impact with your life. Choice of career is not only your best opportunity to make an impact with your life, but also probably the biggest ethical decision you will ever make.

The website, 80000hours.org helps you work out how you can best use your 80,000 hours to help others, and to make an impact with your career. The site provides research and support to help students and graduates switch into careers that effectively tackle the world's most pressing problems, and interestingly, this is provided free of any charge or obligation.

The online guides cover several key ideas that are often not covered by career development counseling provided in schools and colleges. Among the ideas that the site provides guidance on are: How to compare careers in terms of impact; which global problems are most pressing; ideas for new high-impact career paths; and how to make a career plan.

The website's section on key ideas to make an impact, begins by defining impact and then goes on to describe the four key drivers of impact, which can be used to compare your options in terms of the difference they make. The section concludes with an introduction to the most important elements of career strategy.

There are about 20 key articles, which can be read over a weekend. At the end you will have covered everything you need to know to start making a new career plan. There are also optional secondary articles, a podcast interview, and a two-minute summary.

The website is the brainchild of two Oxford graduates, Ben and Will, who as fresh graduates in 2011 were wondering what to do with their own careers. Back then, there was not much practical advice on career choices around, and the two decided to start doing their own research. The enthusiastic response they received from the audience to their initial lecture on the subject led them to develop 80000hours.org



Many people are not in a position to spend time on social impact, let alone make it a large focus, and that this is just fine, according to the website. If you are not able to change your career right now, you can still have a big impact without changing your job, through advocacy, political engagement and donations.

If all this might sound like a lot of work, remember if you can increase the impact of your career by just 1 percent, it would be worth spending up to 800 hours learning how to do that. And the website believes it can increase your impact by much more, and in much less time.

As of June 2022, the site has had millions of readers and over 200,000 subscribers to their newsletter. Thousands of people who have engaged with the site, have written positive reviews on how the site helped them to significantly change their career plans and how they expect to have a larger social impact as a result.

The ultimate aim of 80,000 Hours is to spark a global conversation about how people can best use their careers to help the world, to inspire more people to take this path, and to get the next generation of leaders tackling the world's biggest and most neglected problems.

So what are you waiting for? Welcome and dive right into 80,000hours.org.

EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

ChatGPT a wrong tool in wrong hands



Daron Acemoglu and Simon Johnson

Daron Acemoglu, Professor of Economics at MIT, is co-author (with James A. Robinson) of *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty*, and *The Narrow Corridor: States, Societies, and the Fate of Liberty*.

Simon Johnson, a former chief economist at the International Monetary Fund, is a professor at MIT's Sloan School of Management and a co-chair of the COVID-19 Policy Alliance.

Microsoft is reportedly delighted with OpenAI's ChatGPT, a natural-language artificial-intelligence program capable of generating text that reads as if a human wrote it. Taking advantage of easy access to finance over the past decade, companies and venture-capital funds invested billions in an AI arms race, resulting in a technology that can now be used to replace humans across a wider range of tasks. This could be a disaster not only for workers, but also for consumers and even investors.

The problem for workers is obvious: there will be fewer jobs requiring strong communication skills, and thus fewer positions that pay well. Cleaners, drivers, and some other manual workers will keep their jobs, but everyone else should be afraid. Consider customer service. Instead of hiring people to interact with customers, companies will increasingly rely on generative AIs like ChatGPT to placate angry callers with clever and soothing words. Fewer entry-level jobs will mean fewer opportunities to start a career — continuing a trend established by earlier digital technologies.

Consumers, too, will suffer. Chatbots may be fine for handling entirely routine questions, but it is not routine questions that generally lead people to call customer service. When there is a real issue — such as an airline grinding to a halt or a pipe bursting in your basement — you want to talk to a well-qualified, empathetic professional with the ability to marshal resources and organize timely solutions. You do not want to be put on hold for eight hours, but nor do you want to speak immediately to an eloquent but ultimately useless chatbot. Of course, in an ideal world, new companies offering better

customer service would emerge and seize market share. But in the real world, many barriers to entry make it difficult for new firms to expand quickly. You may love your local bakery or a friendly airline representative or a particular doctor, but think of what it takes to create a new grocery store chain, a new airline, or a new hospital. Existing firms have big advantages, including important forms of market power that allow them to choose which available technologies to adopt and to use them however they want.

More fundamentally, new companies offering better products and services generally require new technologies, such as digital tools that can make workers more effective and help create better customized services for the company's clientele. But, since AI investments are putting automation first, these kinds of tools are not even being created.

