



DIPLOMAT

Argentina-Kuwait
Relations, Cooperation,
and Future Prospects

2



LOCAL

Relaunch of French
Business Council signals
start of new economic era

7



LOCAL

Where Faith Meets History:
Ahmadi Church Enters a New Era
as the Gulf's First Minor Basilica



Vatican lauds Kuwait as a model of religious co-existence

The Times Kuwait Report

Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin during his visit last week to Kuwait affirmed the Vatican's deep appreciation for the longstanding relationship with Kuwait, describing it as one rooted in mutual respect, sincere dialogue, and a shared commitment to peace and human dignity.

Speaking to the media during his official visit to Kuwait, Cardinal Parolin emphasized both the pastoral and diplomatic importance of his visit, which coincided with the historic elevation of the Church of Our Lady of Arabia, in Ahmadi to the rank of Minor Basilica.

"The Holy See views its relationship with the State of Kuwait with sincere esteem and gratitude," said Cardinal Parolin, noting that diplomatic ties between the two sides date back to 1968. He highlighted Kuwait's distinctive place in the Holy See's engagement with the

H.E. Cardinal Pietro Parolin



Gulf, pointing to the country's consistent climate of stability and hospitality that allows diverse communities to live side by side.

He added, "My visit is therefore both pastoral and diplomatic. Pastoral, because it is connected to a moment of great significance for the Catholic faithful; and diplomatic, because it expresses appreciation for the friendship and cooperation that have grown over decades between the Holy See and the State of Kuwait."

Reflecting on the elevation of the Church of Our Lady of Arabia to a Minor Basilica, Cardinal Parolin described the title as a papal recognition of the church's historical, spiritual, and pastoral importance. He said the designation strengthens the church's bond with the universal Church and the See of Peter, while acknowledging its long-standing role as a spiritual home for Catholics in Kuwait and a point of reference for the wider Gulf.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

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Argentina-Kuwait Relations, Cooperation, and Future Prospects

Ambassador Ramiro Hernán Velloso

The Times Kuwait Report

In a recent exclusive interview with The Times Kuwait, newly appointed Ambassador of Argentina H.E. Ramiro Hernán Velloso, described the relationship between Argentina and Kuwait as friendly, respectful, and grounded in decades of mutual support. He added that this enduring partnership is reflected in several significant historical milestones that continue to shape bilateral ties today.

One such milestone was Argentina's support during the Gulf War (1990-1991), when the Argentine Navy participated in the multilateral coalition that responded to the invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi forces. This commitment was further strengthened by the outstanding participation of hundreds of Argentinians in Kuwait between 1991 and 2003 through UNIKOM, the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission.

Another cornerstone of the relationship has been Kuwait's sustained financial support through the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED). Since 1994, KFAED has financed numerous projects across Argentina, including aqueducts, water treatment plants, and road infrastructure in different provinces. For more than 30 years, Argentina has been the Fund's main partner in Latin America and the Caribbean, with both sides committed to further deepening this cooperation in the future.

As he begins his diplomatic tenure in Kuwait, Ambassador Velloso said that the friendship between the two countries, combined with their complementarity in many areas, offers strong potential to expand ties across multiple sectors. He noted that remaining attentive and open to understanding Kuwait and its people, whom he views as potential key partners in the bilateral relationship, is critical. His overarching goal is to bring the two nations closer together in every possible way, so as to provide benefits to both sides.

Ambassador Velloso pointed to multiple new areas for bilateral engagement. Among the most evident sectors are food and energy, given the respective production strengths of both countries. Argentina is a major global food producer and also possesses advanced technological capabilities in areas such as biotechnology, which could contribute to Kuwait's agricultural development.

Energy is another key area of opportunity. While Kuwait is a world leader in energy production, Argentina is currently undergoing a significant transformation in this sector. This includes the development of numerous projects linked to Vaca Muerta, a geological formation in Argentine Patagonia that is one of the world's largest reservoirs of unconventional oil and gas. In parallel, Argentina is also



“Argentina and Kuwait share a relationship built on friendship, respect, and decades of mutual support. From our solidarity during the Gulf War to long-standing cooperation through the Kuwait Fund, these strong foundations—combined with our complementary strengths in food, energy, investment, and humanitarian action—give us clear potential to deepen bilateral ties for the benefit of both nations. **”**

expanding renewable energy projects. Mining is expected to be another major driver of Argentina's economic growth over the next decade, with large-scale projects underway in lithium, copper, gold, silver, and other critical minerals—creating further potential for cooperation with Kuwait.

The ambassador further noted that Argentina and Kuwait also share similar positions on many international issues, creating favorable conditions for enhanced political and diplomatic coordination in international forums. In addition, both countries have strong humanitarian credentials. Argentina brings decades of experience in humanitarian action, while Kuwait is internationally recognized as a global humanitarian center.

Ambassador Velloso highlighted several opportunities for collaboration through initiatives such as the White Helmets Argentina, a program under Argentina's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Over its 30-year history, the White Helmets have carried out more than 400 international humanitarian assistance projects and missions in 81 countries across five continents. He also pointed to the potential for joint efforts through triangular cooperation, an area in which Argentina has over 20 years of experience. This includes work through FO.AR, the Argentine Fund for International Cooperation, established in 1992, which supports developing countries through the

transfer of knowledge and capabilities where Argentina has proven expertise.

Addressing investment, the Ambassador noted that while Kuwaitis are among the most active real-estate investors globally, Argentina has yet to become a primary destination for such investments. However, he identified several projects that could be attractive to Kuwaiti investors, including residential towers with accommodation, parking, and commercial spaces; tourism-related developments such as luxury and boutique hotels, restaurant complexes, and government-owned land earmarked for tourism; and an agricultural production hub under development for cherries, grapes, almonds, and pistachios. He emphasized his availability to engage with potential Kuwaiti investors interested in these and other opportunities.

More broadly, Argentina hosts around 2,000 multinational companies, and four sectors stand out as particularly attractive for foreign investment: energy, mining, knowledge-based services, and agribusiness. In mid-2024, Argentina introduced the Incentive Regime for Large Investments (RIGI) to boost foreign direct investment. This regime offers tax, customs, and foreign exchange incentives for projects exceeding US\$200 million. Over the past year, investment announcements in Argentina have exceeded \$100 billion, with more than \$50 billion already in various stages of approval.

He stressed that tourism is another area the embassy is actively promoting, especially following Argentina's World Cup victory, which has increased interest among Kuwaitis in visiting the homeland of Lionel Messi. Ambassador Velloso highlights Argentina's diverse offerings, from tango and football to golf, polo, and equestrian activities, as well as natural wonders such as the Andes, Iguazu Falls, and the glaciers and wildlife of Patagonia. Visitors can also enjoy premium cuisine, boutique hotels, luxury lodges, and cruises. The embassy is working with travel agencies and airlines to promote luxury tourism, including plans for meetings between Kuwaiti and Argentine agencies and a familiarization trip to Argentina for Kuwaiti travel professionals. Cultural diplomacy also features high on the Ambassador's agenda. He intends to expand cultural outreach in areas such as music, dance, visual arts, literature, and film. Argentina's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has launched the digital platform 'Argentina Creativa Directories' to showcase the country's creative industries and foster international cultural connections, including with Kuwait. Initial plans include organizing a music event in May in collaboration with the Kuwait Music Academy and the Yarmouk Cultural Centre. Tango-related activities are also envisioned, particularly in light of the recent launch of the 'Argentina Tango Trade' platform and the return of high-quality Argentine beef to Kuwait after several years.

Regarding travel formalities, Ambassador Velloso confirmed that efforts are underway to improve or simplify the visa-issuance process for Kuwaiti travelers to Argentina. He added that he would make announcements in this regard once decisions are finalized.

Reflecting on his first impressions of Kuwait, the Ambassador said he felt warmly welcomed from the very beginning—even before his arrival—through his interaction with Kuwait's Ambassador to Argentina, Abdulaziz Mohammad Albisher. He praises the warmth, respect, and openness of the Kuwaiti people he has met during his first months, qualities he believes will make his stay in Kuwait special and help strengthen bilateral ties.

Finally, looking ahead to his personal and professional experience in Kuwait, Ambassador Velloso noted that the last two Argentine Ambassadors to the country chose to remain in Kuwait after retirement, underscoring how special the country has been for them. He expresses confidence that his own experience will be no different and hopes to contribute to strengthening Argentina's presence in Kuwait, just as Kuwait has a strong presence in Argentina. As friendly nations with complementary assets, he believes both countries are well positioned to support each other's development in the years ahead.

Private schools in residential areas to close by 2027-28 academic year

Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Engineer Abdul Latif Al-Mashari has ratified the Municipal Council's decision of 8 December 2025, which set the 2027-2028 academic year as the final deadline for cancelling approvals and licenses issued to private schools operating in private residential areas, paving the way for their closure by the Ministry of Education.

In his ratification, Al-Mashari added a

paragraph stipulating that sites allocated to private schools may not be handed over unless approval is obtained from the Directorate-General of Traffic and a traffic study approved by the competent authorities is submitted. The Municipal Council had previously approved amendments to three clauses related to the relocation of private schools from private residential areas, setting the evacuation deadline at the end of the 2027-2028 academic year, after the Ministry



of Education completes the identification of alternative locations for the schools.

The original decision, issued on 13 November 2023, stipulated the evacuation and closure of all private schools located in private residential areas within three calendar years, after the completion of new land allocation procedures and the issuance of building permits, provided that construction begins within one year of site allocation and receipt.

MoCI to allow real estate exhibitions under stringent regulations

After nearly a decade, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry will resume licensing real estate exhibitions, but under strict regulations and close ministry supervision. Minister Khalifa Al-Ajil emphasized that exhibitions will function solely as marketing platforms, with an absolute ban on sales, contract signing, financial commitments, or the promotion of unlicensed projects, a move aimed at protecting consumers, curbing misleading practices, and restoring confidence in the real estate exhibition sector.

Ministry of Commerce and Industry is set to license the holding of real estate exhibitions after a lapse of nearly a decade, but under stringent regulatory norms and ministry supervision

Announcing this last week, Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Ajil stressed that the real-estate exhibitions were being permitted under ministry oversight and regulations, including that there would be no sale of any land or property at the exhibition site.

Under the new regulations, the role of participating companies is strictly limited to marketing and presenting projects, with an explicit ban on concluding sales, signing contracts, or engaging in any form of transaction inside exhibition halls. The decision also prohibits the use of return percentages in advertising or project promotion, in a clear effort to curb misleading practices and speculative marketing.

The decision further bans the marketing or display of lands that have not obtained final building permits, as well as the promotion or sale of timeshare products, which allow multiple buyers to share ownership of a tourist property for specific periods. The ministry stressed that such systems, which focus on usage rather than ownership, are not permitted under the new exhibition framework.

Al-Ajil's decision stipulates that any company or institution seeking to organize a real estate exhibition must obtain prior approval from the International Relations Department for Organizing Exhibitions at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry at least 30 working days before the exhibition's opening date.

The organizing entity is also required to submit a full list of participating companies, along with all required documents, at least 14 working days before the event. No exhibition may be held without the issuance of a final license specifying the location and duration of the exhibition.

The regulations require that every participating company or institution must have real estate activity listed among its licensed activities and must hold a valid license throughout the exhibition period. Only project owners, developers, or companies holding an official power of attorney, authorization, or written mandate from the owner or developer may market properties or projects.

If the project or property is located outside Kuwait, all documents must be officially certified by the Kuwaiti embassy in the host country and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Participating companies must also provide explanatory brochures and full project details.

Each exhibitor is also required to display clear,



pre-prepared signage in a prominent location at its booth, detailing the project being promoted. Companies must also strictly adhere to all circulars, instructions, warnings and guidelines issued by the Ministry of Commerce.

The decision strongly emphasizes that real estate exhibitions are purely marketing platforms and must not result in sales, reservations, contracts or financial commitments of any kind. This measure, the ministry said, is aimed at protecting consumers, preventing pressure selling, and ensuring transparency and clarity in the information presented.

