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ROYALE HAYAT HOSPITAL

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Media Freedoms and a Media Literate Public



THE TIMES KUWAIT REPORT

The profusion of digital news and social media platforms in recent years, and the staggering rapidity in their uptake by the public, has also led to a deluge of digital disinformation and distortion of facts appearing online. In addition, the widespread release of egregiously misleading news and reports by states, non-state actors, and by 'misinformation service providers', has resulted in the spread of racism, discrimination, intolerance and hatred among people, and in rupture of social cohesions.

Moreover, distorted online reports disparaging entire communities, the propagation of conspiracy theories

on vaccines, or fake cures for ailments, put at risk the lives and livelihood of affected people, and threaten the fabric of societies and democracies. The boundary between fact and fake content has become blurred to the extent that even those who claim to be digitally-savvy and worldly-wise are often confused between truth and falsehood online.

Even respected media organizations share blame in the spread of disinformation and fake news. The ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine, as well as in other wars and crises across the world, provide ample evidence of the role that the media play, either inadvertently or deliberately, in spreading misleading and often blatantly false news. Financial



pressures, falling journalistic standards, biased coverage, and catering to a polarized public by failing to report fully, factually, and fairly, have all contributed to an increasing trust deficiency in

the media. Declining trust in both online and print outlets, along with the often divisive role that media play in fanning social and political issues and exacerbating tensions and violence among people, has led

to a growing chorus in support of limiting media freedoms. In some places, governments have responded by imposing stricter publishing laws, increasing internet surveillance, and introducing restrictive guidelines on what can and cannot be published.

In Kuwait, the government is apparently keen to foster media freedom as long as equanimity in community relations is maintained and certain 'red-lines' are not breached in print and social media coverages. In late September, in his address to media stakeholders, Minister of Information and Minister of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, Abdul Rahman Al-Mutairi, expanded on the government's new draft media regulatory law.

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Indonesian Embassy celebrates Independence Day

Indonesian Embassy celebrated the country's 78th Independence Day last week with a grand ceremony. In her address to attendees at the event, Indonesian Ambassador H.E. Lena Mariana hailed the strong and cordial relations between Indonesia and Kuwait, and noted that Kuwait was an important trading partner for Indonesia.

She added that Indonesia hopes to further strengthen bilateral ties with Kuwait in various sectors, and to explore the potential for collaboration in these sectors. The ambassador pointed out that the volume of trade between the two countries has increased by 150 percent and reached around \$316 million in 2022.

She revealed that the Indonesian embassy

was coordinating with the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry to host the Indonesian Trade and Tourism Forum and Exhibition (ITTFF) on 14 November.

Ambassador Mariana also praised Kuwait's support to Indonesian citizens working in various sectors in Kuwait, including in healthcare, oil and gas, hospitality, and manufacturing. In addition, she appreciated

the Kuwaiti government's support in providing protection to Indonesian citizens in Kuwait.

The ambassador also expressed Indonesia's solidarity with Palestine and stressed her country's clear and strong stance on the situation in Gaza, urging global leaders to address the root of the problem through adherence to international standards.

MoH alleges misappropriation of 'Foreign Treatment' fund

Investigations are ongoing into an alleged misappropriation of around KD15 million from the Ministry of Health's (MoH) 'Foreign Treatment' fund for citizens. The Public Prosecution, which is leading the investigation, summoned last week the MoH representative for assessing the veracity of the allegations. According to the MoH, the Egyptian director of a travel office in Kuwait created fake invoices worth nearly KD15 million for arranging medical treatment and hotel accommodation for citizens in one of the European countries, by exploiting the absence of a Kuwaiti health office in that country.

The ministry discovered the embezzlement by cross-



checking invoices for treatment abroad, and found that the accused had falsified hotel reservation and treatment invoices in this European country, and had submitted the forged documents to the Ministry of Health in his capacity as the director of a tourism and travel company.

The implicated Egyptian is believed to have escaped from the country. However, concerned authorities in Kuwait are said to be pursuing the matter with the Egyptian authorities, through diplomatic and legal channels to have the accused arrested and to take legal measures against him after submitting documents proving his involvement in the embezzlement of money.

Other suspects believed to be involved in the embezzlement scheme are being identified and investigated to assess their role in the swindling and to take the necessary legal actions.

Government projects will need to hire nationals

Council of Ministers at its regular meeting last week approved a draft decision to mandate that contracts for government projects should stipulate the hiring of nationals in these projects. The decision is in line with the recommendations made by the National Demographics Committee headed by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, Sheikh Talal Al Khalid.

The decision obliges all public entities to include the regulation provisions in their contracting requirements to ensure more job opportunities for national cadres in government projects. The move aims to enable Kuwaitis to gain practical experience, develop technical skills, and achieve continuity, development and transition between contracts.

The regulation comes with several benefits for the national employee, including that the starting wage scale for fresh university graduate is KD450. In addition, these workers will be entitled to social allowance (employment support), health insurance for the employee and their family, annual salary increases, and bonuses ranging from 20 to 30 Kuwaiti dinars for good performance.



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Relations between Kuwait and Austria are built on a close and deep friendship

Ambassador of Austria H.E. Marian Warba held a reception to celebrate his country's National Day. The event, which took place at the official residence of the ambassador on 26 October, was attended by Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Protocol Affairs, Ambassador Nabil Al-Dakhil, the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Defense, Sheikh Dr. Abdullah Mishal Al-Sabah, and a large number of ambassadors and diplomats, in addition to a large crowd of citizens and members of the Austrian community in Kuwait.

In a speech he delivered on the occasion, Ambassador Warba stressed that relations between his country and Kuwait are built on a close and deep friendship, and added, "we will do our best to work on preserving and strengthening it".

"This event tonight is a sign of appreciation offered by the Austrian Embassy to its friends and partners, who are essential to the close



relations between our two countries and to the spirit of cooperation between Austria and Kuwait in the fields of politics, economy,

trade, business, culture and tourism," said the Austrian envoy. He pointed out that an important evidence of these excellent relations

was the recent visit made by Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah to Vienna.

"Last June, Sheikh Salem met with his Austrian counterpart, Alexander Schallenberg, and the Speaker of the Austrian Parliament, Wolfgang Sobotka, and the two partners agreed to intensify our cooperation in all fields, and we signed a number of important bilateral agreements that will benefit our relations in many aspects."

Pointing out that trade and business relations between the two countries were thriving, but there is always room for further growth, the Austrian ambassador said, "Since our meeting last year at my home here, Austria has been happy to receive more than 40,000 Kuwaiti citizens, and I am happy to announce that since September, we have issued a 5-year Schengen visa for all Kuwaiti citizens who travel to Austria." He stressed that this would make traveling much easier and more convenient for Kuwaiti visitors to Austria.





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Coffilia Coffee from Viet Nam opens first outlet in Kuwait

By Ricky Laxa
Staff Writer

Coffilia, a high-end coffee brand from Viet Nam opened its first outlet outside the country and the first one in Kuwait. The outlet was inaugurated by Ambassador of Viet Nam H.E. Ngo Toan Thang, along with Luai Al-Qattan, owner of Coffilia in Kuwait and Thang, chairperson of Coffilia in Viet Nam, in the presence of members of the diplomatic community and specially invited dignitaries.

In his welcome remarks, Al-Qattan thanked the Vietnamese Ambassador and the team of Coffilia for working on the project over the past three years to open the very first outlet outside Viet Nam. He also expressed his hope to open more outlets in Kuwait within the coming months.

Al-Qattan, who calls himself a 'Viet Nam lover', has visited the Coffilia farms of Minh Tien in the northwestern region of Viet Nam to learn about the 'circular economy' that the group has successfully integrated into its business model.



An agreement between Al-Qattan and the Coffilia team was signed on 25 September 2023, after months of preparation to open the Coffilia venue in Kuwait.

At Coffilia, customers will have the opportunity to try brand-new Vietnamese drinks, including the famous 'bac xiu' (white

coffee with condensed milk), 'ca phe sua da' (brown coffee with milk and ice) and 'ca phe muoi' (salt coffee). All the coffee and tea in Coffilia has been researched and developed in-house by the Coffilia team and will be adapted to suit the taste of Kuwaiti locals.

Coffilia coffee uses the coffee beans

harvested from their very own farms, which earned 4C and UTZ certificates in 2010. Since 2000, the company has begun to export directly to foreign markets; Coffilia is now available in several European countries, including Germany, Italy, England, France and other markets like Japan, United States and more.

The opening launch of Coffilia is a joy for Vietnamese people in Kuwait in general, and the Embassy of Viet Nam in Kuwait in particular, said Ambassador Thang. Affirming that his aim is to promote further trade and tourism activities between Viet Nam and Kuwait, the ambassador noted that the two countries share a 47-year relationship. He hoped that the quality of Coffilia coffee will be the proof for the position of Viet Nam as the world's second biggest coffee exporter.

