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Kuwait trails foreign investments in the region

THE TIMES REPORT

Kuwait, along with other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, is keen to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and leverage it to help diversify the economy, provide employment for young nationals, and encourage the private sector to play a greater role in economic growth and development of the country.

Over the years, GCC countries have in general been open to global trade, but less forthcoming when it came to opening up for global investments, probably from a fear that it could dilute their sovereignty. But the 2008 global financial crisis shattered this long held view, and the mid-2014 precipitous fall

in oil prices further hammered home the realization that just being open to global trade and relying on government investments to diversify the economy were clearly not enough.

With various studies consistently showing that domestic resource mobilization on its own was not sufficient, and that FDI could contribute significantly to both productivity and income growth in the domestic markets, many GCC states began looking at attracting FDI. A slew of measures were introduced by states, including updating archaic legislation, launching new investment and companies laws, and reforming capital market rules. In Kuwait, one of the main entities tasked with implementing the government's economic goals, including attracting FDI, is the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA).

Established in 2013, the KDIPA contributes to the national goal of economic diversification, job creation and quality training for nationals, through, among others, attracting and encouraging value-added and

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Sultan of Loyalty, Love and Wisdom passes away

Oman's Sultan Qaboos bin Said passed away on Friday,10 January aged 79.

A three-day period of mourning has been declared in Oman, and the country's flag will be flown at half-mast for a period of 40 days.

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Filipino deployment ban impacts availability and cost of maids

In a bid to clear any confusion with regard to the partial ban on deployment of Filipino workers to Kuwait, following the recent murder of an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) by her Kuwaiti sponsor, the Philippine Labor Attache in Kuwait, Nasser Mustafa said in an advisory posted on social media that:

"The ban applies only to visa 20 (domestic helpers) for both new hires and 'balik mangagawa' (returning OFWs). This includes the verification, accreditation and processing of individual contracts and additional job orders for visa 20. All overseas employment certificates issued to domestic workers by the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) on or before 5pm on 3 January, 2020 shall be valid for deployment."

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kuwait is reportedly communicating with the Philippine authorities to normalize the situation. They urged the Philippines to reconsider the partial ban, and allow the court to investigate and to deliver justice given that the victim's employers had been arrested and were in custody. They also pointed out that an individual incident should not be considered a reflection of Kuwait society as a whole.

On a related note, the recent partial ban on deployment of Filipino household workers to Kuwait has impacted the price of hiring Filipino domestic workers available in Kuwait, with prices soaring from KD200 to around KD550. The ban has also increased prices for household workers from other countries, including Indian, Sri Lankan and workers from the African continent. Domestic workers are also being provided

by black-market offices located in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Farwaniya for prices ranging above KD1,000.

Air India's new Country Manager welcomed

Heads of Govt of India Public Sector Undertakings (PSU) operating in Kuwait organized a meeting to welcome Sanjeev Suri, the newly appointed Country Manager of Air India at the premises of New India Assurance, in Behbehani Building.

Six Government of India Public Sector Undertaking, Air India, TCIL, LIC of India, New India Assurance, Oriental Insurance and LIC Housing Finance are operating in Kuwait over the decades to provide various services to the residents of Kuwait.

PSU Heads welcome the new country head who takes charge of any PSU often. In accordance with the tradition Mr. Suri was extended a warm welcome by all the PSU heads in a befitting manner.

The meeting was presided over by Mr. Ram Mohan Reddy, Resident Manager, New India Assurance Kuwait. A shawl was wraped around him by Mr. Anil Parashar, Resident Manager Oriental Insurance to welcome Mr. Suri.

Mr. Suri shared his experience of working in Air India, and expressed his strong desire to take its operations to great heights in Kuwait. Mr. Devesh Kumar, Country Manager, LIC of India and Mr. Anish Agarwal, Country Manager, TCIL spoke on the occasion and expressed their good wishes to Mr. Suri. The meeting concluded with vote of Thanks followed by high tea.

Pakistan embassy and PBFPK organizes 'Internet of Things' training session

Embassy of Pakistan and the Pakistani Banking and Finance Professionals in Kuwait (PBFPK) organized a training session on 'Internet of Things - Artificial Intelligence - Big Data - Digital Banking - Self Service'.

The training session, held at Pakistan House in Mishref on 4 January, was conducted by Naeem Mirza, a high-profile professional and a member of PBFPK. The session was well-attended by a large number of members and non-members of PBFPK.

Ambassador of Pakistan to Kuwait H.E. Syed Sajjad Haider thanked PBFPK for organizing the session and said that the training would hopefully help professionals to excel in their respective professions, by inculcating in them the latest technological advancements and developments.

The President of PBFPK, Muhammad Tahir Bashir, in his welcome speech thanked the Embassy for providing the opportunity to educate the Pakistani professional community. The session was followed by lunch.

Absentee Kuwaiti coop employee draws monthly salary

A Kuwaiti employee working in a cooperative society brazenly admitted on state television recently that he had been receiving a salary every month from the cooperative, even though he had been perpetually absent from work for several years. The revelation has caused severe embarrassment to the authorities, and the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) is understood to have initiated an investigation surrounding the case.

Inspectors from PAM are said to be now visiting several cooperative societies to ascertain whether the Kuwaitis employed there are regular attendees or just 'ghost' employees who join for work and then disappear but continue to draw monthly salaries, as part of the government's subvention for nationals employed in the private sector.

Airport witness huge rush after holidays

Kuwait International Airport (KIA) witnessed the return to the country of around 130,000 passengers following the four-day New Year holidays.

In a press statement, the acting Deputy Director General of Kuwait International Airport Affairs, Director of Engineering Department, and Head of the T4 passenger terminal operating team Saleh Al-Fadaghi affirmed that the travelers returned from several destinations and that preparations taken at the airport in anticipation of the rush was excellent. He added that efforts put in place by the Directorate General for Civil Aviation (DGCA), in coordination with the Ministry of Interior and other entities were highly successful in managing the huge influx of passengers. He revealed that there were a total of 1,740 scheduled flights at Kuwait International Airport, and the total number of passengers and arrivals were approximately 256,000.

Measures taken against companies for money laundering

Anti-Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Department at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry has issued 128 precautionary measures against companies violating provisions of law 07/10/2013.

The measures include issuing written warnings to 14 real estate companies, 9 jewelry companies, an insurance firm, and an exchange company, in addition to issuing an order requiring 49 real estate companies, 23 jewelry shops and 2 exchange companies to follow specific procedures to comply with the law.

The ministry also suspended the activity of three exchange companies that had earlier been approved, and has requested the suspension of the activity of 12 companies, one of them real estate, 7 exchange companies, and 4 jewelry companies.

Visit Nepal Year 2020 outlines country's tourism attractions

Ambassador of Nepal to Kuwait H.E. Durga Prasad Bhandari launched his country's ambitious tourism campaign titled 'Visit Nepal Year (VNY) 2020' at Crowne Plaza Hotel on 7 January. Attending the function were members of the diplomatic corps, Kuwaiti officials, special invitees, businessmen, travel agents and media personnel. The campaign, launched internationally by Nepali embassies in various countries, highlights the tourism attractions in the country and aims to boost the country's tourism sector.

In his address to the gathering, Ambassador Bhandari pointed out that the campaign was started to attract more international tourists to Nepal, and so far the country has launched two successful tourism campaigns in 1998 and 2011.

He added that after the devastating earthquake, the tourism sector had bounced back, and has shown obvious signs of growth and development. He also underscored the various developments that have taken place in the country's history which has ensured peace and stability.

Stressing the vital role played by the tourism sector, Ambassador Bhandari emphasized that his country has the facilities to attract a large number of tourists and consequently boost the country's economy.