Investors in publicly traded companies will also lose out in the age of ChatGPT. These companies could choose to improve the services they offer to consumers by investing in new technologies to make their workforces more productive and capable of performing new tasks, and by providing plenty of training for upgrading employees' skills. But they are not doing so. Many executives remain obsessed with a strategy that ultimately will come to be remembered as self-defeating: paring back employment and keeping wages as low as possible.

“ Instead of hiring people to interact with customers, companies will rely on generative AIs like ChatGPT, to placate angry callers with clever and soothing words. Fewer entry-level jobs will mean fewer opportunities to start a career. ”

Executives pursue these cuts because it is what the smart kids (analysts, consultants, finance professors, other executives) say they should do, and because Wall Street judges their performance relative to other companies that are also squeezing workers as hard as they can.

AI is also poised to amplify the deleterious social effects of private equity. Already, vast fortunes can be made by buying up companies, loading them with debt while



going private, and then hollowing out their workforces — all while paying high dividends to the new owners. Now, ChatGPT and other AI technologies will make it even easier to squeeze workers as much as possible through workplace surveillance, tougher working conditions, zero-hours contracts, and so forth.

These trends all have dire implications for Americans' spending power — the engine of the US economy. But as we explain in our forthcoming book, *Power in Progress: Our Thousand-Year Struggle Over Technology and Prosperity*, a sputtering economic engine need not lie in our future. After all,

the reorganization of the factory that accompanied electrification also created new tasks for workers and thousands of new jobs with higher wages, bolstering shared prosperity. Ford led the way in demonstrating that creating human-complementary technology is good business.

Today, AI offers an opportunity to do likewise. AI-powered digital tools can be used to help nurses, teachers, and customer-service representatives understand what they are dealing with and what would help improve outcomes for patients, students, and consumers. The predictive power of algorithms could be harnessed to help people, rather than to replace them. If AIs are used to offer recommendations for human consideration, the ability to use such recommendations wisely will be recognized as a valuable human skill. Other AI applications can facilitate better allocation of workers to tasks, or even create completely new markets (think of Airbnb or rideshare apps).

Unfortunately, these opportunities are being neglected, because most US tech leaders continue to spend heavily to develop software that can do what humans already do just fine. They know that they can cash out easily by selling their products to corporations that have developed tunnel vision. Everyone is focused on leveraging AI to cut labor costs, with little concern not only for the immediate customer experience but also for the future of American spending power.

Ford understood that it made no sense to mass-produce cars if the masses could not afford to buy them. Today's corporate titans, by contrast, are using the new technologies in ways that will ruin our collective future.

the introduction of new machinery and technological breakthroughs has had very different consequences in the past.

Over a century ago, Henry Ford revolutionized car production by investing heavily in new electrical machinery and developing a more efficient assembly line. Yes, these new technologies brought some amount of automation, as centralized electricity sources enabled machines to perform more tasks more efficiently. But

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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT



Two trends that could save Britain

**Jim O'Neill**

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

As if conditions were not gloomy enough in the United Kingdom, the International Monetary Fund recently downgraded the country's growth forecast even as it offered a brighter outlook for the rest of the world. This was an odd and rather audacious move. While the UK certainly faces challenges, it is not clear that they have become any more difficult since the IMF released its last forecast in October 2022. If anything, a stronger global economy should benefit the UK, too.

Discussions about the UK's never-ending gloom tend to ignore two trends that may be suggestive of a pleasant surprise, despite the current political leadership's haplessness. I say "could" because much will depend on whether Britain can overcome the policy chaos that has prevailed since Brexit.

The first trend involves UK house prices, which is both a favorite dinner-party topic for homeowners and a persistent source of frustration for all those not fortunate enough to have gotten a foot on the homeownership ladder. Alongside the lack of social mobility, this is one of the UK's central economic challenges. But the issue is not just high prices relative to incomes. Equally important are the regional disparities in housing prices. For many decades, housing prices in London real-estate tended to rise by more than those elsewhere,

the only exceptions being during big financial crises, when London prices also fell (typically owing directly to the crisis). But this pattern has been breaking down since 2015-16. If the apparent reversal of house-price behavior does constitute a new trend, it should be a massive positive story. British economic commentators, however, seem barely to have noticed it.

To be sure, the highest London house prices actually peaked before the 2016 Brexit referendum, because Prime Minister David Cameron's government had adopted tax policies designed to discourage buy-to-rent house purchases (which were generally speculative bets by landlords on London property). But

led to an abrupt spike in UK mortgage rates, making the London market even less affordable for many aspiring homeowners.