Ambassador Thang thanked everyone for coming to the event and invited all coffee lovers to visit the outlet and enjoy the flavors of coffee and specialty drinks from the beans homegrown in his country. Coffilia Coffee is located at Al Kout Beach Hotel in Mangaf.



Indus Group holds career counseling for students at ILOA School



Indus Group, the pioneer and leading exhibition organizers in India, held a career counseling and guidance meet with students at Indian Learners Own Academy School (ILOA)). The event was aimed at providing advice and guidance to students on their future education choices.

The event was attended by experienced career counselors who provided valuable insights to students on career opportunities, industry trends, and job market demands. The counselors also gave guidance on which courses and degrees would be most beneficial for students to pursue in order to achieve their career goals. The career guidance team was warmly welcomed by the Principal Asha

Sharma, who appreciated the initiative taken to provide the students with a first-hand insight on career options. The students were encouraged to ask questions and share their concerns with the counselors. The counselors provided personalized advice based on each student's interests and aspirations. They also highlighted the importance of gaining practical experience and building a strong network in the industry.

Speaking about the event, Thiagrajan from the Indus Group said, "We are committed to providing students with the right guidance to help them make informed decisions about their future. The career counseling and interaction meet is just one of the many initiatives we take to support the Indian education system."

Indus Group has been organizing exhibitions in India since 1995 and has organized over 120 exhibitions across the country. The group has also organized over 150 exhibitions in 20 countries, including 111 India Education Exhibitions across 20 countries/cities, making it a leading player in the exhibition organization industry.

Indus Group's goals also include making India one of the top destinations for education in the world by organizing events across 50+ countries and bringing 15,000 students to India, while bridging the gap between students and top universities and institutions worldwide. Their mission is to promote education tourism, create awareness about emerging career opportunities, and empower students to make

informed decisions about their future.

Overall, the career counseling and interaction meet was a great success, with students leaving with a better understanding of the education and career opportunities available to them. Indus Group remains committed to supporting the Indian education system and helping students achieve their career goals.

Among the participating universities who were able to share valuable advice and knowledge to the children were Vellore Institute of Technology, Dr. MGR Educational & Research Institute, Vishwakarma University, Vishwakarma Institute of Technology, BML Munjal University, Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT), RV University, Acharya Institutes.



Kazakhstan shares strong ties with Kuwait

Embassy of Kazakhstan celebrated its Republic Day with a reception held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel on 25 October, in the presence of Kuwait's Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Samih Issa Gohar Hayat, who was the guest of honor along with a large gathering of diplomats and Kuwaiti dignitaries.

In his message on the occasion, Ambassador of Kazakhstan, H.E. Azamat Bardibay stated: "It is a great honor for me to welcome you all to the reception on the occasion of the Republic Day of Kazakhstan. I would like to take this opportunity to brief you about our achievements over the past thirty years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Kazakhstan and Kuwait, as well as the prospects for developing relations between our two countries."

"Kazakhstan is a young country and has only 32 years of independence, which in terms of history is a short period of time. In this short time, we have been able to become a country and successfully integrate into the international community. Kazakhstan is the ninth largest country in the world by area and is home to representatives of 140 ethnic groups and 17 religions. Today, we have achieved remarkable success in developing the economy and having friendly relations with nations around the world, and we have made valuable contributions to strengthening regional and international security."

"It is worth noting that over the past four years, thanks to constructive dialogue and civil unification under the wise leadership of His Excellency President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev,



we have achieved tangible success in political modernization and establishing democracy in the country. We have succeeded in seriously strengthening the human rights protection system. We launched a process of radical transformation and renewal of the state apparatus and obtained greatly expanded opportunities for creative social and political activity."

"Kazakhstan has also taken decisive steps to improve the quality of life of citizens, abolish the monopoly of the economy and develop fair and open competition. By voting in a republican referendum for amendments to the constitution last year, we highlighted our spirit of true justice and authentic democracy."

"Constitutional reform is an integral part of the broad political modernization program implemented by His Excellency Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. A 30 percent quota for women and youth was introduced in party lists before the



elections and in the distribution of the mandate of representatives. The threshold for political parties to enter Parliament has been reduced from 7 to 5 percent. The death penalty has been abolished. A direct mechanism for local governors elections was launched."

"It is worth noting that the transformations that took place during the past four years and the constitutional reform formed a new model for the political structure of the state. Kazakhstan is completely different from what it was four or three years ago, or even one year ago. Thanks to the unity and solidarity of the people of Kazakhstan and constructive public dialogue, the people of Kazakhstan have achieved real progress in a short period of time. In fact, in a short period of time Kazakhstan became the only country in our geopolitical region, Central Asia, to implement these political changes. Our consistent innovations have formed a special Kazakh model of political reforms

which in the future will be filled with new content."

"In addition, Kazakhstan is constantly working to strengthen its role in regional and international politics and to promote peace, cooperation, respect and mutual trust. Our country's voice on the international stage has become more important. In the context of unprecedented geopolitical tension, we remain firmly committed to the basic principles of a peaceful and constructive foreign policy. Kazakhstan is rightly proud of its centuries-old history and multifaceted cultural heritage."

With regard to the interaction between Kazakhstan and Kuwait, I would like to emphasize that we are two very friendly countries, united by strong ties of friendship and cooperation that have been proven over the decades. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations on 11 January, 1993, relations of trust based on mutual respect and equal partnership have been established between the two countries."



IDF conducts breast cancer awareness program for teachers

Every October widely known as 'Pink October' marks Breast Cancer Awareness Month (BCAM), a national campaign to raise awareness for this cause.

Indian Community School, Senior, in collaboration with Indian Doctors Form (IDF) organized a breast cancer awareness program on 20 October, which aimed to raise awareness and reduce the stigma of breast cancer. around the condition, through education about screening, symptoms and treatment.

The chief guest on the occasion was Vandana Swaika, wife of the Indian Ambassador H.E. Dr. Adarsh Swaika, and the guest of honor was Public Relation Manager at International Hospital, Nour M. Haider. Among the dignitaries attending the event were President of the IDF, Dr. Diwakara Chaluvaiah, Vice-Presidents of IDF, Dr. Sajna Mohammed and Dr. Sameer Humad, Hon. Vice Chairman to the Board of Trustees of Indian Community School, Vinu Kumar Nair, Indian Women's Association's Surayya Salim, Former President of IDF, Dr. Amir Ahmed, and Principal of ICSK Junior, Sheeja Ravi,.

A total of 150 faculty members from 22 different Indian CBSE schools in Kuwait participated in the informative seminar. The session commenced with lighting of the traditional lamp by Mrs. Swaika accompanied by Dr. Chaluvaiah, and Mr. Nair.

The chief guest appreciated the doctors for serving the community and also highlighted the importance of raising awareness of breast cancer to safeguard the society from the life-threatening disease. In her inaugural speech, Dr. Mohammed, briefed the audience on the objective of the campaign and stressed on the need to spread awareness, and the importance of early detection.

Eminent speakers, President of the Indian Doctors Forum, delivered an This was followed by insightful presentations on breast cancer, covering topics such as risk factors, symptoms and the latest advancements in treatment by Dr. Chaluvaiah, and by Medical Oncologist at Kuwait Cancer Control Center, Dr. Susovana Nair, and Medical Oncologist at Kuwait Cancer Control Center, Dr. Rifat Jehan.

Vote of thanks proposed by the Vice Principal of ICSK Senior, Susan Rajesh, drew curtains to the informative session. A medical camp with a team of 25 - 30 doctors was exclusively arranged for the teachers to provide free cancer screening and consultation.

The Breast Cancer Awareness Programme conducted under the able leadership of Principal and Senior Administrator of ICSK, Dr. V. Binumon, in collaboration with Indian Doctors Forum was a resounding success. It not only educated the school community but also promoted a culture of empathy and support for those affected by breast cancer.

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Kuwait ranks 52nd in WJP Rule of Law index



For the first time ever, Kuwait has featured in the 2023 World Justice Project's (WJP) Rule of Law index. Kuwait ranked in 52nd spot among 142 countries and jurisdictions assessed by WJP in 2022. Kuwait also ranked second among the nine countries listed in the index from

the Middle-East and North Africa (MENA region) with a score of 0.58, on a scale from 0 to 1, where 1 indicated the strongest commitment to the rule of law.

The United Arab Emirates and Kuwait were the only two Gulf Cooperation Council countries to be assessed for this year's index. The UAE topped the list in the region with a score of 0.64 to rank 37th in the global index for this year.

In a statement released on Kuwait's inclusion in this year's index, the Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority 'Nazaha' said that its efforts in cooperation with the United Nations Development Program, had enabled Kuwait to be included in the index. The Authority added that the annual listing by WJP aims to support efforts to detect and prevent corruption, in addition to measuring the factors included in the index that have not been previously measured in Kuwait.

This index is the world's leading source of original and independent data on the rule of law. It relies on more than 149,000 household surveys and 3,400 surveys of legal practitioners and experts, to measure and compare how the rule of law is experienced and perceived at the national level. The index also provides up-to-date and reliable information for policy makers, civil society organizations, academics, citizens, legal professionals and others, it

aims to encourage policy reforms, guide program development and inform research to strengthen the rule of law.