He highlighted Nepal's geographic beauty and attractions, as well as its remarkable biodiversity, which promises life-changing and memorable experiences for the single traveler or groups. Ambassador Bhandari also underlined the liberal visa policy of Nepal, which allows citizens of many countries to obtain a tourist visa easily from Nepal's embassies around the world.

Pointing out that 1000 Kuwaiti visitors came to his country last year, Ambassador Bhandari remarked that more work would be done to introduce Kuwaitis to the abundance of tourist opportunities through many programs.

Noting that the number of Nepalis in Kuwait reached about 70,000, Ambassador Bhandari lauded the political relations between the two countries as excellent and developed in various fields.

On the occasion, Jazeera Airways, while announcing their daily flights to Nepal from Kuwait, held a lucky draw giving away tickets to winners. Various tourist information including the country's best places to visit, tourism attractions and tourist packages were displayed for the perusal of attendees.

DDI achieves HIPAA Seal of Compliance

Dasman Diabetes Institute (DDI), founded by Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences, has recently received HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996), which is a United States legislation that provides data privacy and security provisions for safeguarding medical information. The law has emerged into greater prominence in recent years with the proliferation of health data breaches caused by cyber-attacks and ransomware attacks on health insurers and providers.

Traffic department to offer more online services

Following the successful launch of driving license renewals online, the General Traffic Department is considering offering other services online, including a system for issuing new driving licenses, replacing damaged licenses and issuing learners licenses.

The online driving license renewal service, which began in mid-November 2019, allows citizens and expatriates to apply for online renewal of their driving licenses on the website of Ministry of Interior and then receive the licenses from the machines installed in Avenues Mall, Al-Kout Mall, the service centers of Ministry of Interior, and the investigation department in Capital and Hawally governorates.

Within a month of launching the online service the traffic department was able to renew more than 17,000 licenses. The applicants submit their old licenses and receive the new ones from the machines after paying the required fees, as well as any fines for violations at the location.

Meanwhile, the General Department for Information Technology at the Ministry of Interior is also planning on implementing a system for the online renewal of residence permits for expatriates. The process, which has already been initiated for domestic workers, has renewed over 9,000 Article 20 visas.

Easy, protein-packed dips

Homemade dips are often tastier than whatever you can buy. They are obviously fresher, but they also do not contain any chemicals or preservatives. They are also super simple to make since there is no actual cooking involved. Just toss the ingredients in a food processor and hit the purée button.

The best thing about homemade dips has to be how easy it is to infuse them with flavor. These are the best homemade bean dips packed with protein, easy to make ahead, easy to pack, and will last for several days in the fridge, which makes them perfect for meal prep.

Cilantro-Lime Black Bean Dip

Drain and rinse one (15-ounce) can black beans. Transfer to a food processor and add 2 tablespoons chopped cilantro, 1 chopped garlic clove, 2 tablespoons water, 2 tablespoons fresh lime juice (from 1 lime), 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil, 1 teaspoon ground cumin, 1/4 teaspoon smoked paprika, 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt, and freshly ground black pepper to taste.

Purée until smooth. Taste and adjust the seasonings, if needed. Garnish with red pepper flakes, extra cilantro, and a drizzle of olive oil, if desired. This one goes great with plantain chips.

Garlic-Rosemary White Bean Dip

In a small skillet, combine 3 thinly sliced garlic cloves, 1 minced rosemary sprig, and 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil. Warm over medium heat until mixture is gently sizzling and garlic is lightly golden, about 1 minute. Remove from heat and let stand 5 minutes to infuse.

Meanwhile, drain and rinse one (15-ounce) can white beans. Transfer to a food processor and add infused oil mixture and 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice. Purée until smooth; season to taste with kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper. Garnish with a drizzle of olive oil and more rosemary, if desired. This one goes great with whole-grain crackers.

Thai Red Curry Chickpea Dip

Drain and rinse one (15-ounce) can chickpeas. Transfer to a food processor and add 1/4 cup natural almond butter, 3 tablespoons water, 2 tablespoons fresh lime juice (from 1 lime), 2 teaspoons red curry paste, and 1 teaspoon white miso. Purée until smooth; season to taste with kosher salt and freshly ground pepper. This one goes great with crunchy veggies, like carrots, cucumbers, and radishes. You can also get creative with these dips and use them as components of other dishes. For instance, you can spread a few tablespoons of the black bean dip on bread to add heft and creaminess to a veggie sandwich, use a dollop of the chickpea dip to complete a grain bowl, or spread the white bean dip on a platter as a bed for roasted veggies and grilled bread.

Thought for the week

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

— Nelson Mandela

Tips to lose extra water weight

Ask Mira: Eating Right to Live Happy & Healthy

Water retention is very common among obese people, and I know because I work with many such clients. Some of them are very obese and others are less, and most cases have to do with water weight, which can actually make up a lot of excess body weight. After my clients lose that extra water weight, some of them end up losing up to 4 kg in just a week.

Usually I do a test called a body analysis which calculates the water, fat and muscle mass of the person and the relative percentages. So if the body water mass or percentage is very high compared to the normal range, it means a likelihood of fast weight loss obsevered during the first week of the diet.

People who do not lose a lot during the first week usually do not suffer from water retention.

Fat needs time to be lost, and that is why in the coming weeks we cannot lose as much weight as we do during the first week.

Here is how to get rid of this extra water weight:

Drink enough water: If you are not drinking enough water, your body will hold on more water than it actually needs. Two glasses of water before each meal are a must, especially before breakfast when you wake up.

Decrease sodium intake: Salt has no calories but it retains water in the body. Don't you feel thirsty and bloated after a sushi dinner, for example? This is due to the high sodium content in seafood and in the soya sauce. Always ask for the low sodium soya sauce. Do not add extra salt to your meals.

Decrease processed and fried carbohydrates: Fried carbohydrates contain more sodium than other foods. Choosing brown bread, baked potato, steamed rice and pasta and whole grains will help a lot. Both processed carbohydrates and sodium are molecules that attract water. So when you have them in your blood stream, water will stick around them.

Organize your meals: Eating three healthy meals also help in flushing the water out of your body. You should focus on vegetables and fruits that are low in sodium and very high in water. In addition, pick from a list of potassium-rich foods as potassium is known to help balance sodium levels and increase urine production, which helps to naturally funnel out excess water.

Foods recommended for being healthy and potassium-rich are dark green leafy vegetables, beans, bananas, avocados, tomatoes and yogurt or other dairy products. You can also try magnesium-rich foods such nuts and whole grains to help in your endeavor. Do not forget that water retention is a good cause for cellulite development, so you do not need this extra water neither cellulite.

Cut carbs: To get rid of excess water, try cutting carbs from your diet. Carbs are converted into glycogen in the muscles and liver alongside water. A low carb diet tends to reduce glycogen stores in addition to leading to a drop in insulin levels, which causes a loss of sodium and water from the kidneys.

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

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

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Kuwait seeking domestic workers from other countries

Recent decision by the Philippines government to impose a ban on deployment of Filipino household workers to Kuwait, has resulted in efforts by authorities to find alternate sources, including from countries such as Ethiopia, India, Indonesia and Nepal.

An Ethiopian delegation is reportedly arriving in Kuwait shortly to discuss with the Public Authority of Manpower (PAM) the possibilities of employing household workers from that country,

Officials at PAM also disclosed that Kuwait has not received any official communication from the Philippines with regard to the deployment ban, and that discussions were being held with the Philippine Embassy to ascertain the facts.

Talks between Kuwait and Manila remain open with regard to the return of workers from the Philippines, on the basis of clear-cut solutions that benefit both countries. Discussions on Filipino domestic workers who went on vacation returning back to their original sponsors is said to clinch on the labor office taking full responsibility for their salaries and safety.