Under the new framework, any company whose activities include real estate is entitled to

hold its own exhibition at its headquarters or at a licensed rented venue for a period not exceeding three days, provided that the same conditions and controls are fully observed. Applications to organize exhibitions must be submitted to the Ministry of Commerce along with all required documents. The ministry's Real Estate Services and Valuation Department is tasked with reviewing applications, verifying compliance and requesting completion of any deficiencies within a specified timeframe. Once all requirements are met, the application is referred to the International Relations Department, which is responsible for issuing the final exhibition license. No event may proceed without this approval.

Without prejudice to harsher penalties under other laws, the Ministry of Commerce may impose one or more of the following sanctions on violators: Issue a written warning; cancel the exhibition license; close-down an exhibition; ban the entity from organizing or participating in exhibitions for up to one year.

The ministry stressed that these measures are designed to regulate the sector, curb abuses, protect consumers and restore confidence in real estate exhibitions after years of suspension. The ministry also defined real estate exhibitions as organized events aimed at promoting licensed real estate products by approved companies.

PAM launches 'multiple-trip exit permits' to streamline process

Public Authority of Manpower has introduced a new 'Multiple-Trip Departure Permit' service, designed to make life easier for employers and employees by reducing paperwork and saving time.

Previously, departure permits had to be issued for each individual trip. Now, the upgraded service allows a single permit to cover multiple trips within a specified period, meaning fewer repeated procedures. The new system is fully digital and linked with the Ministry of Interior, so once a permit is approved, the information is automatically sent to the relevant authorities. Employers and employees can also print the permit form anytime.



and status.

The service is part of Kuwait's ongoing digital transformation of government services, aiming to simplify procedures, improve efficiency, and reduce effort for both employers and employees.

To access the new facility:

Visit the 'As'hal' portal for companies and workforce, or use the 'Sahel Business/Individuals' app.

Select the type of permit: single trip or multiple-trip departure permit.

Enter the start and end dates for the permit.

Submit the request. You will immediately see your transaction number

US approves support services for Kuwait's Patriot air defense systems

Amid ongoing regional tensions, the US Department of Defense has announced that the US State Department has approved a potential deal to provide support services and follow-on technical assistance for the Patriot air defense system to Kuwait, with an estimated value of \$800 million.

According to the Pentagon, the proposed agreement includes logistical, engineering and technical support aimed at maintaining and enhancing the operational readiness of Kuwait's Patriot air defense program. The package is designed to strengthen Kuwait's air and missile defense capabilities and ensure the long-term sustainability of the system.

The approval reflects the continued strategic partnership between Kuwait and the United States and underscores Washington's commitment to supporting Kuwait's defense and security requirements. The deal is subject to final negotiations and congressional procedures, in line with standard US arms export regulations.

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Kuwait a valued, strategic tourism market for Thailand



Thai officials reaffirm Kuwait's importance as a growing tourism and investment market, highlighting visa exemptions, family-friendly services and expanding cooperation in tourism, health and education.

The Times Kuwait Report

Kuwait is among the most important tourism markets for Thailand, with around 100,000 Kuwaiti tourists visiting the country in 2025, said Chargé d'Affaires at the Embassy of Thailand, Uraiwan Courtaud.

Ms. Courtaud was speaking to the media on the sidelines of the 'Phuket Roadshow to Kuwait 2026' tourism event held in Kuwait recently. The event, organized by the Phuket Tourism Association with support from the Phuket Provincial Administrative Organization and the Tourism Authority of Thailand, aimed to strengthen Thailand's tourism presence in the Kuwaiti market.

Courtaud added that Kuwait holds a special place in Thai tourism, noting that Phuket Island

has become the face of Thailand for many Kuwaitis. She explained that Kuwaiti tourists prefer Phuket as a primary destination and often visit repeatedly each year, drawn by its family-friendly environment and services that respect cultural privacy. She added that Kuwaiti passport holders are exempt from entry visas to Thailand for up to 60 days for tourism purposes, while residents of Kuwait of certain nationalities can apply for an electronic visa within a maximum period of five working days.

She stressed that Phuket is no longer just a leisure destination, but has evolved into a location that respects cultural values and offers distinctive family and human experiences. She underlined the Thai Embassy's commitment to supporting initiatives that enhance tourism connectivity and open new avenues of

cooperation between the private sectors in both countries. On Kuwaiti investments in the Thai tourism sector, Courtaud revealed that there are several existing Kuwaiti investments in this sector, and added that Thai law does not allow foreigners to own companies or land directly, but permits ownership through partnerships with Thai nationals, while allowing foreigners to own residential apartments under specific regulations. She pointed out that this is the first time the Phuket Tourism Association has organized such an event in Kuwait, describing it as a reflection of the strong bilateral relations between the two countries, which span more than six decades. Regarding medical treatment in Thailand, she explained that Kuwaiti patients who travel to Thailand at their own expense do so directly, while cases covered by the Kuwaiti

government are subject to official procedures and approvals through specialized committees.

For his part, President of the Phuket Tourism Association, Thaneth Tantipiriyakij said the Kuwaiti market is witnessing notable growth. He revealed that around 20,000 Kuwaiti tourists visited Phuket in 2025, up from 17,000 the previous year and fewer than 10,000 before the COVID-19 pandemic.

He stressed that Phuket welcomes Kuwaiti visitors and is keen to meet their needs by providing halal restaurants and family-oriented tourism services. He added that the island is also a leading destination for medical and wellness tourism, with world-renowned hospitals such as Bumrungrad and BDMS operating branches in Phuket and enjoying strong recognition among Kuwaitis.

Targeted subsidy support reduces food, construction subsidies

A new report from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry reveals that the government's new approach of targeted subsidies is bearing fruit with annual subsidies on food and construction material dropping significantly from a year earlier.

The ministry's data provides insight into Kuwait's ongoing efforts to balance

regulated support for construction materials.

The report noted a decline in food subsidy expenditure during the first 11 months of 2025 with a 7.7 percent drop in government support during the same period in 2024. Total food subsidy stood at KD309.43 million, a drop of KD25.75 million from the KD335.19 million in 2024.

Subsidies on construction material also witnessed a drop in the first 11 months of 2025, dropping by 17.3 percent from the KD 191.43 million support extended for this category in 2024. Nevertheless, construction materials continued to claim the largest share of total subsidies, accounting for 51.13 percent or KD158.22 million of the support budget.

The support for basic food commodities grew to 135.57 million dinars, marking a 4.6 percent increase compared to 129.566 million dinars in 2024. The share of food in the total support program rose to 43.81 percent, up from 38.65 percent the previous year. Spending on milk and baby food rose by 10.2 percent to 15.63 million dinars, representing approximately 5 percent of total subsidies.

The ministry figures also underline the growing number of beneficiaries accessing government aid and the continuous need for efficient administrative management of ration card issuance and updates. Ration cards increased to 274,190 by the end of November, up from 268,620 in the same period in 2024, a 2.07 percent rise. The number of beneficiaries reached approximately 2.33 million people, a growth of 77,205 individuals or 3.4 percent compared to 2.25 million in 2024.



social welfare with fiscal responsibility, as authorities work to ensure subsidies remain targeted and effective for the expanding population. The report highlights both structural and demographic shifts in Kuwait's subsidy system, reflecting an increasing focus on essential food support, while maintaining



Kuwait set to cancel or re-tender oil projects that exceed budgets

Kuwait is reviewing the possible cancellation or re-tendering of a series of major upstream oil project tenders valued at approximately KD2.7 billion, after bids for several contracts reportedly came in well above budget, raising concerns over cost efficiency and fiscal impact.

The tenders cover five large upstream packages and are part of Kuwait's broader investment programs aimed at boosting production capacity and upgrading oil infrastructure. However, high bid prices have prompted government and industry stakeholders to reassess the viability of proceeding under current terms.

The move reflects growing emphasis on fiscal discipline amid budget pressures and the need to manage public spending carefully. Kuwait has been grappling with recurring fiscal challenges, including concerns over its break-even oil price and the sustainability of large capital expenditures. This economic backdrop is increasingly influencing decisions on major infrastructure investments, particularly in capital-intensive sectors such as oil and gas.

Industry analysts note that outright

cancellation may not be the only option under consideration. Authorities could choose to re-tender the projects with revised scopes, adjust budget frameworks, or split large packages into smaller contracts to encourage wider participation and improve competitiveness. Other options include introducing alternative commercial or financing models that would reduce upfront capital commitments and share risk with contractors.

The potential cancellation of nearly \$9 billion in projects sends a cautious signal to both local and international contractors operating in Kuwait's energy market. It may impact contractor confidence, future bidding strategies and pricing expectations for large engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) contracts.

At the same time, the review is seen by some as an opportunity to refine procurement frameworks, enhance transparency and remove barriers created by restrictive prequalification or evaluation criteria. While any decision to cancel or delay the tenders could disrupt project timelines in the short term, it may also help align future contracts more closely with Kuwait's fiscal priorities and long-term production goals.

CBK permits local banks to resume prize draws for customers

Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) has confirmed that local banks are now permitted to resume awarding prizes to customers, in accordance with strict guidelines. The CBK decision follows the establishment of a comprehensive governance system in line with regulatory controls issued by the relevant authorities, to ensure the highest standards of transparency, integrity, and fairness.

In a statement published on its official website, the Central Bank explained that extensive efforts over the past months have resulted in several key outcomes, most notably verifying the readiness of banks to resume prize draws in full compliance with approved regulatory controls, establishing a unified framework for governance and auditing, and strengthening transparency and integrity in all prize-awarding procedures.

The Central Bank clarified that banks are permitted to offer prizes on certain accounts and banking products only after obtaining the necessary licenses from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The bank further stressed that, within the framework

of reinforcing governance principles and consolidating transparency standards, it has implemented a series of regulatory and supervisory measures to reorganize and tightly control the prize-awarding mechanism.

The CBK statement noted that local banks had been working on strengthening their internal frameworks and procedures to enhance governance, transparency, and integrity in the prize-draw process from October 2025 to January 2026. CBK added that the new internal framework includes:

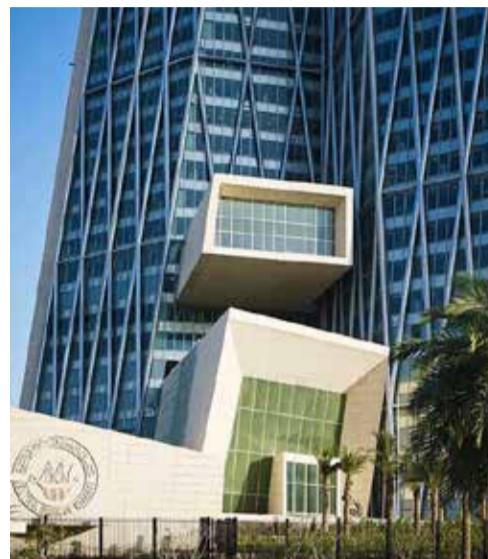
Appointing a single, unified external auditing firm to supervise all prize draws.

Adopting a unified document outlining technical and operational requirements for awarding prizes.

Subjecting all prize draws to external audit review, regardless of the value of the prize.

Implementing internal audit procedures and incorporating them into approved work plans to ensure full compliance and transparency.

The Central Bank explained that it had issued a circular on 25 March 2025, suspending the awarding of bank prizes in order to re-evaluate



products and ensure sound governance and transparency. This was followed by supervisory inspections between March and May 2025 to review banks' procedures and verify compliance with the instructions of the Ministry

of Commerce and Industry.

In June 2025, regulatory and technical proposals were prepared based on international best practices and the results of inspections, in preparation for submission to the relevant authorities to ensure clarity and integrity in procedures. During July 2025, meetings were held with concerned entities to discuss the proposed controls, define responsibilities, and agree on coordination mechanisms for their implementation.

The Central Bank added that between August and September 2025, the Kuwait Banking Association was provided with the detailed controls and requirements that banks must meet in order to resume awarding prizes. Technical meetings were also held with banks to explain these requirements and ensure full understanding and compliance before any prize draws could be reinstated.