The index assesses countries based on eight main factors of: Restrictions on government powers, Absence of corruption, Open government, Fundamental rights, Order and security, Regulatory enforcement, and Civil and criminal justice. The main factors are further divided into 44 sub-factors.

MP queries ministers ... How many expats do you have?

Member of Parliament Muhalhal Al-Mudhaf has addressed a joint question to the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, and Minister of Defense, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for



Cabinet Affairs and the Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Oil and the Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment, and the Minister of Finance, Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs, Minister of State for Municipal Affairs, Minister of

State for Communications Affairs, Minister of Information, Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, Minister of Health, Minister of Commerce and Industry, Minister of State for Youth Affairs, Minister of Public Works, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Housing Affairs and the Minister of Electricity Water and renewable energy.

In his joint question, he requested that he be provided with a table showing the number of non-Kuwaitis working in their respective ministries and affiliated agencies, from January 1, 2020 until date of receiving this question, provided that it includes the following (department and sector, name and nationality, academic qualification, date of appointment and job title, the salary and bonus they receive, reports Al-Jarida daily.

He also wants to know the reasons for appointing expatriates and why not Kuwaitis; how many Kuwaitis applied for the same jobs and why they were rejected, and what measures were taken by the ministries and affiliated agencies to implement the Kuwaitization policy?



Kenyan ambassador visits The Times Kuwait office

Ambassador of Kenya H.E. Halima Abdille Mahmoud visited The Times Kuwait office last week and met with Managing Editor Reaven D'souza. Several issues of interest were discussed during the visit, including Kenya's tourism and economic potential.

Ambassador Halima also expressed appreciation at the role of The Times Kuwait newsmagazine in disseminating timely and useful information to the large English speaking community in Kuwait.

LuLu Hypermarket anniversary celebration offers 'one-year free shopping'

LuLu Hypermarket, the leading retailer in the region, is celebrating yet another anniversary of its successful operations in Kuwait with bonanza offers from 25-31 October across all its outlets in the country.

The highlight of the celebration is a never-before offer of a one-year free shopping for 10 lucky winners, who stand to win KD1,500 worth of free gift vouchers that enable them to shop throughout the year. The promotion also features other amazing bonanza offers and discounted prices, including the opportunity for 100 customers to win gift vouchers worth KD100 each. To avail the opportunity of winning the fabulous prizes that are worth a total of KD25,000, all that shoppers have to do is make a minimum purchase of KD5 worth of items, as every KD5 purchase entitles them to enter the draw from 25th Oct. to 31st Dec 2023.

In addition, during the anniversary bonanza sale, shoppers get a flat 50 percent discount across all categories, as well as the opportunity to avail of 21 super deals every day of the promotion period.

For those who love shopping for

garments, footwear, and ladies' bags, there is a special deal that provides shoppers who purchase KD20 worth of items from the garments, footwear, or ladies' bag section to receive a further KD20 worth of items from the respective sections for free.

And, in the grocery shopping section,

shoppers can pick their favorite cut of meat, fish, or fresh apples during special festivals organized specifically for these products during the anniversary celebration period.

The bonanza anniversary celebration at LuLu Hypermarket is the brand's unique way of saying a big thank-you to all their customers for their unwavering support over the years, which has made the hypermarket the undisputed retail leader in Kuwait and the region.

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Kuwaitization of pharmacist jobs a long way off

The government has been making significant pace in its Kuwaitization drive that aims to replace expatriates in public sector jobs, and increasingly in the private sector, with those from the national cadre. However, implementation of this policy has not been witnessed across all ministries and other public sector undertakings. For instance, the ministries of health and education continue to be dominated by expatriates.

Latest data from the Central Statistical Bureau show that, as with several other sectors in the Ministry of Health, the pharmacy sector in the ministry as well as in the private sector, continues to be dominated by expatriate pharmacists, and that this trend is likely to continue over the near future.

The figures show that of the total 2725 pharmacists in the public sector, Kuwaitis account for 1,170 pharmacists (43%) while non-Kuwaitis number about 1,555 (57%).

The difference in employee ratio is even more stark in the private sector, where Kuwaiti pharmacists number only 420 (12%) while non-Kuwaitis account for 2,950 (88%) of the total 3,350 pharmacists in non-government sector.

The large discrepancy in number of pharmacists in the private sector can be attributed to the fact that most pharmacy owners are concerned with the profit they make from their investment, and so are reluctant to hire Kuwaiti nationals who demand a far-higher salary than that paid to hire non-Kuwaiti pharmacists.

In total, of the 6095 pharmacists in the country, Kuwaiti pharmacists number only 1,590 or 26 percent, while non-Kuwaitis account for 4,505 or 74 percent of the total pharmacists in the country. The shortage in Kuwaiti pharmacists is not from any lack of support from the government. In addition to the lucrative higher salaries that nationals

enjoy in public sector pharmacies, the government has also implemented several measures to encourage citizens to enter the non-government pharmacy sector.

The steps taken in this regard include Law 30/2016, which stipulates the issuing of a license to open a pharmacy in the private sector, and in private hospitals with more than 50 beds, only in the name of Kuwaitis. The law also mandates that pharmacies located in cooperative societies should be licensed only in the name of a Kuwaiti pharmacist.

The government has also formed a committee to study the practice of the profession, reconsider the law regulating the profession, and give Kuwaiti pharmacists the opportunity to work and compete in the private sector. In addition, the committee will consider including the specialty of pharmacy within the programs of the Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialties,



and granting greater opportunities to send qualified national pharmacists to complete their further studies abroad."

Despite these positive steps, the need for foreign pharmacists is likely to continue for various reasons such as the limited number of Kuwaiti pharmacist graduates, the rapid expansion of public and private sector health facilities, including new hospitals, specialized clinics.

Embassy of Viet Nam holds barista competition, promotes coffee beans



Ricky Laxa
Staff Writer

A barista competition was held Friday morning at His Majesty The Coffee, the event was organized by the Embassy of Viet Nam in Kuwait and in collaboration with Coffilia. Ten baristas signed up for the occasion with 5 competing for Espresso and the other 5 for Latte Art. Vietnamese Envoy Ngo Toan Thang, Deputy Chief of Mission of South Korea Lee Jinkuk and spouse, Abrar Al Hassan, owner of His Majesty The Coffee and Luay Al Qattan, owner of Coffilia Kuwait were among those present who graced the occasion.

Mr. Thang Chairperson of Coffilia in Viet Nam and Mr. Hung head barista of Coffilia delivered an introduction to contestants regarding the beans and its essence and quality. Two contestants successively prepared espresso drinks for each of the three judges. Same procedures were followed for the Latte Art competition. Judges Mr. Tahng, Mr. Hung and Mr. Saleh Al Shahabb in turn voted for the winners of the two categories.

Two Filipino baristas bagged the major prizes: Nick Magalso Jr. won the Espresso and Jerald John on Latte Art. Contestants received certificates from the Embassy of Viet Nam, gift pack and voucher from the newly opened outlet of Coffilia in Mangaf. Winners also received special prizes. Among the competitors were; James Karl M. Pasquin, Anidz U. Dulongan, Reyan Landicho, Muhamed Ali Makalutang, Aron Pax, Aiza Gragasins, Velasco and Gideon Waibale.

The coffee beans provided for the competition came from Coffilia, an all-new brand which has been gaining popularity in Kuwait recently. The beans were grown using the "circular economy" model to ensure both taste and environmental effects. Mr. Luay Al-Qattan, sponsor of the Coffilia brand, just opened its first shop in Kuwait and the first outside Viet Nam.

Vietnamese Envoy expressed hui gratitude to everyone for taking part in the competition and those who attended the occasion. Judges encouraged the baristas to explore the new ingredients and techniques behind the counter. Mr. Thang and Mr. Hung also expressed their appreciation for having the chance to co-organize the competition, so that the Coffilia brand gets more popularity in the coffee community of Kuwait.

The event was jointly organize with Masterclass Kuwait Co and hosted by Ricky Laxa of The Times Kuwait.



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CAP holds 'Cultural Resistance through Palestinian Art' exhibition



Contemporary Art Platform (CAP), a non-profit organization dedicated to developing and supporting art in Kuwait, hosted an extraordinary art exhibition on 22 October featuring Palestinian, Kuwaiti and international artists in support of the Palestinian resistance. The event, which was conceptualized and created within a week and aims to raise funds to aid people suffering in Gaza, will be open to the public for one month.

The exhibition, which brought together a diverse collection of art from the CAP collection, not only reflects on the experience of the Palestinians but also conveys their dreams, aspirations



some of whom were present at the event, and others who have passed away. "In light of recent events, we must understand that people cannot live in peace when isolated. The more isolation grows, the more hatred is fostered, especially when it is imposed by oppressors who have taken land," he pointed out.