Meanwhile, PAM said it will soon come out with new rules on hiring domestic workers so as to avoid domestic worker problems, and prevent the occurrence of incidents similar to what happened recently to Filipino maid Janelle Villavendi.

However, Kuwait remains adamant on not allowing Kuwaiti sponsors to be sued in the Philippines, or any other third country, for their actions in Kuwait. Authorities maintain that signing such a clause could lead to domestic workers registering malicious complaints against Kuwaiti sponsors, which could result in their arrest when they travel abroad.

Investigations into the death of Ms. Villavendi reveal that she had earlier filed a complaint with the labor office that brought her to Kuwait, against her employer for non-payment of salary, Unfortunately, the labor office did not inform the Philippine Embassy and instead settled the matter amicably with the employer. However, the employer continued withholding her salary and this allegedly led to the beating that resulted in her death.

Pope praises Amir's peace initiatives

Pope Francis during his annual New Year audience with ambassadors of countries affiliated to the Vatican lauded the initiatives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in promoting peace and dialogue worldwide.

The pope's praise for His Highness the Amir came during the meeting with Kuwait's Ambassador to Switzerland and non-resident Ambassador to the Vatican Bader Al-Tanaib Speaking after the audience with the pope, Ambassador Al-Tanaib said he had conveyed the special greetings from His Highness the Amir to the pope on the New Year.

Pope Francis appreciated His Highness the Amir's leading role and wisdom in establishing the values of constructive dialogue, and spearheading humanitarian action and coexistence for the sake of goodness, peace and stability. The pope expressed best wishes for a prosperous and peaceful New Year to the leadership and people of Kuwait, said the ambassador.

The pope also called on the international community to find means to end various global crises and focus on welfare and development of all mankind.

Pope Francis warned that increasing tensions between the US and Iran were setting the stage for a broader conflict in the Mideast while jeopardizing efforts to rebuild Iraq. In his annual foreign policy address the pope also touched on climate change and nuclear proliferation.

Ministries filled with expatriate consultants

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah has been called upon to conduct a restructuring of the ministries because "they are infiltrated by a number of expatriate consultants".

Making the allegation against expatriate consultants, MP Safa Al-Hashem revealed that an expatriate consultant in the Ministry of Finance is 78 years old, and his service in the ministry has cost the state KD99,000.

Responding to the remarks, Minister of Finance and State Minister of Economic Affairs Dr. Mariam Al-Aqeel said she will look into the consultants' contracts.

Jazeera Airways brings more choices and services to passengers in 2020

Jazeera Airways, Kuwait's leading low-cost airline, operating regionally and internationally, today announced a series of new services and fare categories applicable from 2020 that aim to give passengers more choices to customize their itinerary as per their needs and budget when travelling to the Middle East, Europe or Asia.

Speaking of the change in the airline's fares and services for 2020, Jazeera Airways Chief Executive Officer, Rohit Ramachandran, said: "As we continue to expand and offer our customers more places to visit, we are focusing as well on enabling them to choose how they want to travel. Our new fare categories and services have been designed to make their journey with Jazeera Airways all the more personalized and enjoyable. We will be the first airline in the Middle East to offer a Priority Service they can pre-purchase online."

Starting from January 8, 2020, Jazeera Airways passengers will be able to choose from three fare categories in Economy Class: Light, Value or Extra, each providing them with a set of services to meet their needs. Passengers of Economy Class Light, the lowest fare category, are allowed a carry-on and a small bag, and can add on the services they require for their travel itinerary.

The new Priority Service provides passengers with a faster travel experience: access to Priority Check-in, Priority Baggage and Priority Boarding. Charges will be KD10 one-way and will be available at all airports. Passengers on connecting flights will pay KD15 for the one-way service for both flights.

Tajik ambassador highlights strong relations with Kuwait

Ambassador of Tajikistan to Kuwait H.E. Zubaydov Zubaydullo held a press briefing to elaborate on the growth and development of relations between Tajikistan and Kuwait through various bilateral visits and programs held last year, as well as various cooperative endeavors that have helped to facilitate and foster growth of ties between Tajikistan and Kuwait.

Ambassador Zubaydov Zubaydullo

pointed out that on 11-17 January, 2019, a delegation of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) visited the projects sponsored by the fund and explored the tourist attractions across Tajikistan. He added that the delegation visited the second irrigation project in the Olimtoy area of the Dangara district, the Kulob-Kalai Khumb road, the Norak hydroelectric station, the Khulbuk and Gisar fortresses, Safeddara and other tourist destinations in Dushanbe and the countryside.

With regards to celebrations, he also noted that on 9 February, 2019, the Tajik Embassy participated in the Kuwait Market exhibition, and on 19 March, Kuwaiti officials attended a ceremony on the occasion of Navruz holiday on the Tajikistan embassy premises, that highlighted the rich history and culture of the country.

On charitable contributions, Ambassador Zubaydov Zubaydullo went on to highlight that in March, the Kuwaiti Charity Society 'Salom', led by the Chairman of the Society, Dr. Nabil Hamad Al-Aun, paid a visit to Tajikistan to implement irrigation and construction projects in various regions of the country. Then, in April, the Secretary General of the Red Crescent Society of Tajikistan, Bahodur Kurboniyon, visited Kuwait to discuss cooperation with the Red Crescent of the two countries and to encourage more donations.

He added that in 2019, the Kuwaiti side provided US$400,000 for the reconstruction of the hospital building in the Toskala sanatorium in the Vose district in Tajikistan, and the 'Salom' charitable organization donated medical equipment amounting to $3 million in July.

Speaking more on cordial visits, Ambassador Zubaydov Zubaydullo mentioned that in September a delegation of Kuwaiti journalists visited Tajikistan to cover the launch of the second unit of the Roghun Hydroelectric Power Station, and in October, Tajikistan played host to the Days of Culture of the State of Kuwait, which was attended by a Kuwaiti delegation headed by the Deputy Secretary General of Cultural Affairs at the National Council for Culture, Art and Literature (NCCAL), Badr al-Duwaish.

Ambassador Zubaydov Zubaydullo also lauded the high-level visit of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Tajikistan, H.E. Qohir Rasulzoda to Kuwait in November, 2019, and underlined that during the visit, the 'Program of the Agreement on Cooperation in Tourism between the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan and the Government of Kuwait for 2020-2023' was signed. Furthermore, to attract tourists and investors to Tajikistan, Ambassador Zubaydov Zubaydullo underscored the various investment and tourism forums held in Kuwait, with the participation of business and tourism company representatives.

SWAK celebrates Silver Jubilee with Konkani Mega Musical Show

Shirva Welfare Association Kuwait (SWAK) will be celebrating their Silver Jubilee with a Konkani-language mega musical show on Friday, 17 January, 2020 at the American International School Maidan Hawalli. It is an open to all event.

SWAK members and Konkani community guests who would like to attend the event should please contact M&M confectionary – Salmiya for entry passes.

You may also contact the members listed below for entry passes

Adrian Gomes : 99695644 – Farwaniya Area
Alexander Fernandis : 99066754 – Abbassia Area
Alwyn D'souza : 99739984 – Salmiya Area
Alban D'souza : 97948146 – Salmiya Area
Clifford D'souza : 97885597 – Salmiya Area

Gilbert Mendonca : 99262347 – Abbassia / Kuwait City Area
Harold D'souza : 65553949 – Salmiya Area
Joyce : 60301332 – Salmiya Area
Naveen Barboza : 65098706 – Kuwait City Area
Regina : 66972618 – Salmiya Area
Urban D'souza : 97322429 –Farwaniya Area

Hawkers, vendors, beggars arrested

Chairperson of the Joint Committee for Restructuring Expatriate Labor Force Mohammed Al-Dhafiri explained that a total of 6,250 individuals were arrested by the joint committee during the past year, including 6,177 hawkers, 50 vendors and 23 beggars. In addition, there were also around 3,000 individuals arrested who were registered as domestic workers.