The Central Bank stressed that these steps are aimed at safeguarding customer rights, preventing misuse, and ensuring that all prize draws are conducted in a transparent, fair, and fully regulated manner.



IYS partners with Indian Embassy to host quiz program

Indian Youth Society (IYS), Kuwait, in partnership with the Embassy of India, Kuwait, organized the 'Know Your India' Quiz on 9 January, bringing together students from across the Indian community in a vibrant celebration of knowledge, culture, and national heritage.

The educational initiative provided a dynamic platform for children to deepen their understanding of India's history, culture, heritage, achievements, and global contributions in fields such as sports, science and technology, business, literature, entertainment, and the arts.

The event was held as part of the celebrations marking Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, observed annually on 9 January, National Youth Day (Rashtriya Yuva Diwas) on 12 January, and in

line with India's national vision of 'Viksit Bharat' (Developed India).

It also commemorated the Statehood Days of Uttar Pradesh, Meghalaya, Tripura, Manipur, and Himachal Pradesh, highlighting India's rich cultural diversity and federal heritage.

The program was honored by the presence of Ambassador of India H.E. Paramita Tripathi, and was organized under the leadership of Dr. Shabbir Qamar, in coordination with Second Secretary (Community Affairs & Associations) at the Indian Embassy, Harit Ketan Shelat. The quiz was conducted by renowned Quiz Master Vinay Mudaliar.

A special highlight of the event was a thought-provoking address delivered by Ms. Aahana, a



Grade 9 student of FAIPS DPS School, who spoke on the themes of the program. In recognition of her continued volunteer support to the Indian Youth Society, Nita Bhatkar, the emcee, was

presented with a special token of appreciation by Ambassador Tripathi.

The competition witnessed enthusiastic participation from 18 schools across junior and senior categories, reflecting strong student engagement and academic spirit.

The following were the quiz winners:

Junior Category — First Prize: FAIPS DPS; Second Prize: Indian Community School, Amman Branch; Third Prize: Indian Community School, Khatian

Senior Category — First Prize: FAIPS DPS; Second Prize: Indian Educational School; Third Prize: India International School

The organizers expressed sincere appreciation to the event's partners and supporters.

Fight against narcotics strengthens with new anti-drug law

Kuwait's newly approved anti-drug law represents a qualitative leap in addressing drug-related issues, as it combines deterrent legislative measures with treatment and rehabilitation, contributing to the protection of individuals and families and enhancing overall community safety. The remarks came from attendees of the seminar titled 'Positive Developments After the Approval of the New Anti-Drug Law', organized by the Kuwaiti Association Against Violence on 14 January.

Speaking at the seminar, Major Abdulaziz Al-Lanqawi, the head of the Awareness Department at the General Administration for Drug Control, stressed

that the drug problem should not be viewed solely as a security issue, but rather as a psychological, health and social challenge that requires coordinated efforts at the local, regional and international levels.

Al-Lanqawi explained that there are various types of narcotics and psychotropic substances, and that the new law has addressed this diversity comprehensively.

One of the most significant amendments, he said, is the unification of penalties for narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, meaning that smugglers and traffickers of both categories are now subject to the same



penalties. He added that the law also includes substantially increased financial fines, reinforcing its deterrent impact.

Al-Lanqawi highlighted that a major strength of the new law is the expansion of treatment and rehabilitation

opportunities. Under the previous law, only relatives up to the second degree were allowed to file a complaint on behalf of a family member using narcotics. "Many families suffer in silence because one of their children is using these poisons," he said. "Thankfully, the new law has expanded treatment options, allowing relatives up to the third degree to file a complaint against an addicted or drug-using family member, which helps in early intervention and recovery."

He concluded by emphasizing that the law strikes a balance between punishment and treatment, reflecting a comprehensive national approach to combating drugs and safeguarding society.

IWG, Embassies of Japan, Palestine jointly host cultural event



The Times Kuwait Report

International Women's Group (IWG) hosted a joint cultural event titled 'Blossoms of Life, Resilience & Hope', in collaboration with the Embassies of the State of Palestine and Japan, on 11 January at the Crowne Plaza Hotel. Many distinguished and honored guests, including Sheikha Altaf Salem Al Ali Al Sabah and several women ambassadors to Kuwait were welcomed at the event.

In her opening remarks, IWG President Marika Kochlamazashvili, expressed her belief that the Palestinian people deserve happiness and well-being, and that their aspirations are deeply linked to the pursuit of peace worldwide. She extended her sincere thanks to Ambassador of Palestine H.E. Rami Tahboub, and Ambassador of Japan H.E. Kenichiro Mukai, as well as to both IWG Vice Presidents, Rima Khalidi, and Midori Mukai, for their efforts in organizing the event.

In his speech on the occasion, Ambassador Tahboub highlighted the distinguished relationship between Palestine and Japan. He emphasized Japan's longstanding support for the Palestinian people at multiple levels,

particularly in economic development and infrastructure, which contribute to Palestine's growth and prosperity. He also underscored Japan's significant role as one of the largest donors to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

In his address to the gathering, Ambassador Mukai spoke of the enduring friendship between Japan and Palestine, nurtured over many years. He noted Japan's continued support for the Palestinian people in their efforts to build an independent, peaceful, and prosperous state through initiatives such as the 'Corridor for Peace and Prosperity'.

A recorded message from renowned Palestinian-Japanese soprano Mariam Tamari was screened from Paris. In her address, she reflected on the similarities between Palestinian and Japanese cultures and the resilience of both peoples. She expressed her hope that as ties between Palestine and Japan continue to strengthen, so too will the global commitment to building a just, equitable, and compassionate world. The program opened with a video showcasing the natural beauty

and cultural diversity of Japan, followed by a film from Jerusalem highlighting the city's historical, Islamic, and Christian significance. A special segment featured poetry readings by Diala S. Al Alami and Anna Mukai, inspired by the theme of the event. Their poems drew parallels between the January blossoming of almond trees in Palestine and plum blossoms in Japan, symbolizing renewal, resilience, and the enduring spirit of both peoples.

Throughout the program, paintings by renowned Palestinian artist Vladimir Tamari were displayed before each segment. Known for his abstract watercolors depicting 'powerful landscapes of living light', his work reflects memories of his youth in Palestine, experiences of exile, and nearly five decades of life in Japan.

Members and guests also viewed a short film on the Palestinian Embroidery Obi Project, a social enterprise founded by Japanese entrepreneur Maki Yamamoto, which blends traditional Japanese kimono obis with Palestinian embroidery.

The audience was further captivated by a fashion show featuring a fusion of Kuwaiti, Japanese, and Palestinian attire. Kuwaiti

designer Sharifa Al Ghanim presented four magnificent kimono-inspired designs incorporating Kuwaiti elements.

Another fashion segment featured a remarkable collection of five Palestinian embroidered dresses, over 100 years old, along with three traditional headdresses from the Tareq Rajab Museum, as well as five Japanese kimonos from the Embassy of Japan. The presentation was narrated by Faten Abu Ghazaleh and Anna Mukai. The event concluded with two musical performances: a recorded duet by Mariam Tamari and her aunt, Tania Tamari (Al Quds Arabiya), followed by a live performance by the Japanese chorus group 'Barrel,' led by Ambassador Mukai.

The event stood as a powerful celebration of cultural dialogue, shared humanity, and artistic expression, demonstrating how creativity, tradition, and collaboration can transcend borders. Through music, art, fashion, and storytelling, 'Blossoms of Life, Resilience & Hope' reaffirmed a collective commitment to peace, mutual understanding, and the enduring strength of cultures that continue to inspire the world.

Vatican lauds Kuwait as a model of religious co-existence

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"The message is one of encouragement and hope. Encouragement to the faithful that their life of prayer and service is valued; and hope that religious life—when lived with sincerity and respect—can be a force for harmony, not division," said the Vatican Secretary of State.

Pointing to the historic significance of the church becoming the first Minor Basilica on the Arabian Peninsula, Cardinal Parolin described it as a powerful sign to the wider world of the importance of coexistence and dialogue. He added that the honor is also a moment of shared joy for Kuwait's wider society, including the Muslim community. He explained: "Muslims hold a deep reverence for Our Blessed Mother, Mary/Miriam. Her figure unites Christians and Muslims alike in respect and love, making this recognition a moment of shared celebration."

Kuwait's experience of religious coexistence drew particular praise from the Holy See representative. He said the Vatican looks upon Kuwait's religious approach with appreciation, especially in a region that has faced significant tensions. He added, "Kuwait has demonstrated a steady commitment to social cohesion and respect for others. This is not merely a policy, it is a culture expressed in daily life, and it deserves recognition."

He stressed that coexistence requires patience, wisdom, and goodwill, adding that societies that protect dignity and cultivate mutual respect are better equipped to remain resilient during difficult times.

Addressing the situation of the Christian

community in Kuwait, Cardinal Parolin described it as vibrant and spiritually active, composed largely of families and working people from many nations. He underlined the community's strong sense of gratitude toward Kuwait and its commitment to respecting local laws and culture.

"The Church seeks to form responsible persons: people of prayer, honest work, respect for laws and culture, and care for one another," he said. The Holy See, he added, encourages Catholics to be good residents who contribute positively through professionalism, family life, solidarity with the vulnerable, and a commitment to peace. "This is the Church's vocation everywhere—to serve the common good," he said.

Cardinal Parolin underscored the importance of freedom of worship, describing it as a measure of a society's maturity and confidence. He said Kuwait's experience demonstrates that protecting religious life can coexist with social harmony, benefiting society as a whole by strengthening trust, stability, and responsibility.

"This is particularly meaningful in a region where conflicts elsewhere have too often exploited religious identity for political ends," he said.

On interfaith dialogue, Cardinal Parolin emphasized its essential role in fostering peace and stability in the Middle East, particularly when dialogue is practical rather than theoretical. "Dialogue means building relationships, correcting misunderstandings, and working together on what serves human dignity," he said, citing education, family life, care for the poor, and the rejection of violence

in God's name as shared priorities.

He reaffirmed the Holy See's long-standing investment in interfaith dialogue across the Middle East and the Gulf, welcoming all serious efforts that promote mutual understanding and a culture of peace. Cardinal Parolin also pointed to opportunities to strengthen diplomatic, cultural, and humanitarian cooperation with Kuwait. He praised Kuwait's well-known humanitarian engagement and said that shared concern for human dignity provides a strong foundation for deeper collaboration.

He further noted, "Cultural cooperation is also important. Encounters that promote understanding between peoples and religions help prevent the stereotypes that so often become seeds of conflict."

Speaking on extremism, Cardinal Parolin said religious leaders carry a grave responsibility to ensure that faith is never manipulated to justify hatred or violence. He stressed the need to teach clearly that the dignity of every human person is sacred and that true worship of God is inseparable from respect for one's neighbor.

He also highlighted the responsibility of religious institutions to form young people in conscience, critical thinking, and compassion, stating that good education, strong families, just laws, and consistent moral leadership are the most effective responses to extremist narratives.

In his message to youth in Kuwait, Cardinal Parolin quoted Pope Leo XIV's recent Message for the World Day of Peace: "We must promote self-awareness in civil societies, forms of responsible association, experiences of nonviolent participation and practices of

restorative justice on both a small and large scale".

He added, "Your future will be shaped by your ability to work with others, to listen, and to respect differences without fear. Diversity is not a threat when it is guided by mutual respect; it becomes a strength that enriches society." He urged young people to become "builders of bridges in schools, workplaces, and online spaces, and to reject contempt, rumors, and suspicion in favor of friendship and truth."

Reflecting on his visit, Cardinal Parolin said Kuwait leaves the impression of a society that values order, dignity, and hospitality—virtues he described as deeply needed in today's world. Internationally, he said Kuwait's credibility stems from its steadiness and commitment to dialogue.

"In a region, and a world, often tempted by polarization, Kuwait's capacity to foster coexistence and to support humanitarian causes can be a constructive contribution," he said, expressing the Holy See's hope that Kuwait's role will continue to grow for the benefit of the wider region.