Against this backdrop, a recent issue of The Sunday Times Property section caught my eye with a story about the number of houses in the UK worth more than £1 million (\$1.2 million). It found that, in 2022, the number of such homes in the London metropolitan area grew by less than in any other region (though London still accounts for around 10% of the overall stock). Nor is this story confined to the high end of the market. Delve deeper into the data and you will find similar trends across many price ranges.

Notwithstanding the obvious implications

expected, productivity growth was weak just about everywhere. Between 2004 and 2020, however, productivity rose by about 18 percent in Manchester, and by 21 percent in Greater Manchester, compared to just 15 percent in London. Moreover, if you strip out 2020, the first year of the pandemic, while Greater Manchester's relative outperformance compared to Manchester recedes, it still persists vis-à-vis London.

These data are encouraging for several reasons. Not only have Greater Manchester's house prices followed the broader pattern of regional outperformance over London in recent years, but Manchester itself has been a pioneer in the "devolution revolution" (former Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne's catchphrase for the delegation of greater policy-making power to local governments).

By the summer of 2024, seven (mostly urban) areas in northern England will have adopted the same basic mayoral structure as Greater Manchester. If they can match Greater Manchester's reformist zeal, they, too, could start to share in these modestly hopeful trends toward greater regional convergence.

Now, as promising as these trends are, it remains to be seen if they will persist. The UK is nowhere close to solving its regional problems. Despite Greater Manchester's somewhat better outlook, it is still home to some of the country's most underperforming areas, and its overall productivity remains a whopping 40 percentage points below London's. Moreover, if non-London house prices rise too much, that will simply bring new affordability problems, especially if the higher costs are not accompanied by growth in productivity, real earnings, and living standards.

Still, for now, both trends merit far more attention and study.

“ In 2022, the number of homes worth more than £1 million in the London metropolitan area grew by less than in any other region. This is not confined to the high end of the market, similar trends are visible across many price ranges. ”

while urban house prices in other parts of England had already begun to outperform those in London before the referendum, Brexit reinforced the trend. The top end of the London housing market was hit hard by the break from the European Union, while most other markets were hardly affected.

Then came COVID-19, which ushered in the new era of remote work and radically increased the attractiveness of more affordable locations outside London. And that was followed by Prime Minister Liz Truss's policy fiascos, which

for lower earners, this trend could point to a positive development in the UK economy. It would be very good for regional productivity, social mobility, and the distribution of wealth if Britons are beginning to recognize that there are more opportunities to succeed in places other than London.

That brings us to the second under-noticed trend: the slow and steady success of devolution. Last year, for the first time ever, the UK Office of National Statistics reported productivity data at the level of individual boroughs. As



Traffic pollution found to impair brain function

Air pollution is now recognized as the largest environmental threat to human health, impacting all major organ systems in the body. In many countries emissions from the transportation sector account for the biggest share of greenhouse gasses (GHG) pollution spewed into the atmosphere.

Burning of fossil fuels such as gasoline and diesel in vehicle engines releases carbon dioxide (CO₂), a major GHG. Along with CO₂, other gasses that contribute to the buildup of GHG in the atmosphere include methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), and hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs). Together these GHGs warm the Earth's atmosphere and cause changes in the climate that contribute to many of the disastrous droughts, floods, heatwaves and forest fires witnessed today.

Records show that greenhouse gas emissions from transportation account for about 27 percent of total greenhouse gas emissions in the United States, making it the largest contributor to the nation's GHG emissions. The burning of one liter of gasoline is estimated to impart around 2.3kg of CO₂ to the atmosphere. The burning of a similar quantity of diesel released nearly 15 percent more CO₂.

Additionally, traffic congestion has been shown to increase vehicle emissions that then further contribute to the pollution and degradation of surrounding air quality. Multiple studies around the world have revealed an increase in morbidity and mortality among drivers, commuters, pedestrians who are regularly exposed to vehicle emissions, as well as in households located near major highways.

A fresh study by researchers at the University of British Columbia (UBC) and the University of Victoria in Canada has now shown that even normal levels of traffic pollution can impair human brain function in only a matter of hours. The findings show that just two hours of exposure to diesel exhaust



“The new study, which is the first of its kind in the world, provides the first evidence from a controlled experiment on humans, of altered brain network connectivity induced by air pollution.”

causes a decrease in the brain's functional connectivity — a measure of how regions of the brain interact with each other.

The new study, which is the first of its kind in the world, provides the first evidence from a controlled experiment on humans, of altered brain network connectivity induced by air pollution. The prevailing wisdom among the scientific community until now was that the brain had protective mechanisms that protected it from the harmful effects of air pollution. The new study upends this long-held belief and provides additional evidence to support a connection between air pollution and cognition.