Their files have been suspended, and there will be legal repercussions against the sponsors and workers for such practices.

In addition, Director of the Department for Recruitment of Domestic Workers Nasser Al- Mousawi affirmed that the total number of domestic workers registered with the Public Authority for Manpower reached 730 thousand, and the total number of registered recruitment agencies was 473. He added that the total number of complaints resolved amicably between the parties was 2,805, while 704 complaints were referred to the judiciary, adding that the amount collected from the sponsors amounted to KD1.56 million.

Reception held to mark Slovakia National Day

Ambassador of Slovakia to Kuwait H.E. Igor Hajdusek hosted a reception to celebrate his country's 27th anniversary of Independence at the Palms Beach Hotel & Spa. Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Waleed Al-Jassem was the chief guest on the occasion, which was attended by members of the diplomatic corps, Kuwaiti officials, Slovak nationals and media personnel.

In his address to the gathering, Ambassador Hajdusek noted that the Velvet Revolution that occurred in Czechoslovakia in November 1989, resulted in essential political changes that opened the way to democracy and pluralism. In July 1992, Slovakia declared itself a sovereign state and the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic went their separate ways after 1 January 1993, ending 75 years of the common road of the Slovaks and Czechs in one state – Czechoslovakia.

"In the past 27 years the Slovak people, with concerted and determined efforts achieved tremendous transformation, joining various international organizations, including becoming a member of the European Union, the Transatlantic Alliance NATO, and a member of the euro zone and the Schengen area," said the ambassador. He welcomed the opening of the EU Delegation in Kuwait last year and said it was "an outstanding opportunity for closer cooperation between the EU Member States and Kuwait." On the close bilateral relations between Kuwait and Slovakia, Ambassador Hajdusek praised Kuwait as a close friend and a good partner of Slovakia. He added, "The development of bilateral relationship has been blessed with prosperity and advantages in various fields of cooperation, and the well-known Piešťany, thermal spa is visited by many Kuwaitis."

With regards to expanding cooperation in different fields between Slovakia and Kuwait, Ambassador Hajdusek mentioned various areas such as new energy programs, e-commerce, innovations, AI sector, people-to-people and cultural exchanges, education and training programs and others. He hoped such endeavors would generate more benefits for the people of the two countries. "We do firmly believe that with our concerted efforts, the bilateral cooperation will continue and will make further progress. We are very grateful for the support and assistance we receive from our Kuwaiti partners," he added.

Entertainment City in limbo, 14 other tourism projects completed

In response to a parliamentary query by MP Ali Al-Deqbasi on the closure of Entertainment City owned by the Touristic Enterprises Company (TEC), and whether there were contracts signed for its development and reopening, Minister of Finance, Maryam Al-Aqeel stated that a decision was issued by the TEC board of directors to close the entertainment city following a report on the dilapidated state of its equipment and games.

Clarifying on this, Minister Al-Aqeel stated that the Ministry of Finance only had a supervisory role on the TEC, which allowed it to monitor and follow up the implementation of the contract signed on 28/4/2009 between the two parties.

She added that a specialized agency had been set up to prepare economic, market and environmental studies on the viability of Entertainment City, and to draw up a complete restructuring plan. However, last year, decision 25/2019 issued by the Council of Ministers mandated the relevant authorities to transfer the land allocated for Entertainment City project to the Amiri Diwan.

Minister Al-Aqeel also clarified that similar decisions were issued by the concerned bodies to transfer some facilities allocated and licensed for the TEC for the use by other entities. She

pointed out that TEC did not close down any project for maintenance, but that they were in fact closed for other reasons, including judicial dispute. She added there are plans to carry out comprehensive development of TEC facilities according to a planned comprehensive strategy. It was also disclosed that around 14 projects by the Touristic Enterprises Company have been fully completed so far and that only one project in Shaab Park, for which the contract was signed on 25 October, 2018 has progressed slowly, with barely one percent completed.

The completed projects include Messilah Beach, Aqeela Beach, Ras Al-Ard Club, various resting areas in Nuwaiseeb, Al-Sabahiya Park, Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh Garden, Yacht Club, Khiran Park, Entertainment City, Fahaheel Marine Club, development of seafront and land (1, 2) "Balajat", and the development of Kuwait Towers and the Green Island.

Kuwait passport ranked 57 among powerful passports in the world

The annual Henley Passport Index, which ranks the passport of countries based on how many nations the holder can visit without a prior visa, slotted Kuwait in 57th position.

Holders of Kuwait passport could travel to 95 countries without a prior visa. The UAE, which ranked 18 in the world allowing holders to visit 171 countries without a prior visa, topped the list among Arab countries, with Kuwait coming in second spot and Qatar (58th globally) in third position in the region with easy access to 93 countries.

For the third year in a row, Japan maintained its top spot with a visa waiver/visa on arrival score of 191. Singapore came in second place with access to 190 nations, and South Korea tied with Germany in third spot with entry to 189 countries without a prior visa.

European countries have a strong showing in the rest of the top ten, with Finland and Italy (easy access to 188 countries) tied at 4th position, and Spain, Luxembourg and Denmark (187) ranking 5th, followed by Sweden and France (186) at 6th

position. Switzerland, Portugal, the Netherlands, Ireland and Austria (185) came in 7th spot.

Meanwhile, the US and the UK continued to slide down the rankings and now jointly occupy 8th spot — a far cry from the number one spot they jointly held five years ago, in 2015. Norway, Greece and Belgium (184) ranked along with the US and UK in 8th rank. New Zealand, Malta, Czech Republic, Canada and Australia (183) came in 9th position, and rounding off the top ten spots were Slovakia, Lithuania and Hungary (181) in 10th spot.

At the other end of the passport spectrum, Afghanistan passport holders could travel to 26 destinations without a prior visa.

UN charter 'first defense line for small countries', says Kuwait

Kuwait affirmed that the United Nations charter constituted "the first defense line for small countries," noting that the 1991 liberation of Kuwait was an example of how efforts could be coordinated for such an achievement. The Kuwaiti stance was demonstrated at a United Nations Security Council session – addressed by the State of Kuwait Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi.

On basis of UNSC resolutions designed to support law sovereignty, justice and equality, the liberation of Kuwait was accomplished, thus it was a successful and historic example regarding the UNSC capability to end the aggression, Ambassador Al-Otaibi stated.

On current conditions in the Gulf, he indicated that all stakeholders were deeply concerned about security and stability of the region "and we share the United Nations Secretary-General in his recurring calls for de-escalation in the area and urge for maximum restraint and wisdom for sake of political tackling that may spare the region more escalation and hazards."

Seventy-five years after the formation of the UN, its charter remains a constitution for multi-lateral international action and a clear international law that regulates relations among States and places action measures to deal with threats against international peace and security in a collective and effective fashion."

Ambassador Al-Otaibi said, "The UN charter concerning us during our membership in the Security Council was the compass according to which we dealt with issues enlisted in its agenda and we were convinced that the Security Council could

be more effective in tackling challenges raging in our world today."

Al-Otaibi called for activating "the tools enshrined in the charter" to settle strifes peacefully, through negotiation, mediation and arbitration. Preventive measures should be of great concern for the Security Council for sake of averting break-out of strifes by dealing with crises in the early stages, he said, also expressing confidence that regional organizations, and others, could also contribute to safeguarding international, regional peace and security, according to the UN Chapter eight. He called for greater cooperation between the UNSC and regional organizations.