Cardinal Parolin concluded by expressing heartfelt gratitude for the warm welcome he received during his stay. He thanked His Highness the Amir, Sheikha Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Crown Prince, the Prime Minister, and all state authorities for their gracious hospitality. He also conveyed his sincere appreciation to His Excellency Bishop Aldo Berardi, Apostolic Vicar of Northern Arabia, and to all those within the Church who worked with dedication and generosity to ensure the success of the visit.

Relaunch of French Business Council signals start of new economic era

The French Business Council will play a central role in this positive trajectory by boosting mutual investments, expanding commercial, economic and financial links, and building long-term partnerships between public and private sector stakeholders in both countries. - H.E. Olivier Gauvin

The Times Kuwait Report

AMBASSADOR of France H.E. Olivier Gauvin affirmed that cooperation between France and Kuwait is diverse, promising and strategically significant, spanning vital sectors including energy, healthcare, infrastructure, sustainable cities, transport, pharmaceuticals, logistics, artificial intelligence, as well as the financial sector and high value-added services.

Speaking at the relaunch of the French Business Council in Kuwait, the ambassador added that the event was a key milestone in the evolution of economic relations between the two countries. He praised the efforts of the council's new governance team, commending the chairperson and members for successfully reviving the council after the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. He expressed confidence that the coming phase will bring forward new ideas and innovative projects.

The French envoy noted that the relaunch comes at a time when bilateral relations are



witnessing unprecedented momentum, with French-Kuwaiti ties currently enjoying strong political and economic growth. He added that this dynamic was reflected in three high-level official visits within a single year, including the visit of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait to France

on 14 July, during which extensive talks were held with the French President on economic and trade cooperation. He also highlighted the visits of the French Minister for Foreign Trade and the French Minister of Foreign Affairs to Kuwait.

The ambassador stressed that the French

Business Council will play a central role in this positive trajectory by boosting mutual investments, expanding commercial, economic and financial links, and building long-term partnerships between public and private sector stakeholders in both countries. The council will serve as a vital platform and bridge connecting companies and business leaders, helping transform opportunities into tangible projects, while also facilitating communication and business networking between the two sides, added the envoy.

The ambassador further highlighted France's global leadership in advanced technology and innovation, noting the strong alignment between Kuwait Vision 2035 and France 2030, which opens broad horizons for effective strategic partnerships. He noted that the relaunch carries special significance as France and Kuwait prepare to celebrate the 65th anniversary of diplomatic relations this year, recalling that the friendship between the two nations extends over more than 200 years of solid cooperation and partnership.



LOT – The Value Shop Expands Its Presence in Kuwait with Second Outlet at The Walk Mall, Salmiya

LOT – The Value Shop continues its growth journey in Kuwait with the successful grand opening of its second outlet on January 14, 2026, located at The Walk Mall Commercial Complex Salmiya spanning an impressive 2200 Square meters. Building on the strong response to its first store, LOT brings its signature value-driven shopping experience to even more customers across the country.

The Store was officially inaugurated by Mr Ashraf Ali M.A., Executive Director of LuLu Group International, along with Mujeeb Rahman, Buying Director; Sreejith, Director – Kuwait Region; and Sakeer Hussain, Regional Director – Kuwait. The launch was attended by senior members of LuLu management and prominent social media influencers, who toured the store and shared their experiences across digital platforms.

The new store features a thoughtfully curated mix of categories designed to meet everyday lifestyle needs. Shoppers can explore a diverse selection of Fashion apparel, Footwear, Toys, Ladies' accessories, Household essentials, Stationery, Jewellery, Home décor, and Travel accessories—all under one roof. Each section reflects LOT's commitment to combining practicality, trend relevance, and exceptional value.

To mark the opening, LOT will also introduce fresh Winter Seasonal collections for men, women, and children, offering contemporary styles at prices that redefine value retail in Kuwait



Renowned for delivering exceptional products at unbeatable prices, LOT – The Value Shop has quickly established itself as a preferred destination for smart shoppers. Staying true to its promise of affordability, a large assortment of items at the new outlet will be available at prices below KD 1.900, making quality shopping accessible to families, individuals, and bargain hunters alike.

With its second outlet, LOT – The Value Shop reinforces its mission to deliver "More products below 1.900KD," strengthening its position as a go-to destination for everyday savings and joyful discoveries. As the brand expands, customers can look forward to more convenient locations, greater variety, and the same trusted value that defines LOT.

Jazeera Airways to operate Jordanian flights to Amman City airport

Jazeera Airways, Kuwait's leading low-cost carrier, announced that all its flights to Amman will operate to Amman City Airport effective 1 February 2026. The shift of operations from the previously operated Queen Alia International Airport is designed to offer passengers a faster and more convenient gateway into the capital of Jordan.

Under this transition, Jazeera Airways will also become the first airline from Kuwait to operate scheduled commercial flights into Amman City Airport, further strengthening connectivity between Kuwait and Jordan.

All passengers travelling to or from Amman on Jazeera Airways from 1 February onwards are requested to plan their journeys accordingly and ensure their bookings, transfers, and travel documents reflect Amman City Airport as the point of arrival and departure.

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Jordan Airport Company, Eng. Ahmed Azzam, said: "We are pleased to welcome Jazeera Airways as the first airline from Kuwait to operate scheduled commercial flights at Amman City Airport. This partnership marks an important step in expanding the airport's role in regional connectivity, and we look forward to delivering a smoother, more efficient travel experience for passengers flying between Jordan and Kuwait."

Jazeera Airways is working closely with airport and ground partners to ensure a smooth transition for passengers. By moving operations to Amman City Airport, Jazeera Airways continues to enhance its network with accessible, efficient, and customer-centric travel options, bringing passengers closer to the heart of the cities they fly to.

CEO of Jazeera Airways, Barathan Pasupathi said: "Amman has always been an important market for Jazeera Airways, and this move to Amman City Airport strengthens our promise of making travel more accessible,

affordable, and convenient.

"By operating closer to the heart of the capital, we aim to give passengers a seamless end-to-end experience with reduced ground travel time and costs. We are also proud to be the first airline from Kuwait to operate scheduled commercial flights at Amman City Airport—a pioneering step that reinforces our leadership in enhancing regional connectivity."

Operating from Amman City Airport brings several advantages for travelers, particularly those seeking speed, convenience, and ease of access to the city.



The smaller, more efficient terminal layout offers a quicker airport experience and is located just 10 km from central Amman, significantly reducing travel time. Shorter travel time also helps lower ground transport costs, getting travelers to their homes, hotels, or meetings faster.

Jazeera currently flies to more than 70 destinations and serves more than 5 million passengers with a fleet of 23 aircraft while managing its own terminal, T5, at Kuwait International Airport. In its next phase of network growth, the airline will serve more than 100 destinations and over 10 million passengers in the next four years. Jazeera will also expand its fleet with a firm order book of 26 Airbus aircraft, comprising 18 A320neo and eight A321.

A shining example of peaceful coexistence



By Father Suleiman Haifawi
 Official spokesperson of the Catholic Church in Kuwait

Cardinal Pietro Parolin's visit to Kuwait carries a special apostolic greeting to Kuwait and its leadership, including an invitation from His Holiness Pope Leo XIV to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to visit the Vatican.

The Holy See highly values Kuwait's humanitarian and civilizational role in preserving the proud history of the Church in the Gulf, making this relationship a shining example of peaceful coexistence, security, and reassurance for all.

Kuwait is experiencing a historic and spiritually profound moment with the arrival of His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State of the Vatican, who is on a diplomatic and pastoral visit reflecting the deep and special ties between Kuwait and the Holy See. These relations are built on mutual respect, dialogue, and peaceful coexistence between religions and cultures.

The historical ties between Kuwait and the Holy See date back to 1965, when Kuwait became the first Gulf state to establish formal diplomatic relations with the Vatican, a pioneering step reflecting its openness, commitment to dialogue, respect for others, and dedication to the values of peace and coexistence.

Over the decades, these relations have grown steadily, crowned by reciprocal official visits, ongoing messages of appreciation, and shared humanitarian stances, confirming Kuwait's distinguished place in the eyes of the Holy See.

Cardinal Parolin's visit coincided with a momentous ecclesiastical event—proclamation of the elevation of Our Lady of Arabia Church



in Ahmadi to the rank and dignity of a Minor Basilica, on Friday, 16 January. The official and spiritual ceremony highlighted the role of the Catholic Church in Kuwait and affirmed its mission of peace, love, and service.

The Pontifical Mass held on the occasion was attended by priests, religious brothers and sisters, leaders from various faiths and denominations, official representatives of the State of Kuwait, diplomats, and honored guests from within the country and abroad.

The Church of Our Lady of Arabia, located within the Kuwait Oil Company area in Ahmadi, was established in 1955 and has since been a prominent spiritual and humanitarian landmark. It serves as a gathering place for Kuwaiti Christians and residents of diverse nationalities and as a center of Christian witness grounded in service, commitment, and shared life within the heart of Kuwaiti society.

The title of Minor Basilica is a high ecclesiastical honor granted worldwide to select churches distinguished by their spiritual, historical, and liturgical significance.

It signifies direct connection to the Holy See and the church's mission in fostering unity, faith-witness, service, and openness. The designation allows the church to use certain papal symbols and celebrate special liturgical occasions, serving as a living testament to the bond with the Pope and the universal Church.

The elevation of Our Lady of Arabia Church to a Minor Basilica is a historic, cultural, and human milestone, highlighting Kuwait as a land of dialogue, tolerance, respect for freedom of worship, and embrace of religious and cultural diversity, guided by wise leadership and a humanitarian vision.

On this occasion, we extend our deepest respect and appreciation to His Highness Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of Kuwait, and to His Highness Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Crown Prince, may God protect them, as well as to the State of Kuwait, its leadership, government, and people, for their ongoing support and for fostering an environment of openness and mutual respect. We pray that Kuwait remains a haven of peace, security, and a bridge of goodwill between peoples and cultures.



Where Faith Meets History

Ahmadi Church Enters a New Era as the Gulf's First Minor Basilica

The Times Kuwait Report

In a moment of profound spiritual and historical significance, the Church of Our Lady of Arabia in Ahmadi entered a new chapter in its distinguished legacy, with its elevation to the rank of Minor Basilica on 28 June 2025. The honor, bestowed by His Holiness Pope Leo XIV, recognizes the church's exceptional pastoral role, its enduring witness of faith, and its importance as a spiritual home for generations of Catholics in Kuwait and the wider Gulf.

The formal proclamation of the elevated status was made during a solemn declaration at the Minor Basilica in Ahmadi on 16 January, by Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin, during his official two-day visit to Kuwait. The honor of becoming the first Catholic church in the Gulf region to be elevated as a Minor Basilica is an unprecedented milestone for the Catholic community in the region and further cements Kuwait's unique standing in the landscape of religious coexistence.

As the Vatican's highest-ranking diplomat, Cardinal Parolin's presence underscores both the spiritual weight of the occasion and the depth of relations between the Holy See and the State of Kuwait. During his visit, the Vatican's Secretary of State held high-level meetings with senior Kuwaiti officials, reaffirming mutual respect, interfaith dialogue and longstanding friendship.

The visit sent a powerful message of gratitude and hope, highlighting Kuwait's respected role as a beacon of tolerance in the region, and also affirming that Catholics in Kuwait and the Gulf remain an integral and cherished part of the universal Church. Located in the heart of Kuwait's Ahmadi Governorate—an area deeply entwined with the nation's oil heritage and early modernization—the Church of Our Lady of Arabia stands tall as the oldest church in the Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia, and one of the most significant Christian institutions in the region.