He also noted that one of the artworks in the exhibition is a drawing of the 'Dome of the Rock', inspired by passages from Fairuz's song "I am Al-Quds". The drawing will be auctioned to benefit the people of Gaza through the Kuwait Red Crescent Society.

For his part, Cultural Program Officer at CAP, Ibrahim Farghali, said: "The Palestinian art exhibition and the culture of resistance show support for recent events in Gaza, emphasizing the role of culture in art and resistance, while highlighting Palestinian heritage and identity.

The exhibition primarily features works by various Palestinian and international artists, along with contributions from Kuwaiti artists, including sculptors Saad Hamdan and Abdulwahab Al-Awadhi. The works encompass a range of mediums, including painting, photography, sculpture and composite pieces. Symbolic works, such as stones from the First Intifada in Palestine are on display. "Pieces like the one depicting life in the camp between Ramallah and Jerusalem aim to convey the daily struggles and suffering of Palestinians," said Farghali.

While the exhibition gives visitors a chance to grieve and express solidarity, it also acknowledges the tremendous fight and resistance of Palestine and Palestinians globally.



and struggles. The display features an array of paintings, sculptures and photographs and mixed media works created in response to the ongoing crises of violence, trauma and displacement.

Speaking on the occasion, former Secretary-General of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) and current Editor-in-Chief of Al-Arabi magazine, Dr. Sulaiman Al-Askari, pointed out that exhibition showcased the works of international and local artists who shared a common mission in advocating for the right of the Palestinian people to life and security.

He stated that the dire living conditions of Palestinian living in camps have also not been spared from the rockets of the brutal Israeli army. He said the war was an unequal one and pointed out that the people of Gaza were fighting alone against the Israeli army's use of modern and advanced missiles, which have not been seen in many previous conflicts between more evenly matched forces.

Dr. Askari stated that the exhibition was a Kuwaiti initiative, with substantial effort invested in its organization, bringing together international artists,



Kuwait seeks high-quality FDI in priority sectors

Foreign direct investment (FDI) is a crucial element in Kuwait's strategy to achieve the United Nations sustainable development goals, and the goals included in the New Kuwait Vision 2035, said Chairman of the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA), Sheikh Dr. Mishal Al-Jaber.

In an interview with the Oxford Business Group, a premier research publication, Sheikh Mishal noted that the influence of foreign direct investment contributes to creating a sustainable, prosperous and comprehensive economy by facilitating the transfer and development of advanced technology, encouraging innovation in green industries and promoting renewable energy and smart cities.

It also works to strengthen relationships with local suppliers and producers, develop the national workforce and create job opportunities in various sectors. And, at the international level, it supports Foreign Direct Investment Global Partnerships for Sustainable Development through Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives.

He added that in line with the authority's mission of promoting Kuwait as a major location for value-added direct investment, developing local skills is a key goal, and this is in line with New Kuwait Vision 2035's focus on creative human capital. He noted that the current government work program for the period 2023-2027 emphasizes nurturing local talent, improving the quality of life, and building an advanced and sustainable economy.

In recent years, the Authority has cooperated closely with its licensed investment partners to develop national talent. These entities have announced hundreds of quality job opportunities for the local workforce in various fields and at various administrative, professional and technical levels. Thousands of employees have benefited from these programs that offer specialized, accredited certificates to enhance professional and managerial skills.

Sheikh Mishal pointed out that the Authority uses a multi-faceted investment policy that is consistent with national and international frameworks, including the principles contained



Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA) Director General Sheikh Dr. Mishal Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah

in the framework of the investment policy of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development for sustainable development.

He noted that the latest interim strategy for the period 2023-2025 identifies three strategic directions — adopting digital transformation, enhancing resilience in the face of global challenges, and enhancing capabilities to

attract and retain direct investment.

He added, "These focus areas aim to enhance competitiveness by attracting high-quality investments in priority sectors, as specified in the government's strategy for the period 2023-2027, and priority sectors include tourism and entertainment, transportation, communications and logistics services, housing, communications and information technology, financial services, renewable energy, oil and petrochemicals.

He concluded by saying, "In parallel with the ongoing government efforts, the Authority is supervising the development of three economic zones to serve as industrial clusters, beginning with the Abdali Economic Zone, which will be launched in the near future.

These areas are designed to be integrated into the development of major strategic regional projects, and the Authority is actively working on enhancing these opportunities through digital and traditional media campaigns to highlight emerging developments and improve the investment environment."

IBPC hosts visiting Indian IT delegation



Indian Business and Professional Council (IBPC) last week hosted an interactive evening with top Indian IT Industry delegates who were in Kuwait to attend the India-Kuwait Information Technology conference.

The Indian delegation, whose visit was organized in association with the Indian IT industry association, nasscom, comprised

representatives from leading IT companies in India that offered services ranging across the IT domain, including IT solution providers, online security and artificial intelligence.

The interactive evening held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel witnessed a large number of Indian business owners, senior executives and representatives of various



companies. "This is our small endeavor to connect the Indian IT sector with Kuwaiti business houses and industries", said IBPC Chairman Gurvinder Singh Lamba in his welcome speech.

In his address on the occasion, Indian Ambassador H.E. Dr. Adarsh Swaika said that the visiting delegation had a very fruitful meeting earlier with key stakeholders in

the IT field in Kuwait, and that he expected Kuwait "would take full advantage of India's growing IT story".

The event provided a great opportunity for business people to interact with the Indian companies and explore various opportunities. A booklet for the nasscom conference was also released during the event.



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India, Kuwait to strengthen ties in Information Technology



The Indian embassy, in cooperation with the Indian Business and Professionals Council and the National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM), organized the Indian-Kuwaiti Conference for Information Technology. It featured about 20 prominent companies in the IT services sector from India, with the support of the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Kuwait has been strengthening its ties with India in the field of information technology, with

the participation of 18-22 specialized Indian companies operating in Kuwait.

The Indian Ambassador, Dr. Adarsh Swaika, emphasized during his speech that Indian companies are highly active in the technology sector in all Gulf Cooperation Council countries, particularly in the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

Ambassador Swaika stated that the successful Indian technological solutions can easily be applied anywhere in the world, including Kuwait. The Indian technology industry generated revenues of

\$245 billion during the current fiscal year. Further pointing out that India is the third largest and fastest-growing center for technology startups globally, with returns of about \$250 billion annually in the technology sector. While Wafa Qatami, a member of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry, stated that India is among Kuwait's main trading partners, ranking fourth in terms of countries exporting to Kuwait in 2021.

The trade exchange between the two

countries amounted to \$13.8 billion in 2022-23. Qatami emphasized that the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry is eager to provide all possible forms of cooperation to achieve common economic goals and increase trade exchange rates between the two countries.

With the impressive growth of India's technology industry and Kuwait's eagerness to embrace digital transformation, the strengthening of ties in information technology between India and Kuwait looks set to continue.

Media Freedoms and a Media Literate Public

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Explaining the reasons behind the new draft law, Al Mutairi said, "Currently, we have three existing laws, namely the Press and Publishing Law, the Electronic Publishing Law, and the Audio-Visual Law." Adding that the new draft law combines elements of three previous laws, the minister said that prior to drafting the law, "we examined the underlying standards of existing laws, with the focus on media regulation and freedom, and considered past experiences."

Elaborating further, the minister said the draft includes, among others, regulating prohibitions and penalties across all media outlets; limiting penalties to the perpetrator of the violation; canceling referral to any other law, and removing the penalty of revoking the license and closing down establishments that violate regulations." He referred to the draft law as, "a partnership between specialists and the public, with primary players in the media field being the active contributors".

"We are committed to a thorough review of the draft texts, and if there are amendments needed to clarify the provisions further, we welcome them," said the minister. Stressing that the new draft law seeks to safeguard journalists, the media, and to promote greater freedoms, Al-Mutairi added, "We will consider every idea presented until we achieve a media system befitting Kuwait."

However, a day after the information minister explained the draft media regulatory law, several members of parliament vowed to reject the law when it is tabled for debate in the National Assembly at the end of October when parliament reconvenes after its summer break. The MPs indicated they would call for protecting the individual's right to expression, and demand that the Information Minister rescind any laws restricting media freedoms.

Reflecting continuing opposition to the draft

media regulatory law, last week, the Cultural Committee at the Media Department in Kuwait University College of Arts organized a seminar titled, 'What do we want from the Media Law?' Held at the Sabah Al-Salem University City, under the patronage of the Dean of the College, the event attracted academics, parliamentarians, and media professionals.

Participants voiced their concerns with the draft media law, including that it could be manipulated to suit political whims, and that the information ministry was attempting to play the role of the judiciary by introducing restrictions and deciding penalties on its own. They called for expanding media freedoms and removing articles in the draft law that were not only in violation of the constitutional rights of citizens, but also did not conform to the needs of society and individuals, and which were not consistent with prevailing developments in global media space.