"We have through our UNSC membership presented a presidential statement for cooperation between the United Nations and the Arab League and we hope to follow up on implementing the content of the statement in the future," he said. Al-Otaibi noted that divergent stances among the council member states have often obstructed tackling crises, underscoring the necessity of unity among them so that the council could be able to shoulder responsibilities as stipulated in the charter.

Al Qurain Festival showcases best of Kuwaiti culture

Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Jabri, on behalf of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, inaugurated the 26th edition of the Al-Qurain Cultural Festival at the Abdulhussain Abdulridha Theater in Salmiya, last week.

In his inaugural speech, Minister Al-Jabri remarked that since its inception in 1994, the Al-Qurain Cultural Festival has been a main cultural event showcasing outstanding cultural and artistic works and talents. He pointed out that the Al-Qurain festival and the Kuwait International Book Fair have become important events for displaying the intellectual and cultural production of the country, and its openness and effective interaction with other world countries and cultures.

Al-Jabri announced that renowned

Kuwaiti Poet Abdulaziz Al-Babtain had been chosen by the organizing committee as the main pesonna of this year's edition in recognition of his role in promoting the Arabic language.

The 18-day event, which is organized by the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL), features a variety of cultural and artistic activities, including music concerts, movie screenings, art gallery exhibits, theatrical and folklore performances, lectures, workshops, and symposia.

A highlight of the festival opening was the screening of the first Kuwaiti movie ever produced: 'Al-Asifa' (the storm), which was recreated as a musical with the orchestra band led by international maestro Kamaludin Orenfy of the National Symphony Orchestra of Uzbekistan, and featured performances by a Kuwaiti folk music band. The performance also commemorated the 57th anniversary of the production of the first Kuwaiti

feature film, which has been a strong pillar of the Kuwaiti film industry. During the event, various personalities were presented with awards for their significant contributions to art and culture..

Kuwait trails foreign investments in the region

...CONTINUED FROM **PAGE 1**

innovation-based direct investment into Kuwait. The authority is also mandated to receive and approve investment licenses and grant incentives, as well as collaborate with other stakeholders to streamline business environment in Kuwait so as to enhance the country's global competitiveness.

Presenting its annual report for the fiscal year 2018/19 that ended in March 2019, the KDIPA noted that it approved new foreign investments worth around KD156 million. The report also revealed that cumulative investments from January 2015, when the KDIPA commenced its operations, until the end of March 2019, was a little over KD960 million (US$3.2 billion).

In his foreword to the annual report, the Director-General of KDIPA Dr. Meshaal Jaber Al Ahmad Al Sabah said that the expected economic and social impact from these investments are extensive at it encourages direct and indirect employment and training opportunities for nationals, transfers latest technologies from abroad, supports local research activities, and enhances the local economy by generating networks in the sectors associated with these projects.

In recent years, the momentum to attract FDI by reducing barriers and offering incentives has gathered pace in the region, with Kuwait and other GCC governments taking various steps, including further liberalizing foreign ownership regulations, strengthening corporate governance, and reducing non-tariff hurdles to investment by streamlining administrative processes and automating border procedures, as well as offering long-term residency schemes by some states.

According to a report by PricewaterhouseCoopers (pwc), as of the end of March 2019, total foreign ownership of GCC equities stood at about US$60 billion, or about 6 percent of market capitalisation. But this investment is not spread evenly across the six-nation GCC bloc. For the last six years, the UAE has been the Gulf's leading destination for FDI and, since 2017, the country has attracted more inward FDI each year (around $10bn) than all the other five GCC countries combined.

Among the GCC states, Bahrain's economy is the one most dependent on foreign investments as it represents around 90 percent of GDP. On the other hand, Kuwait, despite being an early mover in investment liberalization, is the least dependent on FDI as it represents only 12 percent of GDP. Not being desperate for capital has allowed Kuwait to pick and choose its FDIs. "The focus is on high-quality direct investments, with the emphasis being more on adding value and assisting the transition to a knowledge economy. It's more quality than quantity," said Dr. Meshaal Al-Sabah of KDIPA.

In line with this thinking, the FDI flow to Kuwait came from around three dozen companies and were mainly in the service sector, particularly in construction, energy, health, consultancy, training, market research, software and information technology, oil and gas, and in entertainment services.

Data from global investment monitor, fDi Markets, corroborates this investment mix, with their figures showing that investments to Kuwait from 2013 to 2018 totalled nearly $4 billion and that the top sectors for greenfield investments were in business services, real estate and financial services. Interestingly, fossil fuels ranked ninth as a greenfield FDI sector over this period, revealing that Kuwait's FDI profile is a more balanced mix of sectors than the overall economy.

Further figures from fDi Markets on investments in GCC states show that during the five-year review period from 2013, Kuwait lagged its neighbors in foreign direct investment. The UAE topped the regional list with 1,582 greenfield investment projects worth nearly US$50 billion, followed by Saudi Arabia with 414 projects worth around $43 billion; Oman came in third with 179 projects valued at nearly $17 billion, and Bahrain with 159 projects totalling over $9 billion in fourth spot. Qatar with 173 projects valued at around $5 billion was also ranked higher than Kuwait which received a total of 73 projects totalling around $4 billion.

Global agencies such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Economic Forum and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have for long been reiterating that countries in the region need to diversify the economy and bring about reforms to attract more foreign investment, as it could have a huge impact on their growth. They point out that a diversified economy with higher foreign investment can support stronger, sustained, and more inclusive growth by improving the allocation of resources across sectors and producers, creating jobs, triggering technology spillovers, promoting knowledge, creating a more competitive business environment, and enhancing productivity.

Experts have estimated that closing the FDI gap could lead to a one percentage point increase in real non-oil per capita GDP growth, while closing the export gaps could add a further 0.5 percent to GDP growth.

However, boosting non-oil exports and attracting more FDI requires a supportive policy environment, including for the authorities to invest more in human capital development and enhance labor market efficiencies.

Unfortunately, Kuwait's experiments in these fields have been less than salutary. The government's nearly decade-long 'Integrated Education Reform Program', which was conducted in coordination with the World Bank, and aimed at improving the quality of education provided to students in the country, has not delivered the anticipated results.

Though the program ended in 2019, Kuwait still performs poorly in international education standings. The World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index 2017-2018 ranks Kuwait 95th out of 137 countries for the quality of its higher education and training. The country also ranked 119th for labor market efficiency, despite reforms designed to improve productivity and boost competitiveness in the non-oil economy.

Incidentally, reforming the education system to better prepare youth to become competitive and productive members of the workforce, and developing a sustainable diversified economy are key pillars of the government's New Kuwait development plan, which aims to transform the country into a leading economic, commercial and cultural hub in the region by 2030.

Best Places to Travel in 2020

Well-known international hotspots, as well as not so well-known places feature in the best places to travel in 2020 list. Alongside the tried-and-true, this new league of places are capturing the inveterate traveler's attention and imagination.

Uzbekistan: Uzbekistan tops our list for myriad reasons. A change in government in 2016 set the foundation for a dedicated focus on garnering tourists: new infrastructure was laid down, boutique hotels began sprouting up, and restaurants started catering to curious visitors interested in sampling Central Asian fare. Beyond the circuit of three important Silk Road stops: bustling Samarkand, Bukhara's inner-city oases, and sand-swept Khiva, tourists should take the time to visit the Fergana Valley, which not only boasts some of the finest ceramics in the world, but offers stunningly lush scenery surrounded by the towering Tien-Shan mountains.