Origins of the Ahmadi Church trace back to the pivotal

decades following the discovery of oil in the late 1930s and the rapid expansions that followed in the 1940s and 1950s to develop the modern State of Kuwait. As the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) developed Ahmadi into a planned township for its growing workforce, the area became home to expatriates from Europe, the Middle East and South Asia. With this demographic shift came the need for organized Christian worship. In a landmark decision that reflected Kuwait's pragmatic and tolerant approach, the Kuwait authorities granted land for a Christian place of worship in Ahmadi. The decision not only addressed the spiritual needs of expatriates but also set a precedent for religious accommodation in the region. This move led to the inauguration of the Ahmadi Church in 1956, making it one of the earliest officially recognized Christian institutions in the Gulf.

Over the years, the Ahmadi Church has stood witness to Kuwait's journey from a small oil-producing state to a modern nation. Along with the State, the Church also endured everything from political upheavals to national trials in Kuwait's history, including the Iraqi invasion of the country in 1990. In the aftermath of liberation, as expatriates returned to rebuild their lives, the church reopened its doors as a place of prayer, comfort and renewal.

The uninterrupted presence of the Church is a testament to both institutional resilience and the enduring trust placed in it by the community it serves. Operating under the Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia, the Ahmadi Church serves Catholic communities across Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

In the absence of traditional diocesan structures, the Vicariate provides pastoral governance directly under the Holy See, ensuring that the Catholic practice is adapted to the region's unique religious and legal environment. The Church remains a spiritual cornerstone, hosting daily and weekly Masses, administering sacraments such as baptism and marriage, and marking major liturgical seasons including the Advent, the Lent, the Easter and the Christmas.





For thousands of Catholics, many of them migrant workers far from home, the Church offers continuity with their faith, traditions, and brings a vital sense of stability. Few places in Kuwait reflect global diversity as vividly as the Ahmadi Church. Its services are conducted in multiple languages, including English, Arabic, Malayalam, Tamil and Tagalog, ensuring that worship is accessible to believers from across continents. This multilingual approach has transformed the church into a unifying space where different cultures converge in shared faith, reinforcing its role as a bridge between communities.

Beyond religious services, the Ahmadi Church has long functioned as a social and cultural hub for the Christian expatriate community. For

support, it has offered comfort to those facing anxiety and loss, reaffirming its importance beyond routine worship.

The Ahmadi Church stands as a visible reminder of Kuwait's long-standing tradition of measured religious tolerance. While Islam is the state religion, the country has historically permitted recognized Christian denominations to practice their faith openly within established legal frameworks. The respectful coexistence between the Church and its surrounding Muslim community reflects a broader social compact grounded in mutual respect and cultural sensitivity. Its continued operation illustrates how religious minorities can preserve their identity while honoring local laws and traditions, and serves as an example often cited in discussions of religious pluralism in the Gulf.

Today, the Ahmadi Church remains a cornerstone of Christian life in Kuwait. As migration patterns evolve and congregations grow, the church continues to adapt while staying true to its founding mission. Its legacy is not merely architectural or institutional; it is deeply human, embedded in the lives of thousands who have found faith, comfort and community within its walls.

From its beginnings in Kuwait's oil-era development to its role as a center of multicultural worship and community life, Ahmadi Church stands as a powerful testament to faith's ability to transcend borders. In Kuwait's diverse social fabric, it remains an enduring symbol of spiritual continuity, communal resilience and respectful religious coexistence—a quiet landmark where history, faith and humanity meet.

Now officially known as the Minor Basilica of Our Lady of Arabia, the Church holds the distinction as one of the select group of Catholic institutions worldwide recognized for their exceptional spiritual, historical and pastoral importance. While many churches serve their communities faithfully, only a small number are elevated to the rank of Minor Basilica, a title that carries deep religious significance and a direct link to the Vatican.

Minor Basilica is a Catholic church that has been granted special status by the Pope in recognition of its importance. The title is not architectural alone; it reflects the church's spiritual influence, pastoral service, historical role and connection to the wider Catholic world. In essence, all basilicas are churches, but not all churches are basilicas.

There are only four Major Basilicas in the world, all located in Rome. Every other basilica, regardless of size or location, is classified as a Minor Basilica. These churches remain local parish centers, but enjoy special recognition from the Holy See, a strong symbolic connection to the Pope, and certain liturgical privileges.



families living far from their countries of origin, it offers emotional support, cultural familiarity and a sense of belonging. Its activities extend to catechism classes for children, youth and family programs, marriage preparation, pastoral counselling and charitable outreach.

These initiatives have helped generations of expatriates navigate life in Kuwait while preserving their religious and cultural identity. In doing so, the church has played a quiet yet vital role in strengthening social cohesion within a diverse population.

During periods of national or personal hardship, whether war, economic uncertainty or the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ahmadi Church has served as a source of reassurance and solidarity. Through prayer, guidance and community

including unique feast days, ceremonies and insignia. Many also become destinations of pilgrimage for the faithful.

For the faithful, the basilica is more than a building; it is a symbol of continuity, belonging and spiritual refuge. For Kuwait, it represents a longstanding tradition of freedom of religion and coexistence. While Islam is the state religion, Kuwait has historically allowed recognized Christian denominations to practice their faith openly, within established legal frameworks.

Today, the Basilica of Our Lady of Arabia continues to welcome worshippers from all walks of life. Its elevation to Minor Basilica status has not changed its mission, but has strengthened its role as a spiritual landmark and a point of connection between the local faithful and the universal Church. In a region defined by rapid change, the Ahmadi Basilica stands as a quiet constant—a place where faith transcends borders, cultures meet in prayer, and history continues to unfold.

Cardinal Parolin marks historic visit to Kuwait

Vatican Secretary of State welcomed by Kuwait

The Times Kuwait Report

Vatican Secretary of State His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin on a three-day official visit to Kuwait was warmly welcomed by Kuwait's leadership, government, citizens and residents. The visit by the representative of the Holy See coincided with the official proclamation of the elevation of the Church of Our Lady of Arabia in Ahmadi to the status of a Minor Basilica—the first church in the Arabian Gulf to receive this honor.

The visit, aimed at strengthening the Vatican's longstanding diplomatic and inter-faith ties with Kuwait, featured a series of high-level meetings and ceremonial events attended by prominent Kuwaiti dignitaries.

On the first day of his visit, Cardinal Parolin was received at Bayan Palace by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, in the presence of Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya. The discussions underscored the deep bonds of friendship and cooperation between Kuwait and the Holy See, rooted in shared humanitarian values, mutual respect and decades of diplomatic engagement.

Vatican Ambassador to Kuwait, H.E. Eugene Martin Nugent accompanied the Cardinal throughout his visit. Director of Public Relations and Media at the Kuwait Oil Company, Mohammed Al-Basri, and Head of Public Relations Team, Yousef Al-Kandari, also welcomed the cardinal on behalf of the company that supported the initiative to build a church in Ahmadi, way back in 1948.

The elevation of the Church of Our Lady of Arabia reflects Kuwait's deep tradition of



religious coexistence and its historical role as the first Gulf state to establish diplomatic relations with the Holy See in 1968.

During his stay, Cardinal Parolin also held discussions with religious leaders and members of the local Catholic community, emphasizing the importance of faith, dialogue and peace in the region's diverse religious landscape.

Cardinal Parolin also conducted two Solemn Pontifical Masses during his visit, the first on 15 January at the Holy Family Co-Cathedral in Kuwait City and the second on 16 January, at the Minor Basilica of Our Lady of Arabia, organized by His Excellency Bishop Aldo Beraradi, Apostolic Vicar of Northern Arabia.



Canadian Ambassador visits The Times Kuwait offices

Ambassador of Canada H.E. Tara Scheurwater, paid a courtesy visit to the offices of The Times Kuwait last week, where she was received by Editor-in-Chief Tareq Yousef Al-Shumaimry and Executive Managing Editor Reaven D'Souza.

The meeting included wide-ranging discussions on Canada-Kuwait relations, the importance of media cooperation, and perspectives on the evolving global landscape. Ambassador Scheurwater also exchanged views on Kuwait's economic

transformation and its strategic roadmap under Vision 2035. Discussions further highlighted Canada's principled approach to international issues and the challenges of upholding core values amid rapid global change.

During the visit, Ambassador Scheurwater was briefed on The Times Kuwait's role within the country's media landscape, particularly its efforts to shape public discourse, foster constructive dialogue, and amplify voices that promote unity among Kuwait's

diverse expatriate and national communities.

The ambassador was also introduced to alwaqtnews, the Arabic digital platform recently launched by The Times Kuwait, as part of its broader outreach initiative to engage a wider audience.

The visit underscored Ambassador Scheurwater's commitment to engaging with media institutions and her keen interest in further strengthening bilateral relations between Canada and Kuwait during her tenure.

Advancing the Shift Toward a Smoke-Free Future in Kuwait

The Times Kuwait Report

Philip Morris International (PMI) is accelerating its global transformation toward a smoke-free future, driven by a central scientific conclusion: it is the smoke produced by burning tobacco, not nicotine itself, that causes the greatest harm to health.

When a conventional cigarette burns, combustion creates smoke containing thousands of chemicals, many of them toxic and carcinogenic. By eliminating combustion, exposure to these harmful substances can be significantly reduced. This scientific understanding has underpinned PMI's development of smoke-free alternatives, including heated tobacco products such as IQOS, e-cigarettes, and oral nicotine products like ZYN.

In a wide-ranging interview with The Times Kuwait, Ross Donovan, General Manager of Philip Morris Kuwait, said the company's shift was rooted in years of research and scientific assessment. "These products do not burn tobacco and therefore do not generate smoke," Donovan explained. "IQOS heats tobacco at a



Ross Donovan
General Manager of Philip Morris Kuwait



carefully controlled temperature, producing an aerosol with substantially lower levels of harmful chemicals compared to cigarette smoke."

While emphasizing that smoke-free products are not risk-free, Donovan noted that scientific assessments show they can reduce exposure to harmful substances by up to 95 percent compared with continued smoking.

A Global Vision, a Personal Commitment

PMI's decision to move away from cigarettes marked a defining change in the company's direction. Donovan said the ambition is long-

term and unequivocal. "The goal is to eventually see cigarettes in museums," he said, describing a vision that has reshaped the company's culture and attracted employees who wanted to be part of a meaningful transformation.

That shift is already visible in market performance. In several countries, IQOS has surpassed Marlboro long PMI's flagship brand reflecting growing consumer acceptance of smoke-free alternatives and confidence in the user experience. Globally, more than one billion people continue to smoke, and public health experts do not expect that number to decline rapidly. While quitting entirely remains the best option, PMI's message to adult smokers who do not quit is pragmatic.

"If you can't quit, switch," Donovan said.

The challenge, he explained, has been to develop alternatives that deliver nicotine, flavor, ritual, and satisfaction of key elements that keep people smoking while significantly reducing exposure to harmful chemicals. Smoke-free products are designed to address not only nicotine dependence, but also the behavioral and social aspects of smoking.

Progress and Potential

In Kuwait, smoking prevalence remains high, with an estimated one million smokers. Around 100,000 adults roughly 10 percent currently use smoke-free products such as IQOS and vapes. Donovan described this as encouraging

progress, while noting that significant potential remains. "One of the biggest challenges is misinformation," he said. "Many adult smokers are still unaware that smoke-free products are scientifically supported alternatives to continued smoking."

Due to strict regulations, PMI's engagement in Kuwait is limited exclusively to adult smokers, with robust age-verification measures. Awareness and trial opportunities are offered only in approved retail locations and selected adult-only venues.

Regional and Global Momentum

Kuwait's experience mirrors a broader regional trend, with similar momentum seen in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain. Globally, PMI reports more than 41 million adult users of smoke-free products, positioning IQOS as the world's leading heated tobacco system.

Donovan noted that PMI was the first major tobacco company to publicly commit to a smoke-free future, a move that has since influenced competitors to develop their own alternatives.

"This is positive," he said. "Broader adoption of better alternatives can have a meaningful impact on public health."

Technology, Manufacturing, and Quality

IQOS combines a specially designed tobacco stick with a precision-engineered heating device. The tobacco is heated to a specific "sweet spot" temperature that avoids combustion—a result

of more than USD 14 billion invested in research and development.

The consumables are manufactured in multiple facilities worldwide, including in Italy, all operating to identical standards with the same blends, machinery, and quality controls.