Professor of private law at the Faculty of Law, Dr. Fayeze Al-Kandari, asked "Why do we need to combine three laws into one law?" Pointing out that there were repetition and vague wordings in the law's provisions, he said the law needs to be reformulated linguistically. Al-Kandari added, "We clearly need to come up with a new, distinctive media law, and we also must know the legislative purpose of this law, as, at present, it is curious and has involved everything: elections, money laundering, and others..."

For her part, parliamentarian Dr. Jinan Bushehri said, "We will not accept the passage of a law that restricts freedoms. What we seek is more media freedom for all media workers." She added that the law in its present form raises several important questions, including the important question: "Who is this law addressed to?" Who are the media professionals addressed by this law?

Conforming to the view of his parliamentary colleague, MP Hamad Al-Olayan said although

the draft law contains several beautiful terms, it restricts many freedoms.

Noting that the new law defines violations in vague terms that enable political whims to take precedence in some penalties, he said, "the new law contains 'many articles that we will not allow to pass. Also, it glorifies the authority of the ministry and the minister, and this is something we do not accept.'"

On a related vein, in early October, the Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA), which regulates internet services and technologies in Kuwait, decided to scrap its tender for developing the Kuwait International electronic portal that it had floated earlier. The decision followed outcry from the public and by legislators who said that it was aimed at monitoring internet activities of users in Kuwait, and restricting their online freedom.

The strong response by citizens and legislators to any attempts to restrict freedom to access the internet or on social media platforms is understandable, given the widespread use of online media in Kuwait. A report in 2022 by the International Data Corporation, a global leader in market intelligence on information technology, found that nearly 100 percent of Kuwait's population of 4.7 million people were subscribers to internet usage and social media sites, and that mobile subscriptions were in excess of 6.5 million.

Regrettably, the high rate of internet and social media usage, and the large mobile penetration numbers in Kuwait has not translated into a corresponding level of media and information literacy (MIL) among the public. However, this situation is not unique to Kuwait; estimates by the UN show that although 60 percent of the world's population, or 4.75 billion people, regularly access the internet to express themselves, inform themselves, or ask questions on digital social networks, global MIL numbers remain relatively low.

Today, the world is witnessing a dramatic increase in access to information and communication through traditional print services, as well as, increasingly, from online sources. The information that people gain and engage with daily is critical, as it determines and colors their perceptions, beliefs and attitudes. Media and information literacy enables people to enhance the quality of information they engage with; first, by accessing information from trusted sources, and secondly, by assessing this information critically before using it or sharing with others.

With internet usage predicted to expand phenomenally in the 21st-century, the need for the world, and for us here in Kuwait, to promote MIL and critical thinking skills has never been

greater. It is imperative that these key learning competencies be inculcated at a very young age by including them in national educational curricula. The world also needs more dependable social anchors and trusted information sources, as well as reliable reference points to base what people read, watch, or interact with online. Sadly, these are attributes that are currently in short-supply.

The 'Global Media and Information Literacy Week', organized under the umbrella of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) from 24-31 October every year, underlines the importance of raising awareness and enhancing the uptake of the interrelated set of MIL skills among people worldwide. The event also enables policy- and decision-makers to explore paths for integrating MIL programs into national policies, products, and strategies.

In her message on the occasion of Global Media and Information Literacy Week this year, UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay stated that digital networks have become the preferred platforms for expression, protest and interaction worldwide. But, paradoxically, while the digital revolution has enabled the spread of democratic ideals and the diversity of cultural expressions, "it now poses serious challenges for our democracies, as disinformation and hate speech proliferate on social networks," said Ms. Azoulay.

She added that to address these challenges it was essential to enhance media and information literacy globally, and that UNESCO is strongly committed to this task. In this regard, UNESCO and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) have launched the first international university network on Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue (UNESCO/UNAOC-MILID Network), with the aim of promoting MIL societies on a global scale.

The aim of the initiative is to ultimately improve understanding and cooperative relations among nations and peoples across cultures and religions. In addition, a public endowed with MIL and critical thinking competencies can maximize the advantages and minimize the harm arising from today's hyper-connected, communication and information landscape.

Achieving these competencies in the increasingly digital world of the 21st-century also helps promote equality, encourage intercultural and interreligious dialogue, influence freedom of expression, and foster peaceful relations in societies and between nations. As the preamble to the constitution of the United Nations, the UN Charter, states: "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed."

Thought
for the
week

“ A little thought and a little kindness are often worth more than a great deal of money.

— John Rushkin

Government plans comprehensive revamp of corporate tax

Government is reportedly considering the introduction of a comprehensive new tax legislation to replace the existing tax laws. The proposed legislation, labeled 'Business Profits Tax Law' will impose a 15 percent tax on profits for all legal entities operating in Kuwait, while ensuring that citizens and small businesses are not subject to the tax.

The introduction of the proposed law would involve a two-stage implementation process. The first phase, which would begin on 1 January 2025, would see major Kuwaiti multinational companies being taxed. The second phase, which would begin on 1 January 2026, will involve the comprehensive application of the new tax law on all legal entities in Kuwait. The prevailing tax law will be abolished with the introduction of the second phase at the start of 2026.

Corporate tax is said to be among the 14 priorities that the government intends to present to the Parliamentary Coordination Committee for approval within the legislative itinerary for the National Assembly session slated to start on



31 October. A government memorandum submitted to the Council of Ministers has considered the necessary requirements to implement the major international corporate tax. It has also recommended that Kuwait joins the OECD/G20 Inclusive Framework on Base Erosion and Profit Sharing (BEPS). Kuwait is currently the only Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) state that has not signed on to this tax framework.

The memorandum also recommends that Kuwait contract with an international consultant specialized in global taxation laws, to provide a comprehensive study

to determine the rules, standards, and requirements related to tax application. The consultant will be charged with preparing the necessary policies to implement the project in line with international best practices, and the drafting of laws in this regard.

The consultant will also train national cadres on the application. Once a consultant has been contracted for the new tax law, tax awareness regarding the new tax will be spread three months later.

The report also clarifies the difference between 'first-phase' companies and

'second-phase' entities. The list of companies in the first-phase include around 15 Kuwaiti multinational companies, including government entities, with annual revenues in excess of €750 million that operate in Kuwait and foreign markets

The 'second-phase' Kuwaiti companies are those that are financially ready to enter the tax structure by 2026, and who will be required to prepare their internal accounting system and infrastructure for implementation of the new corporate tax structure from 1 January 2026.

The list of companies subject to tax is expected to double in the second phase. The proposed tax structure will reportedly be dynamic, designed to accommodate the entry of any company in the future once it meets the conditions laid out by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

The government move is intended to push for comprehensive tax legislation in Kuwait that adheres to accounting rules and systems in the country, ensuring that all eligible companies are subject to the new tax law.

Relations with the Philippines progressing at steady pace

Speaking to media on the sidelines of a reception last week by the Embassy of Kazakhstan to mark the country's National Day, Assistant Secretary of State for Asian Affairs, Ambassador Samih Hayat, said that Kuwait and the Philippines are working to resolve their bilateral misunderstandings and that "this requires time and concrete steps that are progressing at a steady pace, especially after His Highness the Crown Prince met with

the Philippine President on the sidelines of the ASEAN Summit in Riyadh".

On the question of the mutual ban on travel visas, Ambassador Hayat said that "the issue of lifting the ban on workers is related to the work of committees discussing joint matters." He explained that "bilateral meetings between the relevant committees in the two countries have not ceased and the diplomatic channels are always open between them".



On joint projects with Asian countries, the ambassador clarified, "Repercussions from the COVID pandemic had delayed several joint projects to develop relations with Asian countries, but that the coming period will witness more high-level mutual visits, which will result in many agreements and memorandums of understanding that will legally frame relations for investment in Asian countries."

Career counselors share valuable advice with senior students at SIMS



Senior students from Salmiya Indian Model School (SIMS) interacted with experienced career counselors from reputed Indian universities at the school auditorium last week, as part of understanding their career options and their future educational choices.

The educational team was welcomed to the campus by Director of the School Anees Ahmed. He thanked the organizers for their timely presentation to the children who would

greatly benefit from the interaction with the career counselors.

The sessions were organized by Indus Group, the pioneer and leading exhibition organizers in India. The event was aimed at providing advice and guidance to students on their future education choices.

The event was attended by experienced career counselors who provided valuable insights to students on career opportunities,



industry trends, and job market demands. The counselors also gave guidance on which courses and degrees would be most beneficial for students to pursue in order to achieve their career goals.

During the interaction students were encouraged to ask questions and share their concerns with the counselors. The counselors provided personalized advice based on each student's interests and aspirations. They

also highlighted the importance of gaining practical experience and building a strong network in the industry.

Speaking about the event, a spokesperson for Indus Group said, "We are committed to providing students with the right guidance to help them make informed decisions about their future. The career counseling and interaction meet is just one of the many initiatives we take to support the Indian education system."



EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Carbon-Offset Market's Broken Promises



Mateo Estrada
Lead Advocacy Strategist at
the Organization of Indigenous
Peoples of the Colombian
Amazon.