Botswana: This peaceful nation has garnered an international reputation for its roaring population of wildlife versus a small huddle of tourists. The Bushman Plains Safari Camp in a corner of the famous Okavango Delta is Botswana's first safari camp owned and operated exclusively by the San people. It also offers the kind of guiding and knowledge-sharing that only the San people can provide. If you are exploring Northern Botswana during the dry season (June to October) the Linyanti Wetlands are not to be missed. Matriarchal herds of elephant 100-200 strong can bring you to tears with their tender family structure. The famed lion populations of Savuti rule the grasslands, and this is a prime area to spot African painted dogs.

Senegal: The motherland of Caribbean culture, a symphony of bustling markets, crashing waves fit for surfing, and the howl of gray desert winds. Dakar is the jumping off point for travelers seeking quieter corners of West Africa. Weeklong luxury cruises up the River Gambia departs regularly during the winter months aboard elegant vessels. By land, do not miss a trip to the Djoudj National Park, a sanctuary featuring one of the largest gatherings of migratory birds on the planet who pause in the swamplands to rest after braving the skyward journey over the Sahara. Nearby is the UNESCO-protected city of Saint-Louis, the old French colonial capital which has a laidback New Orleans vibe if you walk down the right streets.

Houston, Texas: Houston is kind of like Dubai, using its wealth earned from the region's natural assets to import high culture, like state-of-the-art museums to world-class performing arts centers. The Museum of Fine Arts is getting a hefty campus expansion in 2020—it is the largest

cultural project under way in all of North America and will dramatically change the flow of pedestrian traffic in the city with new public plazas, reflecting pools, and gardens. The Houston Botanic Garden will be completed in 2020 as well; the crown emerald of the city's greening efforts to connect its park space in what has been dubbed the Bayou Greenways. The Houston Farmers Market will expand across 18-acres, and a smattering of food halls are on the docket for next year, too; but the most ambitious project in the city is

the amalgamation of a handful of research institutions, which will come under a single umbrella as the largest medical campus on the planet, the Texas Medical Center, which is sure to encourage even more food, nightlife, and cultural newness for the city in the next decade.

Kanto, Japan: There are a variety of cultural treasures in the greater Kanto region, and the cluster of neighboring prefectures, like Yamanashi, Kanagawa and Shizuoka. Day-trippers can enjoy a serene bike ride around Lake Yamanaka, a hike through the Aokigahara forest (which poetically means 'Sea of Trees'), or at a dinner by campfire at Hoshinoya Fuji, overlooking Lake Kawaguchi with the iconic mountain soaring just behind.

A popular weekend getaway is Shujenzi Onsen, named after Shuzenji Temple in the center of town. Kobo Daishi, one of Japan's most important religious personalities, founded the temple about 1200 years ago. Daishi is also said to have created Shuzenji's most prominent hot spring, Tokko-no-yu, located in the middle of the river bed that runs through the town center. A four-day circuit around the UNESCO-protected village of Nikko is a strong introduction to the country's rich traditions and coveted hot spring culture.

British Virgin Islands: A legendary destination for yachties, the quiet archipelago is making a resurgence as a classic port of call. Sustainability is the buzzword in the region with turtle tagging programs and a dark-sky observatory are among the highlights of eco-friendly travel to these islands that are believed to have inspired Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson to pen the Treasure Island adventure novel.

Sultan of Loyalty, Love and Wisdom passes away

Oman's Sultan Qaboos bin Said of Oman passed away on Friday,10 January aged 79. A three-day period of mourning has been declared in Oman, and the country's flag will be flown at half-mast for a period of 40 days.

People from all walks of life from across the Sultanate, as well as leaders from the region and from around the world, mourned the death of the ruler known for being the "the Sultan of loyalty, love, and wisdom".

Sultan Qaboos bin Said, who came to power in 1970 after taking over from his father in a palace coup, managed to transform the ultra-conservative, isolated backwater sultanate, where infrastructure was limited to less than ten-kilometers of paved roads and three schools, into a modern developed state. Over a period of nearly five decades that he was in power, Sultan Qaboos used the country's oil wealth to reshape the sultanate from a nation that once banned electricity, radios and even umbrellas into a state known for its liberal views, welcoming tourist locations, and a generally neutral political stance that allowed it to serve as a trusted interlocutor between opposite sides in a fractious region.

A fourteenth-generation descendant of the founder of the House of Al Said, Sultan Qaboos was one of the longest-ruling monarchs in the Middle East. He will be best remembered by people for initiating the 'Omani Renaissance',which brought about social, economic, educational and cultural reforms, as well as opened up Oman to the world.

In a region known to relegate women to second-class citizens, Sultan Qaboos took the lead in promoting women to influential positions and ensuring their representation in popularly elected legislative councils.

Besides his domestic achievements, he is best known in the region and beyond for being a behind-the-scenes 'middle-man' whose charisma and sanguinity made Oman the 'go-to' nation to mediate in difficult situations, including in the nuclear standoff and secret prisoner-swaps between Iran and the US. Oman was also the bridge between diplomatic divides that cropped up in the Arab world and locally in the region.

Born on 18 November 1940, as the only son to Sultan Said bin Taimur and Sheikha Mazoon al-Mashani, Sultan Qaboos did his initial schooling in Oman and later passed out of the prestigious British Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. He married a first cousin but the couple soon separated and had no children.

He was believed to have been ailing from poor health for several years, and has not been seen at public function for a long while. He is reported to have traveled to Belgium and Germany in December for medical checkups.

Shortly after the announcement of the demise of Sultan Qaboos, the Omani royal family council met in private and opened the will of Sultan Qaboos, in which he named his successor, Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq Al Said, who was previously the MInister of Heritage and National Culture.

Shortly after taking his oath before the Council of Oman in the morning, the new Sultan attended and headed funeral prayers at the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque in Muscat. Thousands had gathered at the mosque and outside to pay their respects to their beloved Sultan, whose coffin draped in the Omani flag was later buried at the family cemetery. Sultan Haitham Bin Said who has served as a special envoy to the late Sultan Qaboos Bin Said on different occasions, held various positions in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A 1979 graduate of the Oxford University Foreign Service Programme, he served as the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Political Affairs from 1986 to 1994, and was later appointed as the Secretary General for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1994–2002).

Sultan Haitham is also the Chairman of the committee for the future vision of 'Oman 2040'. A known sports enthusiast, he was the first head of the Oman Football Association in the early 1980s and is also the honorary president of the Oman Association for the Disabled and the honorary president of the 'Omani-Japanese Friendship Association'.

Sultan Haitham Bin Tareq leads mourners of late Sultan Qaboos Bin Said

Kuwait mourns sad demise of Sultan Qaboos of Oman

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, sent a message of condolence to his brother, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said, Sultan of Oman, in which his Highness expressed, in his name and on behalf of the Kuwaiti people, deep sorrow and sincere condolences to His Majesty, the noble family, and the brotherly Omani people on the death of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, may God Almighty have mercy on him

His Highness indicated that he lost a dear brother and a companion, with whom he had a distinguished personal relationship, and he stressed that the world lost one of its great men with the demise of the Sultan. The Sultanate of Oman and the Gulf family and the Arab and Islamic nations have lost a wise leader who devoted his life to serving his country and people and the issues of the Arab and Islamic nations, said His Highness the Amir.

His Highness the Amir of Kuwait also ordered an official mourning period with flags flown at half-mast and the suspension of all government departments for a period of three days from Saturday in mourning over the death of the late Sultan of Oman, Sultan Qaboos bin Said.

In announcing the death of the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, Anas Al-Saleh said that the Council of Ministers received with deep dismay the news of the demise of late Sultan Qaboos bin Said bin Taymur Al Busaidi, Sultan of the sisterly Sultanate of Oman.