The study was conducted at UBC's Air

Pollution Exposure Laboratory, which is equipped with a state-of-the-art exposure booth that can mimic what it is like to breathe a variety of air pollutants. For the study, which was carefully designed and approved for safety, the researchers used freshly-generated exhaust that was diluted and aged to reflect real-world conditions. In the research, scientists briefly exposed 25 healthy adults to diesel exhaust and filtered air at different times in a laboratory setting. Brain activity was measured before and after each exposure using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). The researchers analyzed changes in the brain's default mode network (DMN), a set of interconnected

brain regions that play an important role in memory and internal thought. The fMRI revealed that participants had decreased functional connectivity in widespread regions of the DMN after exposure to diesel exhaust, compared to filtered air. Altered functional connectivity in the DMN has been associated with reduced cognitive performance and symptoms of depression.

The researchers said it was seriously concerning to see traffic pollution interrupting these same networks. While more research is needed to fully understand the functional impacts of these changes, it is possible that they may impair people's thinking or ability to work. It needs to be pointed out that the observed changes in the brain from exposure to vehicle exhaust were temporary and the brain connectivity of participants in the test soon returned to normal after the exposure.

Nevertheless, health experts warn that the effects could be more long lasting if exposure is over an extended period of time. The study recommended that people regularly exposed to vehicle emissions should be mindful of the air they are breathing and take appropriate steps to minimize their exposure to potentially harmful air pollutants like car exhaust.

Some of the steps that people can take on their own to protect against vehicle exhaust fumes include for drivers and passengers who are stuck in a traffic jam to make sure to roll up their windows. It is also important to ensure that the car's air filter is in good working condition, and if you are regularly walking or biking down a street with a lot of vehicular traffic, you might want to consider choosing a less busy route.

With increasing incidence of neurocognitive disorders, and the cognitive impacts of traffic-derived air pollution found in the new study make it imperative for public health officials and policymakers, to evaluate the impact on the brain from exposure to other air pollutants, such as smoke from forest fires and from the combustion of waste material.

Mental health of kids a priority for parents



A new research by the US-based Pew Research Center — an independent think-tank that informs on social issues, public opinion, and demographic trends shaping the world, through public opinion polls, demographic surveys and research — sheds light on the major concerns and hopes of parents for their children as they grow up in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The survey revealed that parents were most concerned about their children's mental health, financial stability, and job satisfaction, and that they were less concerned about other markers of life success such as marriage, having children, or going to college.

Among the more than 3,700 parents who took part in the survey conducted in the US, 4

in 10 said they were extremely or very worried about their children struggling with anxiety or depression. On the other hand, parents were least concerned with their children getting in trouble with the police — with 67 percent saying they were “not too” or “not at all” worried — while 54 percent said they were not worried about their kids getting pregnant or getting someone pregnant as a teen.

Psychologists, social scientists and civil society organizations evaluating the research findings have voiced a spectrum of opinions. However, they all agreed that the stresses of the COVID-19 pandemic brought about an unprecedented shift in how people experience their daily lives. The level of control we felt we had over our lives evaporated with the

pandemic, giving rise to the increased focus of parents on the mental health of their children. This shift in focus and the level of concern it has evoked is reflected in the increase in prevalence of mental health issues among adolescents, with rates of depression and anxiety among teenagers increasing at a faster rate than in adults.

The survey also found that a vast majority of parents (88%) say their children's financial stability and job satisfaction as adults are very or extremely important to them. Only around 20 percent of parents said that it was essential for their kids to get married or have children when they grow up.

The changes in societal expectations and values mirrored in the survey could be attributed to the pandemic, which caused life to slow down and allowed people and society time to rethink and pivot priorities. “Once people were removed from stressful, demanding, and unfulfilling work environments, it was difficult for them to return. We are starting to move away from the ‘hustle’ culture and place more emphasis on wellbeing and balance,” said one social analyst. This emphasis on stability and satisfaction

is a positive development considering that having one without the other could lead to discontentment,” added the analyst.

Among other findings from the Pew survey were that parents rated most highly that their children be honest and ethical, with an overwhelming 94 percent saying that honesty and being ethical were more important than other factors such as sharing the same religious beliefs (35%) or political beliefs (16%). While job and financial success was a strong hope across the board for parents, ensuring their kids get a college degree was much less so. Only 4 in 10 parents said their kids' earning a college degree is very important to them.