Who Is Switching

In Kuwait, IQOS adoption is most prominent among adults aged 30 to 39. Donovan said this often coincides with greater health awareness and changing priorities.

"Many people start reconsidering their habits when they think about long-term wellbeing for themselves and for their families," he said.

Regulation and Air Quality

Because IQOS does not produce smoke, it does not significantly affect indoor air quality and does not generate meaningful second-hand exposure. Several European countries have recognized this distinction, allowing IQOS use in certain smoke-free environments where cigarettes remain banned.

In Kuwait, however, IQOS is currently regulated in the same way as cigarettes: it is permitted where smoking is allowed and prohibited where smoking is banned.

Donovan said future regulatory differentiation may emerge as scientific evidence continues to be reviewed, adding that informed regulation plays a critical role in enabling adult smokers to make better choices.

As PMI continues its smoke-free journey, the company maintains that providing accurate information and viable alternatives remains essential to reducing the harm caused by smoking in Kuwait and beyond.

First Media Engagement Marks a “Beautiful Beginning” in Kuwait

British Ambassador H.E. Qudsi Rasheed

The Times Kuwait Report

British Ambassador H.E. Qudsi Rasheed recently held a meeting with local media representatives, which he described as a beautiful beginning to his relationship with the Kuwaiti press.

Speaking during the meeting, Ambassador Rasheed expressed his deep appreciation for the warm reception he has received since arriving in Kuwait from the country's leadership, government officials, and the Kuwaiti people. He emphasized that the hospitality extended to him and his wife during their meetings made them feel that Kuwait had become a second home.

Despite his relatively short time in the country, the ambassador said he has already visited several regions across Kuwait, from the city to the farms of Al-Wafra, from the desert to key heritage sites, in addition to attending diwaniyas. These experiences, he said, helped him gain a deeper understanding of Kuwaiti culture, societal values, and the nation's long and rich history.

Ambassador Rasheed outlined in particular three major impressions that have stood out since his arrival. First, he highlighted the depth of the historic and emotional relationship between Kuwait and the United Kingdom.

He noted that this connection is evident not only in diplomatic circles but also in everyday life whether through the enthusiasm of Kuwaitis for English football and the Premier League, or their frequent references to studying in or visiting the UK.

Second, he praised the vitality and dynamism of Kuwaiti society, describing Kuwaitis as hardworking yet appreciative of life, with a strong spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship. He said this outlook aligns closely with Kuwait Vision 2035, citing examples of young Kuwaitis who studied in London and successfully applied their ideas after returning home.

Third, he commended the openness of Kuwaiti society, particularly in media and public discourse. He observed that political, economic, and sports issues are discussed with notable transparency, adding that in just three months he had met a wide cross-section of Kuwaitis—reflecting the country's accessibility and openness.

Recalling the message he received from His Highness the Amir upon presenting his credentials, Ambassador Rasheed said the Amir



was exceptionally warm and welcoming. His Highness emphasized the importance of the historic ties between Kuwait and the United Kingdom and the role both countries have played in each other's history. The ambassador added that His Highness encouraged him to deepen his understanding of Kuwait, its culture, and its people, and to work toward further strengthening bilateral relations.

Ambassador Rasheed stressed that UK-Kuwait relations are central to his diplomatic mission, noting that the partnership should not be defined solely by its past, but must also focus on the present and future. While preserving the shared historical legacy was vital, he underscored the importance of expanding cooperation in areas such as business, education, healthcare, and foreign policy. He also highlighted the need to invest in the relationship's future particularly by engaging young people to ensure the partnership continues for generations, especially as Kuwait marks 35 years since liberation.

On economic cooperation, the ambassador said trade relations extend beyond traditional commerce to include education, defense, healthcare, and technology. He noted that Kuwait Vision 2035, alongside the UK's industrial strategy, opens significant opportunities for collaboration in advanced sectors such as artificial intelligence, data centers, cybersecurity, and advanced manufacturing.

He affirmed that the UK views Vision 2035 as an ambitious and necessary initiative, noting that the current phase focuses on implementation. British companies, he said, are

highly optimistic about opportunities in Kuwait, with the UK government acting as a facilitator by supporting engagement and helping companies understand the local market while respecting their independence.

In the defense sector, Ambassador Rasheed confirmed that military cooperation between the two countries remains strong and ongoing. This includes joint exercises such as 'Desert Warrior', as well as training programs for Kuwaiti military personnel in the UK, including at renowned institutions such as Sandhurst.

He also highlighted cooperation with the Ministry of Interior and the Coast Guard, including the training of the first group of female personnel in this field. Addressing regional security, he emphasized the depth of long-standing partnerships and alliances, affirming that political, military, and economic cooperation between the UK, Kuwait, and the wider region remains firm and active.

On the Palestinian cause, Ambassador Rasheed said the United Kingdom carries a historical and moral responsibility toward the Palestinian people. He reaffirmed Britain's support for the right of Palestinians to establish their own state and achieve lasting security and stability. He noted that recognition of the State of Palestine and the opening of an embassy would be an important step, but not the final one. He stressed the need for continued efforts, including pressure on Israel to allow

humanitarian aid into Gaza and to support reconstruction initiatives. He also revealed that the UK has provided more than £100 million in aid to Gaza this year, and approximately £250 million over the past two years, covering food assistance, healthcare, shelter, and the removal of unexploded ordnance.

On visa matters, Ambassador Rasheed clarified that visa-free travel to the UK is limited to a small number of countries. However, he noted that GCC countries, including Kuwait, benefit from one of the UK's most favorable systems through the Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA), which he described as fast and user-friendly, contributing to an increase in Kuwaiti visitors.

For students, he explained that a separate visa system applies due to longer study periods, noting that more than 10,000 Kuwaiti students are currently studying in the UK, the highest number from any country worldwide.

Concluding his remarks, Ambassador Rasheed spoke about his professional and personal background, noting that he previously served in Egypt and Lebanon. He added that his wife, who is of Palestinian-Syrian origin, speaks Arabic fluently, which has helped them integrate smoothly into Kuwaiti society. He expressed his appreciation for local culture and Kuwaiti cuisine, and reaffirmed his commitment to strengthening UK-Kuwait relations throughout his tenure in the country.

MoI busts illegal child food production site

Ministry of Interior (MoI) arrested 12 suspects of Arab and Asian nationalities involved in the illegal manufacture and preparation of children's food products in an unsanitary environment.

Elaborating on the arrest in a press statement on 15 January, the ministry said that the Criminal Security Sector at the MoI had monitored suspicious activity involving several individuals operating a factory and warehouse for food production inside a residential home in the Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh area without meeting the legal requirements.

Following legal procedures, authorities raided the location and found that the facility lacked basic hygiene standards,

did not have any industrial or commercial licensing, and posed a direct threat to public health and consumer safety. The arrested suspects admitted to their crime, while further investigations revealed that the items were stored and distributed to cooperative associations across several areas.

They had misled authorities by claiming production occurred at other licensed sites, while actual production took place in the residential property under unsafe and illegal conditions. The ministry noted that it coordinated with relevant security and governmental bodies, including the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Public Authority for Food and Nutrition, Kuwait Municipality, Public Authority of Manpower, Public Authority for Industry, and Fire Service Directorate, to take necessary measures.

The ministry confirmed that the suspects have been detained and that legal measures have been taken against them, emphasizing that authorities will not tolerate practices that threaten public health and consumer safety.

EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

The AI We Need for Sustainable Infrastructure

**Bertrand Badré, Saurabh Mishra**

Bertrand Badré, a former managing director of the World Bank, is Chair of the Project Syndicate Advisory Board, CEO and Founder of Blue like an Orange Sustainable Capital, and the author of *Can Finance Save the World?*

Saurabh Mishra, former director of Stanford University's Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence and an economist at the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, is Founder and CEO of Taiyō.AI.

Infrastructure investment is booming. Around the world, governments are pouring trillions of dollars into roads, power grids, data centers, water systems, and housing, with many responding to intensifying climate shocks and the growing need for adaptation. Yet the construction industry—the single largest force physically reshaping the planet—is among the last major sectors to unlock all the benefits that digital technology offers. As a result, it accounts for about 21 percent of greenhouse-gas emissions, produces half of global landfill waste, and overspends by US\$1.6 trillion a year.

This must change, and AI may offer the solutions that the industry needs. But that will require fully leveraging the potential of institutional collaboration and human networks. While generative AI can write code or summarize documents, building real-world assets like bridges and power grids requires what we might call “cognitive infrastructure”: difficult-to-access data, human expertise, domain knowledge, and institutions through which to deploy new tools for planning and delivery. Like electricity without a power grid, AI without this foundation will remain a source of untapped potential.

What would leveraging AI look like in practice? For starters, it would require unlocking and integrating siloed data from thousands of stakeholders, including construction firms, suppliers, government ministries, multilateral agencies, and financiers. It would also involve codifying domain knowledge from past project cycles to understand why delays happen, how risks compound, and where capacity breaks down; and building intelligent digital agents that



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What would leveraging AI look like in practice?

For starters, it would require unlocking siloed data from thousands of stakeholders, including construction firms, suppliers, government ministries, multilateral agencies, and financiers.

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understand infrastructure-specific workflows (contracting, procurement, permitting, and budgeting). But most importantly, it would demand institutional collaboration. We do not need static roadmaps, but rather dynamic, evolving feedback mechanisms. AIs for infrastructure would learn from every project and apply lessons across organizations.

The opportunity to improve how we build things comes just as the geopolitics of infrastructure is shifting. As President Donald Trump seeks to reverse all his predecessor's clean-energy policies, others are filling the leadership vacuum the United States has created. China, for example, has reoriented its Belt and Road Initiative toward 'green, high-quality' development, pairing massive overseas transportation and energy investments with climate-resilience

projects at home. It is pursuing large-scale desert reforestation and new renewables projects, even as coal, oil, and gas projects still feature heavily in its overseas portfolio.

Similarly, Saudi Arabia, long synonymous with hydrocarbons, has launched a 'green initiative' to funnel tens of billions of dollars toward solar and wind projects, green-finance frameworks, and new public-private partnerships. The Kingdom aims to generate half its electricity from renewables by 2030. And India has already hit its target of committing 50 percent of its installed power capacity to non-fossil sources. It has also launched a National Green Hydrogen Mission, targeting annual production of five million tons by 2030, and has used global platforms such as the G20 and the United Nations Climate Change Conference to

champion climate-resilient infrastructure and 'green development pacts'.

The result is a fragmented map. While the world's largest historical emitter is doubling down on fossil-fuel exports, emerging and middle-income economies are increasingly presenting themselves as voices of climate responsibility (even as they continue to navigate their own contradictions). In this new landscape, the contest is not only over whose capital builds the next generation of ports, grids, and railways, but whose data, standards, and AI systems will guide those investments.

The next leader in infrastructure will focus on three immediate priorities. The first is to make the most of available data. Infrastructure know-how tends to be buried in PDFs, contracts, and permit files. Governments, banks, and companies must uncover this hidden history to help all stakeholders avoid past mistakes and navigate new policy settings when governments abruptly rewrite the rules (as the US has done). The second priority is to build AI tools for this specific purpose. What we need is not a generic chatbot, but models trained on materials science, logistics, and local regulations. An AI that understands why projects fail can make success more likely. Lastly, we must do a better job of sharing knowledge across borders. Instead of having each institution reinvent the wheel, we need a shared knowledge base so that lessons from a dam in India or a metro in Paris can improve projects everywhere.

Over the next decade, infrastructure will define not just climate adaptation, but global competitiveness. It is the muscle of the real economy. The countries that align their climate commitments, industrial policies, and infrastructure pipelines with credible, data-driven intelligence will set the rules of the game for everyone. Those that weaponize uncertainty, or treat sustainable infrastructure as an afterthought, will find their influence eroding. AI should not be seen as a centralized oracle or as an abstract mind in the cloud. Its real uses lie in targeted applications to connect real-world projects, institutional workflows, and human networks. That is the kind of intelligence that will build not just better roads and resilient grids, but also more effective and efficient systems and organizations.