The recent Climate Week NYC, which convened corporate leaders, policymakers, scientists, and others to discuss climate solutions and drive progress toward decarbonization, underscored how forests have become big business. The fast-growing voluntary carbon market, where companies purchase nature-based offsets to compensate for their emissions, was worth \$2 billion in 2021 and could reach \$10-40 billion by 2030. Some even see forest preservation and restoration as a silver bullet for climate change.

But for indigenous communities, including my tribe in the Colombian Amazon, the arrival of carbon traders marked the start of a troubled history: dubious deals, land grabs, and violent evictions in contested territories. Our collective experience raises serious questions about the integrity of a market that is poised to expand across Latin America and Africa, as the world's largest companies increasingly rely on forest-based offsets to reach net-zero emissions.

To be sure, carbon offsets (also known as credits) were a good idea. Companies, using market mechanisms, could cancel out their carbon dioxide emissions by recognizing



indigenous communities' superior conservation practices and paying them to prevent deforestation. The mechanism also reflects the importance of forests as natural carbon sinks that can contribute more than one-third of the mitigation required to meet the Paris climate agreement's goals by 2030.

The unregulated and opaque market that emerged, however, has major design flaws. Recent research by the Berkeley Carbon Trading Project shows that Verra, the world's

leading carbon-crediting program, has given project developers the freedom to cherry-pick methodological approaches to maximize the quantity of credits they can receive. This has resulted in offset schemes that absorb far less carbon than promised, or none at all.

Even projects that represent genuine carbon reductions are not without controversy. The Alto Mayo in the Peruvian Amazon, which accounted for 40 percent of Disney's offsets between 2012 and 2020, has successfully stopped some deforestation, but not without generating ill will by violently evicting forest communities.

How did a good idea go so wrong? Weak regulation is largely to blame. Carbon-credit dealers, often called 'carbon cowboys', target indigenous communities across Latin America and Africa, sweet-talking them into signing away their rights to the carbon in their forests. The contracts are almost always exploitative, ranging from 100-year irrevocable commitments to terms that award the dealers half of the income earned from carbon credits.

Some dealers have embraced a more aggressive approach. When TotalEnergies seized land from farmers in Congo for a reforestation scheme, it paid some around \$1 per hectare and others nothing; women farmers reported being chased away from their fields by men in trucks. The document that the farmers signed described any payment as 'symbolic' and made 'with a view to clearing their rights of use' to the land. Carbon-offsetting projects are often carried out in jurisdictions with complex land-rights issues that require diligence, precision, and knowledge of indigenous people's customary land rights. But in the 'Wild West' carbon market, where speed is of the essence, deals are made with little concern for history, culture, or rights. That puts indigenous communities like mine in a precarious position.

Meanwhile, the corporate appetite for forest-based carbon credits continues to grow. As businesses come under intense pressure to meet net-zero targets, buying offsets is far easier and more expedient than reducing their own emissions. And when this voracious demand collides with a disorganized and loosely regulated market, brokers are willing and able to create credits by any means necessary, regardless of the climate impact.

The voluntary carbon market's widespread greenwashing is particularly galling. While many offset schemes overstate the amount of carbon that they capture, an investigation by The Guardian, Die Zeit, and SourceMaterial, a nonprofit investigative journalism organization, concluded that a whopping 94 percent of Verra's rainforest offset credits yielded no benefit to the climate.

Guyana's unprecedented carbon scheme has faced similar scrutiny. Earlier this year, the Hess Corporation, which was granted a concession for oil exploration off the coast of Guyana, purchased \$750 million worth of forest-based carbon credits from the country. But indigenous peoples have watched over these forests for centuries,

and the threat of deforestation is very low. In fact, the project permits a level of deforestation that is higher than the country's historic levels. Activists point to the climate damage caused by greatly exaggerated emissions-reduction claims, especially in South America's newest oil-producing country, while some indigenous communities say the authorities have sold off what is not theirs to sell. Indigenous peoples should be fairly compensated for the important work that we do to safeguard forests. Instead, the current system has forced us to contend with volatile offset prices, extractive brokers, and markets that disregard human rights. Even the regulatory framework for carbon markets being developed by the United Nations — which could set a dangerous precedent for all other standards — does not yet account properly for human rights.

An incremental approach to reform will not be enough to restore the voluntary carbon market's credibility. Funding for forest-protection schemes must be strictly regulated, based on

“While many offset schemes overstate the amount of carbon that they capture, media investigations concluded that a whopping 94 percent of Verra, the world's largest carbon crediting program, yielded no benefit to the climate.”

credible science, and impervious to companies' demand for easy offsets. Forest communities like mine must be provided with long-term financial security and a seat at the decision-making table, not in the observers' gallery.

Nature-based carbon-offset schemes get some things right: we must look to forests as a tool for mitigating global warming and pay the people who protect them. As it stands, however, the voluntary carbon market is riddled with shortcomings, resulting in forest-protection schemes that inflate their climate impact and exploit local communities. The time is right for a radical overhaul.



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Unlocking Health Technology's Potential for All

EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT



Mariana Mazzucato

Founding Director of the UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, is Chair of the World Health Organization's Council on the Economics of Health for All. A tenth anniversary edition of her book *The Entrepreneurial State: Debunking Public vs. Private Sector Myths* was published in September.



COVID-19 cases are on the rise again, offering a stark reminder of the lessons we ought to have learned from previous waves. Far from being confined to COVID, most of these lessons apply to infectious-disease threats generally.

The pandemic demonstrated that we have the scientific and manufacturing capabilities to develop and mass-produce safe and effective vaccines quickly in the face of novel threats. But the success of the COVID-19 vaccines also reflected two decades of tireless efforts by scientists in academia and the private sector; and when the moment of truth arrived, a timely injection of public funds carried that work across the finish line.

If there was one technology that played an especially pivotal role, it was mRNA, or messenger RNA, which offers a level of adaptability and scalability that makes it highly suitable for pandemic preparedness and response (PPR). Already, mRNA vaccines and treatments are being tested for a wide variety of diseases, and efforts are ongoing to expand the technology's usability (such as by improving its temperature stability). When the next viral epidemic hits, mRNA vaccines will most likely be the first solution out of the gates.

“

Deploying community health workers who consistently provide just 30 lifesaving health services in countries with the highest disease burden would save as many as 6.9 million lives annually and reduce child mortality by almost half.

”

But though this scientific breakthrough saved countless lives during the last pandemic, the benefits were not equitably shared. One year after the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccines, approximately 73 percent of administered doses were concentrated in high- and upper-middle-income countries, whereas only 0.9 percent had reached low-income countries.

This disparity was even more pronounced for mRNA vaccines, which were primarily used in wealthy countries that initially hoarded supplies. Meanwhile, pharmaceutical companies maintained tight control over licensing and production, allowing them to reap eye-watering

profits. Another lesson of the pandemic, then, is that the mRNA platform will not realize its full potential unless we adopt a new approach that emphasizes equitable access and the common good. That means pursuing symbiotic public-private alliances that are better designed to share both risks and rewards.

When companies benefit from public funds — be it subsidies, guarantees, loans, purchase commitments, or procurement contracts — they should be required to maximize the public value of such investments. The conditions tied to public funding for mRNA-related research and development, production, and distribution, for example, could ensure affordability, equitable access, and reinvestment of profits into health innovation. The mRNA technologies that result from a collective effort should not be under the exclusive control of a few private companies; rather, they should be considered part of a global health commons, and made available and accessible to everyone in need.

A comparison of the Oxford-AstraZeneca and Pfizer-BioNTech (mRNA) vaccines shows why such governance matters. Both partnerships received considerable public funding — \$445 million to BioNTech and \$1.3 billion to Oxford-AstraZeneca — and both benefited from large advance-purchase commitments. But while public funding for production of Oxford-AstraZeneca's vaccine was conditioned on the company setting lower prices in the interest of accessibility, Pfizer-BioNTech was permitted to set higher prices, and then rebuffed calls for it to offer licensing agreements and technology transfers. Next time, governments must ensure that contract provisions reflect the common good and regulate excess profit-taking.

Likewise, intellectual-property governance should seek to facilitate knowledge transfers between countries, in the interest of more decentralized innovation and manufacturing. We urgently need to redesign IP rules and practices to ensure that critical health technologies, especially those heavily reliant on taxpayer funds and human capital (from researchers to participants in clinical trials), are governed for the common good. That is why the World Health Organization's Council on the Economics of Health for All, which I chaired, has called for patents on mRNA technologies to be governed on the basis of a public-good perspective, rather than a proprietary one.

In practice, this means that the criteria for granting patents, including secondary patents, should be made more stringent, including by requiring additional disclosures of information that can help governments evaluate the scale of the market power they are granting. Patents should cover only fundamentally new innovations, and they should be confined more to downstream technologies, in order to prevent the privatization of basic research

tools, processes, and platforms. The purpose of medical innovation should be to improve 'Health for All' — the WHO's central mission — which requires timely and equitable access.