The Arab and Islamic nations have suffered a great loss with the death of a great leader whose opinion, wisdom and generosity were welcomed by all. The tremendous achievements that Oman witnessed during his reign and which allowed the country to reach the prestigious position it enjoys today are a reflection of the abilities and efforts of the late Sultan of Oman.

His positive role in resolving many of the disputes witnessed in the countries of the region, and bringing together different points of view and family unification together at the Gulf level, were highly appreciated by countries and people involved, as well as by the larger global community.

On this sad occasion, the Cabinet recalled with utmost gratitude and appreciation the role of the sisterly Sultanate of Oman under the leadership of the deceased, and his courageous stance in rejecting the sinful aggression that Kuwait was subjected to at the hands of the now defunct regime in Iraq. Oman stood with full force in support of the Kuwaiti rights, and against the affliction inflicted on Kuwait.

In the name of His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince and the Kuwaiti people, the Cabinet extends sincere condolences to the sisterly Sultanate of Oman, the government and the people.

EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

The Demonization of Journalists Must End

LEON WILLEMS
Director of Free Press Unlimited.

Five years ago this month, Saïd and Chérif Kouachi stormed the Paris offices of the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo and, in a nightmare lasting just minutes, killed 12 people. In the days that followed, millions marched in France and elsewhere to express solidarity with the murdered journalists.

For Europeans, the Charlie Hebdo killings represented the first mass attack on journalists close to home. #JeSuisCharlie ("I am Charlie") became one of the most popular Twitter hashtags ever. Press freedom was trending.

Since then, however, the fight to defend journalistic freedom has flagged, and public mobilization has proved to be fleeting – including in the case of Charlie Hebdo. In January 2019, the magazine's staff complained in an editorial that people no longer wanted to hear about the shootings. "Perhaps you should move on!" they were reportedly told.

This apparent indifference has a lot to do with what many believe Charlie Hebdo represents: the freedom to express yourself in a way that might provoke others. And this freedom has come under even more pressure in the last five years.

> "Journalists who shine a light on unpopular or inconvenient facts and Opinions are exposed to a daily barrage of attacks on their integrity, including by important political leaders."

Such a trend is evident in the responses directed at journalists who shine a light on unpopular or inconvenient facts and opinions. They are exposed to a daily barrage of attacks on their integrity, including by important political leaders. In the United States, President Donald Trump has repeatedly referred to journalists who are critical of him as the "enemy of the people." And at a press conference two years ago, Czech President Miloš Zeman brandished a replica of an AK-47 inscribed with the words "for journalists." By indulging in such behavior, these and other leaders normalize attacks against members of the press.

And members of the press are very much under attack. According to Reporters Without Borders, 49 journalists worldwide were murdered in 2019 because of their work. (The annual average for the last five years is even higher, at 81.) In addition, the number of journalists who were arbitrarily detained rose to 389 last year. Threats on social media, against female journalists in particular, are an everyday occurrence, and journalists are routinely beaten up, teargassed, or robbed of their equipment.

Violence against journalists is an assault on an essential pillar of democracy. And as long as these attacks continue, it is not "time to move on" at all.

On the contrary, it's time for European Union leaders to wake up and better protect journalists at risk. Efforts like the PersVeilig initiative in the Netherlands, in which police, public prosecutors, the journalists' union, and editors collaborate to counter violence against journalists, should be implemented across Europe. Politicians who verbally attack journalists must be held accountable, and media organizations should do more to show solidarity with colleagues at rival outlets.

More generally, there is an urgent need for greater awareness and a stronger public defense of journalism's value for society. And there have been successful examples of this in recent years. The murders of journalists Ján Kuciak in Slovakia and Daphne Caruana Galizia in Malta sparked mass protests that forced these two countries' prime ministers to resign. In addition, the investigation by United Nations Special Rapporteur Agnès Callamard into the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, a columnist for The Washington Post, raised public awareness of the criminal behaviour by some in Saudi Arabia.

These cases needed – and received – long-term attention. But who has heard of Norma Sarabia from Mexico, or Eduardo Dizon from the Philippines, who also paid the ultimate price for practicing their profession? Nigerian journalist Jones Abiri went to prison for the second time last year on trumped-up charges, while a Nicaraguan photographer recently told us that he has stopped working as a journalist for the time being, because it meant risking his life every day. Who is standing up for these lesser-known figures?

The justice system should give higher priority to prosecuting attacks against journalists, yet a series of relevant resolutions adopted by the UN General Assembly and Security Council has yielded limited results. A better way to end judicial inaction would be to establish an internationally mandated investigation committee, which also would clear the way to resolving the hundreds of cold cases of journalists killed for doing their job.

Dozens of journalists are murdered every year, and in nine out of ten cases, the perpetrators walk free. As long as such impunity exists, it pays to kill journalists.

Five years ago, we were all Charlie. Today, let us also be the hundreds of other journalists who have been killed since then.

Dakar Rally flagged off in Saudi Arabia

The ongoing 2020 edition of world renowned Dakar Rally is for the first time taking place in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The kingdom's hosting of this prestigious annual racing event is just the latest in a string of international sporting events to take place in the kingdom, as part of a multi-billion-dollar push to enhance its global image, boost domestic spending and attract international tourists to this once hermetic kingdom.

The year gone by was a busy one for sports enthusiasts in the kingdom with a heavyweight boxing rematch, a Formula E motor race and a tennis exhibition tournament taking place. And, in what would at one time be unthinkable, a toned-down women's wrestling match also made its debut last year. In December, Italian football club Juventus with superstar Cristiano Ronaldo appeared at King Saud University Stadium in Riyadh to participate in the Italian Super Cup.

Dakar Rally, billed as the world's most challenging rally race, is taking place from 5 to 17 January, with drivers from more than 62 different countries and six continents having registered to experience the uncharted and spectacular terrain of Dakar Saudi Arabia 2020. Modified vehicles, trucks, quad, SxS, and motorbikes, designed to handle 12 stages of various challenging terrains are participating in this gruelling race across 7,900km of Saudi desert.

Welcoming Rally Dakar to the kingdom, Chairman of Saudi Arabia's General Sport Authority, Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki Al Saud, said hosting the event shows the kingdom's passion and obsession of motorsport. "Dakar Saudi Arabia 2020 will go through various terrains and sceneries, unveiling the kingdom's breath-taking scenery, and will be an exciting opportunity for the world to see the real Saudi Arabia, to meet its generous people and to experience first-hand how we are driven by ambition, professionalism and the steadfast desire to succeed at the highest levels," he added. The sports diplomacy is part of Crown Prince Mohammed Salman's Vision 2030 reform programme to diversify the kingdom's economy away from its over reliance on hydrocarbon revenues. Despite criticisms, the Dakar Rally organisers have praised Saudi Arabia's "willingness to open up" amid unprecedented social reforms after years of conservatism.

Spanish driver Fernando Alonso, who described Dakar Rally as "the biggest challenge of my career", is aiming to create history as the first Formula One world champion to win the Dakar Rally. Alonso, who won the F1 championship with Renault in 2005 and 2006, is one of 351 starters in

this year's race but is not confident of victory given the treacherous conditions of long stretches of sand dunes which is a long way from the asphalt that he is used to. The rally which moved this year from South America to Saudi Arabia, is also a long way from the original 1979 route between Paris and the Senegalese capital Dakar.

Talabat selected as food delivery platform for Expo 2020

Expo 2020 in Dubai, billed as the 'World's Greatest Show', has selected Kuwait-originated Talabat as the food delivery platform for the six-month long event.