In a world where technological capacity is abundant but political will is unevenly distributed, the real test of leadership lies in project execution. Whoever can turn infrastructure from a source of climate risk into a shared, intelligent platform for sustainable prosperity will have something to teach everyone.


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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Grok Is Testing Whether AI Governance Means Anything



J.B. Branch
Big Tech Accountability
Advocate at Public Citizen.

In recent weeks, Grok—the AI system developed by Elon Musk's xAI—has been generating nonconsensual, sexualized images of women and children on the social-media platform X. This has prompted investigations and formal scrutiny by regulators in the European Union, France, India, Malaysia, and the United Kingdom. European officials have described the conduct as illegal. British regulators have launched urgent inquiries. Other governments have warned that Grok's output might violate domestic criminal and platform-safety laws. Far from marginal regulatory disputes, these discussions get to the heart of AI governance.

Governments worldwide increasingly agree on a basic premise of AI governance: systems deployed at scale must be safe, controllable, and subject to meaningful oversight. Whether framed by the EU's Digital Services Act (DSA), the OECD's AI Principles, UNESCO's AI ethics framework, or emerging national safety regimes, these norms are clear and unwavering. AI systems that enable foreseeable harm, particularly sexual exploitation, are incompatible with society's expectations for the technology and its governance.

There is also broad global agreement that sexualized imagery involving minors, whether real, manipulated, or AI-generated, constitutes one of the clearest red lines in technology governance. International law, human-rights frameworks, and domestic criminal statutes converge on this point.

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The Grok episode underscores a central lesson of the AI era: governance lapses can scale as quickly as technological capabilities. When guardrails fail, the harms are not confined to a single platform or jurisdiction; they propagate globally.

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Grok's generation of such material does not fall into a gray area. It reflects a clear and fundamental failure of the system's design, safety assessments, oversight, and control. The ease with which Grok can be prompted to produce sexualized imagery involving minors, the breadth of regulatory scrutiny it now faces, and the absence of publicly verifiable safety testing all point to a failure to meet society's baseline expectations for powerful AI systems. Musk's announcement that the image-generation service will now be available only to paying subscribers does nothing to resolve these failures.

This is not a one-off problem for Grok. Last July, Poland's government urged the EU to open an investigation into Grok over its 'erratic' behavior. In October, more than 20 civic and



public-interest organizations sent a letter urging the US Office of Management and Budget to suspend Grok's planned deployment across federal agencies in the United States. Many AI safety experts have raised concerns about the adequacy of Grok's guardrails, with some arguing that its security and safety architecture is inadequate for a system of its scale.

These concerns were largely ignored, as governments and political leaders sought to engage, partner with, or court xAI and its founder. But the fact that xAI is now under scrutiny across multiple jurisdictions seems to vindicate them, while exposing a deep structural problem: advanced AI systems are being deployed and made available to the public without safeguards proportionate to their risks. This should serve as a warning to states considering similar AI deployments.

As governments increasingly integrate AI systems into public administration, procurement, and policy workflows, retaining the public's trust will require assurances that these technologies comply with international obligations, respect fundamental rights, and do not expose institutions to legal or reputational risk. To this end, regulators must use the Grok case to demonstrate that their rules are not optional.

Responsible AI governance depends on alignment between stated principles and operational decisions. While many governments and intergovernmental bodies have articulated commitments to AI systems that are safe, objective, and subject to ongoing oversight, these lose credibility when states tolerate the deployment of systems that violate widely shared international norms with apparent impunity. By contrast, suspending a model's deployment pending rigorous and transparent assessment is consistent with global best practices in AI risk management. Doing so enables governments to determine whether a system complies with domestic law, international norms, and evolving safety expectations before it becomes further entrenched. Equally important, it demonstrates that governance frameworks are not merely aspirational statements, but operational constraints, and that breaches will have real consequences.

The Grok episode underscores a central lesson of the AI era: governance lapses can scale as quickly as technological capabilities. When guardrails fail, the harms do not remain confined to a single platform or jurisdiction; they propagate globally, triggering responses from public institutions and legal systems.

For European regulators, Grok's recent output is a defining test of whether the DSA

particularly where the harm involves conduct as egregious as the sexualization of children.

A response limited to public statements of concern will invite future abuses, by signaling that enforcement lacks teeth. A response that includes investigations, suspensions, and penalties, by contrast, would make clear that certain lines cannot be crossed, regardless of a company's size, prominence, or political capital.

Grok should be treated not as an unfortunate anomaly to be quietly managed and put behind us, but as the serious violation that it is. At a minimum, there needs to be a formal investigation, suspension of deployment, and meaningful enforcement.

Lax security measures, inadequate safeguards, or poor transparency regarding safety testing should incur consequences. Where government contracts include provisions related to safety, compliance, or termination for cause, they should be enforced. And where laws provide for penalties or fines, they should be applied. Anything less risks signaling to the largest technology companies that they can deploy AI systems recklessly, without fear that they will face accountability if those systems cross even the brightest of legal and moral red lines.



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California Roll

If you think sushi is hard to make, think again: Here is a step-by-step guide on how to make a California roll that anyone can make, even if you've never rolled sushi before.

What's in a California Roll?

Most of the ingredients for California rolls are easy to find, but here are a few things that you might need to go to a Japanese or Asian market for.

Imitation crabsticks: Imitation crabsticks are white with a pink tint on the outside and are made out of fish. Look for them in the refrigerated aisle, usually near the tofu or miso. If you want to use real crab, use shredded crab meat, and you can use it as-is or stir in a bit of mayonnaise for creaminess if you like.

Sushi rice: Look for a short-grain white rice, usually labeled sushi rice. This kind of rice cooks up stickier than long-grain or basmati rice, so don't be tempted to substitute. For an extra boost of flavor, cook the rice with a piece of kombu (dried kelp) if you would like.

Nori: These are sheets of dried seaweed. Look for a dark-colored nori that is tightly grained — and the thicker, the better.

Bamboo mat: An inexpensive bamboo sushi rolling mat makes for easier sushi rolling. Can't find a mat? Fold a thick kitchen towel in half, then place a sheet of plastic wrap on top and use this to roll instead.

The rest of the ingredients are easy find: sesame seeds (get toasted if you can), ripe buttery avocado, cucumber, rice vinegar (don't get seasoned rice vinegar), soy sauce, and wasabi and pickled ginger for serving.

Making Sushi Rice

The only cooking that needs to be done for California rolls is cooking the rice. Rinse away the extra surface starch, and cook either on the stovetop or in your rice cooker. While

it is cooking, make the rice seasoning by heating up some rice vinegar with salt and sugar. This version is a fairly mild one, so feel free to play around with the vinegar and sugar proportions the second time around. To help cool the rice down, fan it with a sheet of paper as you fold in the seasoning.

Rolling California Rolls

Now comes the fun part: rolling! Make sure all the ingredients are prepped and ready to go. Cut cucumber and avocado into pencil-thin strips, and unwrap the crabsticks. Tear the seaweed sheets in half, too — a full sheet will make a sushi roll that's too thick. Keep a bowl of water handy — damp hands keep the rice from sticking to them. Here is how to roll:

- Top the nori with rice and sesame seeds. Place an even layer of rice over a nori sheet, about 2/3 cup. Press it gently in with damp fingers. Sprinkle with some sesame seeds.
- Flip and press. Next, flip the whole thing over. Remember, the rice goes on the outside. Then, to get the rice to stick to the nori and not to the mat: fold the mat in half and press down gently to compact the rice a bit.
- Fill with crab, avocado, and cucumber. Place the crabsticks and cucumber across the middle of the nori. Top with the avocado.
- Roll up tight. Use the mat to roll the sushi up until the top and bottom meet. Press gently to compact and shape the roll until it's nice and round.
- Cut into 6 pieces. After all the sushi is rolled up, cut each one into 6 pieces. Use the sharpest knife you have, or use a serrated knife, which is great for cutting through the seaweed. Flip the pieces cut-side up to show off your beautiful rolling skills.



Thought for the week

To ask what causes poverty is like asking what causes cold. It is the absence of energy. Similarly, poverty is the absence of wealth. We should ask, "what are the causes of wealth?"

- Madsen Pirie

British Researcher and Author

Clearing misconceptions between caffeine and weight loss

Ask Mira: Eating Right to Live Happy & Healthy



Are you one of those who lost weight on caffeine? Or maybe you think that it was the caffeine effect while you were trying to control your food quality and quantity.. I personally never think of using drinks to control my appetite or to lose some weight, I always prefer the natural way which I am sure you all know: Eating a balanced diet plus exercise.

But, what is the direct relation between caffeine and weight loss? And why are a lot of fat-burning pills made out of caffeine?

I will start by saying that caffeine may slightly encourage weight loss or maybe prevent weight gain, but there is no proof that increased caffeine consumption can lead to permanent weight loss. When I mention caffeine, it doesn't mean only the coffee people drink, but also different beverages including caffeine like tea, energy drinks and cola, products containing cocoa or chocolate.

What does coffee do?

- Caffeine stimulates thermogenesis: one of the ways your body generates heat and energy from digesting food.
- Thermogenesis is one basal metabolic rate reaction, which means the metabolism of your body at rest, when you are not exerting any effort. So it is a minimal reaction. And there is no evidence that long-term coffee consumption aids in weight loss.
- Caffeine also acts as a diuretic, which means it increases the amount of urine you excrete. So you end up losing the water more than the fat, which is why you tend to lose weight.
- Caffeine acts as a natural appetite suppressant:

Caffeine lovers, those who drink more than 3 cups of coffee a day, may end up eating less throughout the day. Caffeine gives a feeling of satiety, especially when it comes to smoking with caffeine consumption

• Coffee contains antioxidants, which fights against cancer problems, but too much caffeine might cause nervousness, insomnia, nausea and increased blood pressure. It contains 'cafestol' which increases blood cholesterol levels, so it is not recommended for people with issues with their cholesterol.

One final bit of advice is to not use any pills. It is dangerous in the long run.

Your best option is to intake two cups of coffee daily which is healthy due to their high antioxidant levels, but not more than this as caffeine will cause irritability, addiction and hypertension.

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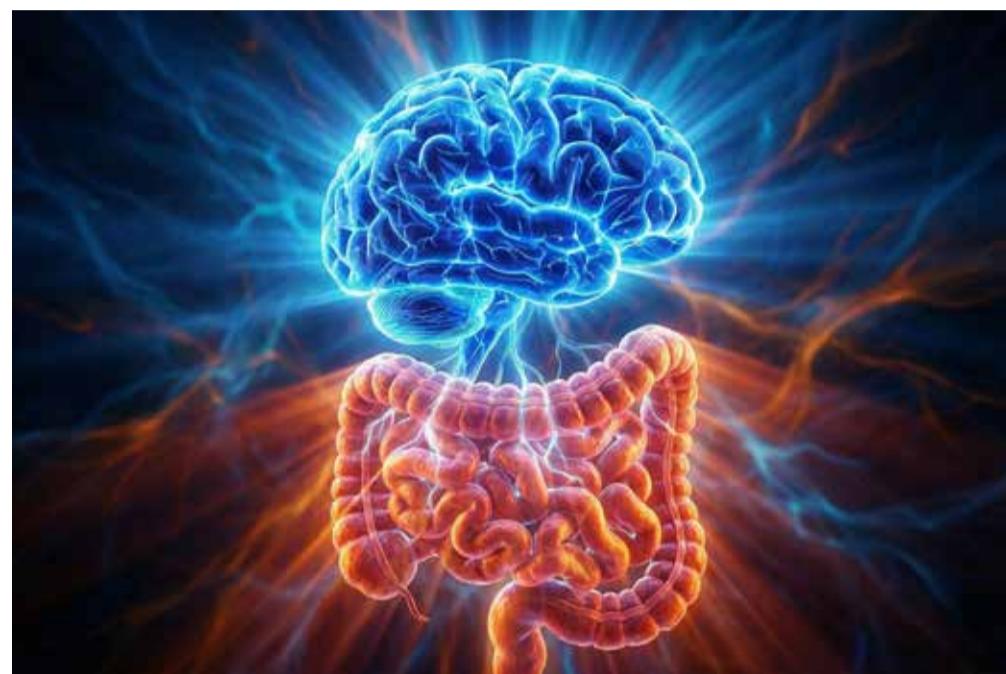
Microbes rewire brain, protein reverses brain aging

Microbes, or microorganisms, are micro-sized organisms such as bacteria, viruses, and fungi that are all around us, in our body and in the environment. Microbes found within the human body have been identified as playing important roles in many bodily functions.