Providing access to essential IP and capital is critical to establishing the local and regional infrastructure needed to produce mRNA-based products. The WHO has explicitly recognized this need by launching an mRNA technology-transfer program, with a hub in South Africa and new technology-sharing partnerships between

companies in at least 15 low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Strong financial and political backing, however, will be needed to ensure this initiative's success. For example, LMIC governments could go further by establishing regional R&D hubs to foster collaboration between public and private actors on joint R&D portfolios. More broadly, as governments take a renewed interest in industrial policy, they should recognize the opportunity to mobilize more investment, innovation, and growth around the goal of Health for All. Brazil, to its credit, has already aligned PPR with industrial policy through its Health Economic-Industrial Complex, which will use public procurement to create a domestic market for locally developed mRNA vaccines, yielding important health and economic benefits.

As international negotiations on a Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness, and Response Accord make headway, the issue of ensuring timely, equitable access to medical countermeasures, including mRNA technologies, must take center stage. The mRNA platform has immense potential to deliver groundbreaking treatments and vaccines for diseases that primarily afflict LMICs and could be produced locally and affordably under the right IP regime.

To build this form of resilience, we must empower those countries' researchers, manufacturers, and governments to shape regional R&D and manufacturing ecosystems in the interest of the common good. Only then will mRNA technology reach its full potential.

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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT



Fixing Global Economic Governance



Joseph E. Stiglitz

A Nobel laureate in economics, is University Professor at Columbia University and Co-Chair of the Independent Commission for the Reform of International Corporate Taxation.

Following the annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank this month, the Middle East is teetering on the edge of a major conflict, and the rest of the world continues to fracture along new economic and geopolitical lines. Rarely have the shortcomings of world leaders and existing institutional arrangements been so glaringly obvious. The IMF's governing body could not even agree on a final communiqué.

True, the World Bank, under its new leadership, has committed to addressing climate change, tackling growth challenges, and strengthening its anti-poverty policies. It aims to increase its lending by leveraging existing capital and by raising new funds. For the latter, however, it will need US congressional approval, and that seems unlikely with Republicans controlling the House of Representatives. Importantly, the planned increase in lending capacity falls far short of what the world needs. It is more than just a drop in the bucket, but the bucket remains largely empty.

As with the climate discussions surrounding the United Nations General Assembly in September, there was much talk about scaling up private capital by lowering the risk premium that investors demand for projects in poor countries. Although the social returns to investing in solar power in Sub-Saharan Africa (where there is abundant sunshine and a dearth of energy) are higher than in the cloudy north, the private sector has been reluctant to enter, owing to fears about political and economic instability.

The upshot of all this 'de-risking' talk is that the public sector should provide whatever subsidies it takes to 'crowd in' the private

sector. No wonder big private financial firms are hovering around these international meetings. They are ready to feed at the public trough, hoping for new arrangements that will privatize the gains while socializing the losses — as past 'public-private partnerships' have done.

But why should we expect the private sector to solve a long-run public-goods problem like climate change? The private sector is well known to be short-sighted, focusing wholly on proprietary gains, not social benefits. It has been awash with liquidity for 15 years, thanks to central banks pumping huge amounts of money into the economy in response to the 2008 financial crisis (which the private sector caused) and the COVID-19 pandemic. The result is a roundabout process whereby central banks lend to commercial banks, which lend to private Western firms, which then lend to foreign governments or infrastructure-investment

Yet existing international arrangements are effectively blocking this urgent imperative.

Consider the OECD's Base Erosion and Profit Shifting framework. The hope was that BEPS would make rich corporations pay their fair share of taxes in the countries where they operate. The prevailing 'transfer price system' gives multinationals enormous leeway to report profits in whatever tax jurisdiction they prefer. But the proposed BEPS reforms — even if fully adopted, which seems unlikely — seem of limited effect and will provide developing countries with limited additional revenues at most. Worse, the invidious Investor-State Dispute Settlement process, which allows multinationals to sue governments when they make regulatory changes that could harm profits, has further constrained the resources available to emerging markets and developing countries, even as it has hampered their efforts

in the global production chain.

All these flawed arrangements can and should be changed. Doing so would provide developing countries with the resources they need to invest in climate-change mitigation and adaptation, public health, and the rest of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Perhaps the single most important improvement to the global financial architecture would be an annual issuance of, say, \$300 billion in special drawing rights (SDRs, the IMF's international reserve asset), which it can 'print' at will if advanced economies agree. As matters stand, the bulk of SDR issuances go to rich countries (the IMF's largest 'shareholders') that do not need the funds, whereas developing countries could use them to invest in their future or to pay back debt (including to the IMF).

That is why rich countries should recycle their SDRs by turning them into loans or grants for climate investments in developing countries. While this is already being done to a limited extent through the IMF's Resilience and Sustainability Trust, it could be scaled up massively and redesigned to achieve a bigger bang for the buck. The best part about this approach is that it does not really cost advanced economies anything. Unless one is beholden to some misguided ideology, there is no reason to oppose it.

Even if advanced economies reached net-zero emissions tomorrow, we would still be doomed, because emissions in developing countries would continue to rise. While offering the private sector better incentives (a euphemism for bribes) has been discussed exhaustively, very little progress has been made, and tariffs and other restraints on environmentally harmful imported goods, such as those Europe is now imposing and threatening to increase in the future, are unlikely to elicit the kind of cooperation that is needed.

The best, and perhaps the only, strategy, then, to ensure that developing countries and emerging markets do what they must if we are to avert a climate catastrophe is to start rectifying some of the global injustices of the past, and to generate more income and affordable financing for developing countries.

“Entire structure of trade agreements preserve neo-colonial trade patterns, with developing countries producing mostly primary commodities, while developed countries dominate the high-value-added links in the global production chain.”

firms, with transaction costs and government guarantees piling up along the way.

It would be much better to use liquidity to strengthen multilateral development banks (MDBs), which have developed special competencies in the relevant areas. Though MDBs have sometimes been slow to act, that is largely because they have obligations to protect the environment and uphold people's rights. Given that climate change is a long-run challenge, it is better that climate investments be carried out wisely and at scale.

When it comes to achieving scale, the key is not just to mobilize more money by borrowing from rich countries, with all the well-known problems that entails; it is to enhance emerging markets' and developing countries' revenues.

to respond to environmental and health challenges.

Then there is the World Trade Organization's Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) regime, which led to vaccine apartheid and unnecessary deaths, hospitalizations, and illnesses in the developing world during the pandemic (further increasing expenditures and decreasing revenues). And TRIPS is designed to fill rich multinationals' coffers with royalties on intellectual property from the developing world well into the future. In fact, the entire structure of trade agreements has preserved neo-colonial trade patterns, with developing countries stuck producing mostly primary commodities, while developed countries dominate the high-value-added links



Healthy lifestyle lowers risk of depression

Depression, a common mental health condition that impacts various aspects of life and leads to symptoms of profound sadness and loneliness in people, is known to affect nearly 300 million people worldwide.

Results from World Mental Health surveys by the World Health Organization (WHO) and other related studies have found that depressive disorder, commonly referred to as depression, affects an estimated 3.8 percent of the global adult population. Around 4 percent of men and 6 percent of women, as well as 6 percent of adults over the age of 60 were found to experience depression.

Other figures from these studies show that more than 10 percent of pregnant women, and women who have just given birth, experience depression symptoms. And, that worldwide more than 700,000 people die each year due to suicide, which is the fourth leading cause of death in 15-29-year-olds.

A report by the WHO also stated that although there are known, effective treatments for mental disorders, more than 75 percent of people in low- and middle-income countries have no access, or do not receive treatment. Barriers to effective care include a lack of investment in mental health care, lack of trained health-care providers and social stigma associated with mental disorders. Given its widespread prevalence and propensity to affect anyone anywhere,

pharmaceutical firms have developed several drugs to treat depressive disorders and its symptoms. A new study now shows that along with drugs and medical intervention, leading a healthy lifestyle can significantly decrease the risk of depression.

While adhering to a healthy lifestyle to avoid depression is sound common-sense, the science behind positive habits and reduced risk of depression is less well understood. The new study helps define what leading a 'healthy lifestyle' involves, by looking at the effects of a broad range of lifestyle factors on those affected with depression.

Previous studies have largely focused on specific lifestyle factors and their impact on depression, the new study looks at a combination of them, as well as their effects on brain structure and biomarkers.

The collaborative study, led by researchers from the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom, concentrated on seven healthy lifestyle factors that had been identified as protective against depression. The factors were, smoking, diet, exercise level, sleep, sedentary behavior, social connectedness, and alcohol consumption.

The study utilized the UK Biobank — a medical research database containing anonymous health and lifestyle information about its participants — to examine data from 287,282 participants, out of which roughly 13,000 had depression, and followed them over a nine-year period.

The study found that having a healthy lifestyle reduced the risk of depression by 57 percent. Of the seven lifestyle factors observed, healthy sleep had the greatest impact on depression risk, decreasing it by 22 percent, followed by 'never smoking' at 20 percent and frequent social connection at 18 percent. Having a healthy diet, consuming alcohol in moderation, regular physical activity, and reduced sedentary behavior, were also found to lower depression risk.