“It's not surprising that parents are thinking outside of the college degree, as more and more young people are increasingly skeptical of the high school-to-college route and desire more flexible postsecondary education pathways,” said a career planning company executive. In the spring of 2022, there were 662,000 fewer students enrolled in undergraduate programs in the US compared to the previous year, and in a recent study 47 percent of high schoolers said they were unlikely to attend college.

Preparing Now for the Next Health Emergencies



Mamta Murthi

Vice President for Human Development at the World Bank.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the weaknesses and lack of preparedness of health systems globally. When the virus was at its peak, many low- and middle-income countries struggled to save lives while sustaining essential medical services such as maternal health care, routine childhood immunization, and the treatment of non-communicable diseases.

After this traumatic period, it is tempting to hope that the worst is behind us. Unfortunately, the future is likely to bring more frequent public-health crises, owing to climate change, urbanization, deforestation, water shortages, land-use changes, the transmission of pathogens from animals to humans, and conflict-induced fragility.

To limit the impact of the coming crises on lives and livelihoods, governments must take urgent action to boost the resilience of their health systems. According to a recent World Bank report, a resilient health system is integrated, enabling more rapid identification of threats and risk factors; agile, and thus able to respond quickly to evolving needs; absorptive, to contain shocks; and adaptive, to minimize health service disruptions.

The World Bank has been working with low- and middle-income countries on this resilience agenda. Our US\$34 billion global health portfolio includes more than 240 projects that help countries take a comprehensive approach

to improving outcomes, especially for poor and vulnerable people, by strengthening primary care and key public-health functions. For example, in June 2022, the World Bank approved \$258 million for Pakistan's National Health Support Program, which aims to strengthen the health workforce and equip community health centers to respond better to emergencies and deliver quality services, particularly to the most vulnerable communities.

The newly created Pandemic Fund is an additional tool to fill critical gaps by helping channel much-needed financial support to developing countries as they shore up prevention and response measures and improve readiness before the next health crisis. Established with the support of the G20, the fund is governed by an inclusive board comprising representatives from sovereign donors, recipient-country governments, philanthropic foundations, and civil-society organizations. The Pandemic Fund has already secured pledges of \$1.6 billion, and the first round of funding has just been announced.

These additional, long-term resources will help countries strengthen their public health systems, raise risk awareness, improve early warning functions, and expand the number of community health workers. Strong risk communication and community engagement can increase trust and build the solid partnerships that underpin a swift and efficient crisis response.

As countries progress toward post-pandemic recovery, they face additional challenges such as inflation, debt sustainability, climate change, aging populations, a high burden of chronic disease, and challenges to socioeconomic and gender equality. Resilient health systems can mitigate the impact of these challenges by improving the readiness of services to



prevent and manage other health crises and by strengthening essential functions.

Needs and approaches will vary across countries and regions. For example, Cambodia, located in a hotspot for emerging infectious diseases, plans to enhance multisectoral collaboration to incorporate human, animal, and environmental health. Kenya seeks to bolster its surveillance and laboratory capacity for infection control. And Bangladesh aims to increase the capacity of its health facilities, workforce, and microbiology laboratories for coping with future pandemics.

Around the world, robust health governance and strong public-health institutions, backed by stable legal and regulatory frameworks, will be crucial to ensure evidence-based decision-making and crisis planning. Countries will also need to create fiscal space and attract and use external resources wisely, with the understanding that investing in integrated and resilient systems will deliver the greatest impact. The most cost-effective investments strengthen public-health functions, health promotion, disease prevention, and primary health-care services, thereby minimizing disruptions when shocks hit. By preventing the much larger costs associated with public health emergencies, such outlays yield long-term dividends.


Building resilience requires partnerships


within and beyond the health sector, as well as engagement with civil society and the private sector, which played an important role in the COVID-19 response. Protecting against health shocks also involves boosting research capacity and embracing innovation by fast-tracking new medical technologies or expanding digital technology in health-care delivery.

The task is immense, but past crises offer valuable lessons and show what can be achieved. For example, the Ebola outbreak of 2014-16, which killed more than 11,000 people in West Africa, accelerated the establishment of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention across the continent, improving the region's surveillance and monitoring capacities.

As the COVID-19 pandemic wanes, this, too, is no time for complacency. We have all witnessed the pandemic's devastating effects. The World Health Organization estimated that nearly 15 million excess deaths worldwide in 2020 and 2021 could be attributed to COVID-19, which has also undermined hard-won gains in poverty reduction, education, health, and gender equality.

Enhancing resilience and readiness requires decisive action. With more crises sure to come, countries that make the right political choices for lasting and sustained policies now will be in the best position to protect the health of their populations and economies.




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