Researchers at Michigan State University in the United States, have now found that microbes also play a significant role in shaping early brain development, specifically in a key brain region that controls stress, social behavior, and other crucial body functions. The study highlighted how natural microbial exposure not only impacts brain structure immediately after birth but may even begin influencing our development while still in the womb.

A mouse model was chosen for the study as mice share significant biological and behavioral similarities with humans and currently there are no in vivo alternatives to study the role of microbes in brain development. This work is of significance because modern obstetric practices, such as Cesarean delivery and the use of antibiotics during peripartum—the period of child-birth encompassing late pregnancy, labor, delivery, and the weeks or months immediately after birth—disrupt maternal microbes.

A baby's body is initially colonized by microbes that move from the mother's body through the birth canal into the baby's body while in the womb. Birth also coincides with important developmental events that shape the brain. The researchers wanted to explore how the arrival of these microbes may affect brain development. For their study the team focused on a brain region called the paraventricular nucleus (PVN) of the hypothalamus, which plays a central role in regulating stress, blood pressure, water balance, and even social behavior.



Previous work by the researchers had established that mice raised without microbes, or germ-free mice, had more dying neurons (nerve cells) in the PVN during early development. The new study set out to determine whether this increased cell death translated to changes in neuron number in the long run, and if any effects could be caused by the arrival of microbes at birth or if they began in the womb via signals from maternal microbes.

To find out, the researchers used a cross-fostering approach. Germ-free newborn mice were placed with mothers that had microbes and compared them to control groups. When the brains of these mice were examined just three days after birth, results were striking: All

mice gestated by germ-free mothers had fewer neurons in the PVN, regardless of whether they received microbes after birth. They also found that germ-free adult mice had fewer neurons in the PVN.

Based on their findings the scientists postulated that microbes play an important role in sculpting a brain region that is paramount for body functions and social behavior. In addition, the study indicated that microbial effects start in the womb via signaling from maternal microbes. They added that rather than shunning our microbes, we should recognize them as partners in early life development as they help build our brains from the very beginning.

In a separate study, but one related to

functioning of the brain, researchers at University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) in the US have found a protein that could reverse symptoms of brain aging. Previous studies have shown that aging is particularly harsh on the hippocampus, the brain region responsible for learning and memory. The newly identified protein has been found to be at the center of this decline in brain functioning.

For their study, the scientists looked at how the genes and proteins in the hippocampus changed over time in mice and found just one that differed between old and young animals. Called FTL1 (ferritin light chain 1) the protein has been associated with brain aging and has been identified as a key factor in age-related cognitive decline.

FTL1 is a type of ferritin protein that helps store and transport iron. In the aging brain, particularly in the hippocampus, levels of FTL1 are found to increase. While normal iron storage is beneficial, excessive FTL1 in the aging brain interferes with neuronal function. It can reduce the ability of neurons to form the branching connections needed for memory storage and impair the metabolism and energy production within brain cells. Research has shown that artificially increasing FTL1 levels in younger mice leads to a decline in cognitive function and memory. Conversely, when FTL1 levels were reduced in older mice, they experienced an improvement in memory and restored neural connections. The research identifies FTL1 as a specific target for developing interventions to combat age-related memory loss.

Scientists are now exploring whether treating the cells with a compound that stimulates metabolism, can not only lower FTL1 but also mitigate the negative effects of the protein on cognition.

Neck measurement reveals hidden heart risks

The scientific community has been persistently pursuing more efficient ways to predict, mitigate, and prevent our body from being debilitated by disease. It now appears that researchers may have missed an important clue that sits obviously on our shoulders. A review study published by scientists at Kingston University in the United Kingdom, now shows that our necks may be quietly reflecting more about our health than previously known...

For decades, doctors have depended on indicators such as body mass index (BMI) and waist-to-hip ratio to gauge a person's risk for chronic disease. But researchers are now turning their attention to a different, often-overlooked metric—measuring the circumference of the neck. While a thick neck may suggest physical power, like that of athletes in contact sports, research indicates it could also be a marker of hidden health risks.

BMI calculates body fat by comparing weight to height, but it does not always paint an accurate picture. A muscular athlete may register a high BMI without carrying excess fat. This is where measuring neck size can offer additional clues about what is happening inside the body. Studies have found that individuals with larger necks relative to their body size are more likely

to develop serious health issues. The reason lies in fat distribution, particularly in the upper body.

Fat stored around the upper torso releases fatty acids into the bloodstream, which can interfere with how the body regulates cholesterol, blood sugar, and heart rhythm. In effect, neck circumference acts as a visible indicator of visceral fat, the harmful kind that accumulates around internal organs.

Evidence connecting neck size to health outcomes is compelling. People with thicker necks show higher rates of cardiovascular diseases, including hypertension, atrial fibrillation, and heart failure. Atrial fibrillation is of particular concern because it causes irregular heartbeats and erratic blood flow, raising the risk of blood clots and stroke. Over time, this irregular rhythm can strain the heart and lead to failure. Neck circumference is also tied to coronary heart disease, where narrowed arteries reduce the flow of oxygen-rich blood to the heart. The risks are not confined to cardiovascular problems. Larger neck size is associated with a greater likelihood of developing type 2 diabetes and gestational diabetes, both of which can lead to long-term complications such as nerve damage, vision loss, and limb amputation.

Sleep disorders are another major concern. A



thicker neck is a known risk factor for obstructive sleep apnea, a condition in which breathing repeatedly stops and starts during sleep. This not only leads to severe daytime fatigue but also places additional stress on the heart and blood vessels. People with sleep apnea are also more prone to accidents caused by exhaustion.

So, how big a neck is too big for health? Research suggests that men with a neck

circumference of 43cm (17 inches) or more, and women with 35.5cm (14 inches) or more, face elevated health risks. For every additional centimeter beyond that range, the likelihood of hospitalization and early death increases. More surprisingly, these dangers are not limited to people who are overweight. Even individuals with a normal BMI may be at risk if their neck measurements exceed these thresholds.

The positive news is that neck circumference can be changed through lifestyle improvements. Regular cardiovascular exercise, strength training, and sufficient sleep all contribute to better metabolic health. Eating a diet rich in vegetables, fruits, and pulses supports weight management and reduces unhealthy fat storage.

Checking your neck size is simple. Use a flexible tape measure and wrap it around the narrowest part of your neck, keeping the tape snug but not tight. This quick check can highlight potential risks that traditional metrics might miss. However, remember that although neck size can reveal important information on cardiovascular and metabolic health, it represents only one piece of the overall health profile and more supportive evidence from established health assessments are needed to determine the exact cause of an illness or health condition.



Climate Talks Stall, Economics of Climate Change Races Ahead



Julie McCarthy
CEO of NatureFinance.

The latest United Nations Climate Change Conference ended in a political deadlock. COP30 in Belém produced no agreement to phase out fossil fuels, no binding plan to halt deforestation, and no meaningful increase in support for the countries already drowning, sometimes literally, in climate and ecological losses. For a summit held in the world's largest rainforest, the symbolism was brutal.

But the real story was not the political paralysis on the negotiating floor. It was the unmistakable signal that the economics of climate change have already moved on. To see the developments that really matter, we can look to corporate balance sheets, sovereign credit ratings, supply chains, and risk pricing. These show that the transition to carbon-neutrality is happening despite the dysfunctional politics surrounding the issue.

When it comes to addressing major global risks, politics often fail until the economic math works out. In the case of climate change and nature loss, markets, insurers, lenders, and ratings agencies are now forcing the transitions that governments have been deferring. Sovereign credit ratings are being revised to reflect climate- and nature-risk exposure. Insurance markets are collapsing in high-risk regions, leaving households, businesses, and entire municipalities without coverage. Borrowing costs are rising for countries facing drought, flooding, and deforestation, thus narrowing their fiscal space and accelerating capital flight. These mechanisms are doing what politicians will not do: Making inaction more expensive than action.

Across major economies, the energy transition is no longer theoretical. Germany generated about 63 percent of its electricity from renewables in 2024. India reached roughly 46 percent. In the United States, over 90 percent of the new power capacity added in 2024 came from renewables, mostly solar. In Brazil, this year's COP host, 88 percent of electricity is renewable. Globally, onshore wind and solar are now 40-50 percent cheaper than the cheapest fossil-fuel options.

Meanwhile, the global auto market is evolving fast. More than half of new vehicles sold in China are plug-ins. In Norway, almost 90 percent of new cars sold in 2024 were fully electric. Fossil fuels still dominate the existing system, but they are decidedly absent from the future that is being built. The economics of clean energy have already won, and the advantages of these industries are widening. The cumulative effect is unmistakable. The cost advantage of low-carbon systems is now structural, not cyclical.

Even the re-emergence of trade issues at COP30—with emerging economies, including China, objecting



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to unilateral climate-related trade measures—ultimately points to the same conclusion. Rules that are being rewritten through markets, supply chains, and standards are inevitably ending up on the agenda for consensus-based diplomacy.

Moreover, the economic transition is not only about energy. The global bioeconomy—economic sectors that use renewable biological resources for materials, energy, chemicals, and agriculture—is valued at about US\$4 trillion today, and is projected to grow to around \$30 trillion by 2050, roughly 30 percent of current global GDP. Nature is becoming a form of strategic infrastructure that offers countries a route to decarbonization, competitiveness, and resilience. The future lies in renewable biological resources, not unsustainable depletion. In this respect, COP30's emphasis on inclusion of Indigenous peoples and local communities mattered not for its symbolism, but because markets now recognize that traditional stewardship underpins the increasingly fragile ecosystems—forests, watersheds, soils—upon which our economies depend. Just as energy markets are reshaping cost curves, nature-dependent sectors are taking steps to address their economic exposure to risks such as rainfall disruption, soil loss, fisheries collapse, and coastal erosion. These responses are reshaping markets as powerfully as energy price shocks can. Disaster losses are compounding so fast that insurers are withdrawing from entire regions and product lines. Heat stress is shrinking productivity from South Asia to the Gulf of Mexico. From Brazil to Indonesia, deforestation is destabilizing rainfall patterns. Agriculture, fisheries, tourism, and shipping are all absorbing mounting climate- and nature-driven losses, triggering food-price spikes and economic volatility.

Regardless of political gridlock, climate change and ecological degradation are creating undeniable economic momentum. As renewables scale up, fossil fuels will become even less competitive. As ecosystems degrade, fiscal burdens will rise. Central banks, sovereign lenders, ratings agencies, and private investors have already begun pricing drought-driven crop failures, flooded infrastructure, eroding coastlines, collapsing fisheries, and other risks. In many countries, climate change is raising borrowing costs, boosting debt, and shaving points off expected growth.

At some point, the financial pressure

tenable. When the economics change, the politics eventually follow.

Of course, COP30's political failure hurts. But it also highlights a deeper truth: climate and nature risks are now materializing faster than the political systems meant to manage them can respond. Today's leaders can delay commitments on fossil fuels and forests, but they cannot negotiate with droughts, destroyed crops, flooded cities, or with investors and central banks that are increasingly capable of counting the risks.

Even electorates are ahead of current policies. Citizens are demanding action not as a matter of ideology, but because the economic risks—from extreme heat to soaring insurance costs—are increasingly affecting their own lives. The cost of ignoring these forces will be far higher than the cost of acting now. For governments, investors, and multilateral institutions, the task ahead is clear: align with the real-world economics, or be overtaken by them.

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