Based on these seven factors, participants were assigned a lifestyle score between 1 and 7 and assigned to one of three groups — unfavorable, intermediate, and favorable — indicating the overall quality of their lifestyle. Participants in the intermediate group were roughly 41 percent less likely to develop depression compared to those in the unfavorable lifestyle, while those in the favorable lifestyle group were 57 percent less likely.

Researchers also looked at genetic variants linked with depression and found that individuals with the lowest genetic risk score were 25 percent less likely to develop depression. The finding that genetic risk had a smaller impact than lifestyle, underscores that leading a healthy lifestyle can be even more important to reducing risk of depression than genetic factors.

While the research relied on self-reporting about behaviors, which can make accuracy and consistency difficult, it also utilized biological and neurological markers to help understand the relationship between lifestyle factors and depression.

The researchers used biological markers such as triglycerides (a biomarker of increased stress), and c-reactive protein (an indicator of inflammation), as well as changes in brain structure as indicators of



the biological mechanisms of depression in the body and brain.

Researchers utilized MRI brain scans of about 33,000 participants and were able to correlate healthy lifestyle factors with larger volume in certain areas of the brain, which is an indicator of brain health. The stress and inflammation biomarkers were also found to improve with lifestyle scores, highlighting the complex relationship between how stress, metabolism, and even the immune systems can affect risk for depression.

A previous study had found that high triglyceride levels were associated with increased prevalence of depression in men. Other research had associated C-reactive protein with a greater symptom severity, specific pattern of depressive symptoms, and a reduced response to treatment.

The study findings have encouraged many mental health practitioners to call for a healthy lifestyle to be included in the treatment regimen for depressive disorders. They recommend that patients build up a healthy lifestyle by choosing one of the seven lifestyle factors and to slowly build up to having all seven of them over several months until having a healthy lifestyle becomes a habit.



Eating red meat increases risk of type 2 diabetes

Researchers at Harvard University T.H. Chan School of Public Health in the United States have asserted that just two servings of red meat per week may increase the risk of developing type 2 diabetes, when compared to people who eat fewer servings, and that the risk increases with greater consumption.

The new study, published on 19 October also found that replacing red meat with healthy plant-based protein sources, such as nuts and legumes, or modest amounts of dairy foods, was associated with reduced risk of type 2 diabetes. Red meat consumption included both processed and unprocessed red meat.

Previous studies have found evidence linking red meat consumption to risk of developing type 2 diabetes. However, the new study, which analyzed a larger number of type 2 diabetic patients, and monitored them for an extended period of years, provides a greater degree of certainty to the link between red meat consumption and type 2 diabetes risk.

Type 2 diabetes rates are increasing rapidly around the world. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) worldwide about 422 million people have diabetes, and over 1.5 million deaths each year are directly attributed to diabetes. These numbers have been steadily increasing over the past decades, and while

earlier diabetes was largely associated with rich developed nations, today, most of the people living with diabetes are in low- and middle-income states.

The increase in number is of concern to health authorities, as diabetes is a chronic, metabolic disease that elevates levels of blood glucose and impairs body functions. But even more concerning is the fact that diabetes is also a major risk factor for cardiovascular and kidney disease, cancer, and dementia due to the serious damage it causes to the heart, blood vessels, eyes, kidneys and nerves.

For this study, the researchers analyzed health data from 216,695 participants from studies conducted by the US National Health Services and follow-up studies that assessed food frequency through questionnaires sent to participants every two to four years over a period of 36 years. During the study period, over 22,000 participants were found to have developed type 2 diabetes.

The researchers found that consumption of red meat, including processed and unprocessed red meat, was strongly associated with increased risk of type 2 diabetes. Participants who ate the most red meat had a 62 percent higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes compared to those who ate the least. Every additional daily serving of processed red meat was associated with a 46 percent greater risk of developing type 2 diabetes and every additional daily serving of unprocessed red meat was associated with a 24 percent greater risk.

The researchers also estimated the potential effects of substituting one daily serving of red meat for another protein source. They found that substituting a serving of nuts and legumes was associated with a 30 percent lower risk of type 2 diabetes, and substituting a serving of dairy products was associated with a 22 percent lower risk.

Based on findings from the new study, health authorities, doctors and dietitians are even more confident in recommending that in order to optimize health and wellbeing people should limit the consumption of red meat to about one serving per week, and aim to swap red meat for healthier plant-based proteins — an option that is not only healthier for people but also beneficial for the environment, as it could help reduce greenhouse gas emissions linked to climate change.

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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Breaking Free from Polio



Andrew Stein

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Gates Foundation.

Eradicating polio has taken far longer than anyone expected. But the last 35 years of efforts to immunize every child against polio represent a major win for global health: a 99 percent reduction in cases means that nearly 20 million people are walking today who otherwise would have been paralyzed.

Now we must finish the job and achieve a polio-free world. That is why, in addition to combating wild polio in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) is focusing on the places where children are most likely to encounter and spread variant poliovirus, particularly the more prominent type 2. This includes northwestern Nigeria, southeastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), northern Yemen, and southern Somalia, which have accounted for more than 84 percent of these cases globally since January 2022.

Insecurity, weak infrastructure, and challenging terrain make it difficult to provide children in these areas with the most basic health services, let alone vaccines. This type of 'under-immunized' environment is especially conducive to outbreaks of variant polio, which can occur when the live, weakened virus contained in the oral polio vaccine is allowed to circulate around unvaccinated or under-vaccinated communities. Tragically, the virus can regain its strength over time and paralyze children.

Stopping the spread of variant poliovirus in Nigeria, Somalia, Yemen, and the DRC is critical to building a world without polio, but success will not come easy. Fortunately, each of these



countries has eliminated wild polio in the past, and a similar approach can be implemented to end variant outbreaks for good.

Nigeria, in particular, has demonstrated how improving population immunity through high-quality vaccination campaigns can contain outbreaks. In 2020, the country — together with the rest of the WHO African Region (with the exception of Somalia and Egypt) — was certified as being free of wild polio, marking the end of a decades-long effort to deliver a healthier future for its children. But variant poliovirus was slowly circulating in the background, before surging in 2021 and ultimately paralyzing more than 400 children in Nigeria over the course of 12 months.

The Nigerian government, steadfastly committed to eradicating polio, met the rapid rise in variant polio with a forceful response, which has led to a nearly 95 percent reduction in cases from the 2021 peak. Not only is the polio map shrinking, with fewer cases confined to smaller areas, but so, too, is the virus's genetic diversity, which means that existing outbreaks are being interrupted while new ones are being prevented. Perhaps most importantly, immunity

against variant poliovirus is rising.

Much of Nigeria's success in bringing this explosive outbreak under control can be attributed to the pioneering rollout of the novel oral polio vaccine type 2 (nOPV2), which was engineered to be more genetically stable than its predecessor and thus less likely to revert to a form that can paralyze. This innovative tool, coupled with scaled-up vaccination efforts in under-immunized communities, has resulted in fewer new type 2 variant poliovirus outbreaks. Moreover, after administering more than 450 million doses of nOPV2 to children across the country since March 2021, Nigeria is now facing only two genetic strains of the virus, compared to seven when the rollout began.

Strong political commitment has also been instrumental in this vaccine rollout, with the creation of the Presidential Task Force on Polio Eradication keeping the fight against polio high on policymakers' agenda. Moreover, programs like the Community Reorientation Women Network (CRoWN), supported by the Aliko Dangote Foundation, have contributed to Nigeria's success by empowering women —

who comprise the majority of community-health workers in remote areas — to identify zero-dose children and encourage vaccine uptake within their communities. These initiatives help parents and caregivers access essential health services for their children.

Nigeria is not the only country making progress. In Somalia, which faces the longest ongoing outbreak of variant poliovirus, GPEI is collaborating with other organizations to implement mobile health camps that can provide more than a half-million children with polio vaccines, as well as neonatal, nutrition, and curative services. In the DRC, the expanded use of digital mapping tools has helped health workers reach thousands of zero-dose children, and the government is setting a global example by convening Presidential Forums on Immunization and Polio Eradication; the most recent of which was held in June.

Emergency operations centers are now in place in each of these countries, helping to improve the speed and quality of their responses to polio outbreaks; in many cases, these centers also help defend against other health threats, including COVID-19 and measles. These innovations, together with the increased use of nOPV2, have already boosted immunity, reduced the number of cases, and shrunk the virus's genetic diversity in the highest-priority areas.

The goal of ending polio once and for all is within reach, but getting there requires a collective effort. To achieve a polio-free world, financial support from global donors — a significant factor in making progress in Nigeria and elsewhere — must be increased. The governments of affected countries must also commit themselves, more strongly than ever, to eradicating the disease within their borders.

Nigeria beat polio once, and it can, and will, do so again. Let us ensure that every country experiencing outbreaks can put an end to the disease for good.



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