Reflecting the Expo 2020 sub-theme of 'Opportunity, Mobility and Sustainability, Talabat will have a tech-driven cloud kitchen for the show, featuring an assortment of restaurants serving cuisines from around the world, complemented with fast and eco-friendly delivery.Focused on, and optimised for, deliveries, the Talabat cloud kitchen will adapt to the demand trends — stocking up on products that are highly sought-after, while also reducing waste.

Visitors to the show will be able to order online from Talabat website that will feature an extensive selection of restaurants offering dishes from global cuisines. They then have the option of having their choices delivered to their location at the venue or to collect their order from

numerous pick-up points spread around the exhibition.

Speaking about being selected as food delivery platform for Expo 2020, the CEO of Talabat, Tomaso Rodriguez said: "Our cloud kitchen concept brings unique advantages: in addition to offering customers a wide choice of freshly prepared foods from many corners of the world, it also helps minimise waste and makes food delivery service even more efficient and nimble."

"Having the leading food delivery platform Talabat on board as Expo's food delivery platform will enable visitors to conveniently order food from around the event site. We are excited to bring people closer to a cloud kitchen, which is a key changing trend in the food and beverage industry, and adds diversity and value to the visitor experience," said Darren Tse, director – concessions and programming, commercial, Expo 2020 Dubai.

An estimated 25 million people are expected to visit Expo 2020 in Dubai over the six months from 20 October 2020 to 10 April 2021. On busy days, it is projected that nearly 500,000 meals will need to be served.

UAE nuclear power plant to begin operations shortly

The Arab world's first commercial nuclear plant should start operations before the end of March 2020, according to sources at the state-run Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation (ENEC).

Located in Al Dhafra Region to the west of Abu Dhabi, the Barakah Nuclear Energy Plant is planned to have four reactors, the first of which, Barakah Unit 1, is currently in a testing phase. It is on track to receive an operating licence from regulators soon, after which it will start loading nuclear fuel and begin generating power.

Full commercial production from Unit 1 is expected within several months. Meanwhile, ENEC is also said to be preparing to start tests on its second reactor. Once the four reactors come onstream, which is projected for sometime in late 2021, they are expected to produce a combined 5,600 megawatts of power, sufficient to meet around 25 percent of the UAE's electricity needs.

When fully operational the Barakah Nuclear Plant is also expected to save the country up to 21 million tons of carbon emissions every year, equivalent to removing over three million cars from the roads. A coalition led by the Korea Electric Power Corporation (KEPCO) was awarded the contract to build the plant in December 2009 for an initial sum of US$20 billion. Construction of the project, which began in December 2012 and has seen the cost being revised upward, will on completion be operated and maintained by ENEC in cooperation with KEPCO.

Like other governments in the Gulf region, the UAE is seeking to diversify its energy supplies and develop alternative sources of income. Other Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia and Egypt, have also announced nuclear projects to provide power to their growing populations and industries.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the World Association of Nuclear Operators (WANO) have conducted numerous inspection missions to the plant to ensure that the construction, commissioning and operation meets with global requirements and also those set out by the UAE's independent nuclear regulator, the Federal Authority for Nuclear Regulation (FANR).

The UAE is committed to upholding its 2008 nuclear policy principles of transparency, safety and security, sustainability and international cooperation to ensure the UAE Peaceful Nuclear Energy Programme is developed in line with the highest standards, said ENEC.

Chinese firm wins mega housing project in Bahrain

The contract to build a mega housing project in Bahrain, comprising over 3,000 residential units, has been awarded to China Machinery Engineering Corporation (CMEC) through a tender valued at US$691 million.

The agreement to build East Sitra City, a government-subsidised affordable housing project, was signed in the presence of Deputy Prime Minister of Bahrain Sheikh Khalid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa, by the Bahrain Housing Minister, Basim Bin Yacob Al Hamar, and the Deputy General Manager of CMEC, Fang Yanshui. Speaking at the event the deputy prime minister described East Sitra City as an important measure for ensuring steady

and robust economic development of the region. For his part, Mr. Yashui said that the Chinese government and CMEC attach great importance to the project which will include 3,100 homes and relevant supporting municipal works. Al Hamar added that the project is one of a number initiated by the ministry to provide 40,000 housing units for lower income families.

Besides housing units, the blueprint for East Sitra City includes health, educational and commercial facilities, places of worship, commercial centres, fuel stations, police stations and coast guard, youth centres and elderly care, parks and public parks.

Top forecaster sees India's rupee beating baht, ringgit this year

India's rupee will likely beat most Asian peers this year, according to Rabobank, in contrast with other top forecasters who expect the currency to continue trailing.

The worst of the country's economic slowdown has passed and the authorities are unlikely to use currency depreciation as a measure to revive growth, said Hugo Erken, head of international economics at the lender and the top rupee forecaster for the December quarter in Bloomberg's rankings.

"India's economy already has faced most of the economic pain in 2019, whereas many other Asian countries are still up for a shock," Erken, who has been working as an economist since 2002, said by email. The rupee could weaken less than 1 percent over the next 12 months, while Indonesia's rupiah may fall 7 percent, Thai baht 11 percent and the Malaysian ringgit 9 percent, he said.

Rabobank's view is at odds with some of the currency's other top forecasters, including TD Securities and Kotak Mahindra Bank, who expect the rupee to trail Asian peers. Erken's forecast is also at risk from a spike in the price of oil — India's top import — as geopolitical risks continue to loom despite the US and Iran stepping back from a wider military conflict.

"Given the domestic macro and the recent geopolitical issues, the rupee will unlikely be the relatively better-performing currency," said Suvodeep Rakshit, vice president at Kotak Institutional Equities in Mumbai..

Study reveals cause, reversal, of type 2 diabetes

Nearly half a billion people around the world live with type 2 diabetes. As the incidence of diabetic patients grow globally, scientists have spurred studies on the disease and its treatment.

Pharmacological interventions have done little to stop what some have referred to as the diabetes pandemic, but now there is increasing evidence to suggest that lifestyle interventions may succeed where other approaches have failed.

Researchers at Newcastle University in the United Kingdom say new studies they conducted into lifestyle interventions not only shows what triggers type 2 diabetes but also how to reverse the condition. The findings also shed light on what leads to remission after reversal for some people.

Clinical trials conducted at the university a few years ago had established that intensive weight loss programs could help people with type 2 diabetes achieve remission without taking any medication. However, the trials labeled Diabetes Remission Clinical Trial (DiRECT), did not establish how the remission occurred, whether it was effective in the long-term, and why some people achieve lasting remission while for others the condition returns.

Researchers who were part of the DiRECT study have now used data from those trails and applied cutting-edge imaging and blood monitoring techniques, to answer some of these questions.

The new study aimed to test and confirm what the researchers called their twin cycle hypothesis, which proposed that type 2 diabetes results from the accumulation of fat in the liver, which induces insulin resistance and increases blood sugar production. This then increases plasma insulin levels, precipitating 'a

self-reinforcing cycle' in which insulin stimulates fat production. The increased levels of liver fat cause the lipids to overspill into several tissues, including the pancreas. Beta-cells, which are responsible for creating insulin, are located in the pancreas, and long-term exposure to saturated fatty acids harms the beta cells.

In a bid to learn about the processes underlying the recurrence of type 2 diabetes in the group that initially achieved remission but then relapsed back to diabetes, the researchers used cutting-edge MRI scans at 12 and 24 months to look specifically at pancreatic and liver fat, specifically. The analysis included measurements of glucose, HbA1c, high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol, and triglycerides. The team also analyzed fatty acids, insulin secretion, and beta-cell function.

The study revealed that the majority of the trial participants maintained remission over the two years but that this was only possible if liver triglycerides and fat in the pancreas remained low.

Specifically, almost 9 out of 10 participants who managed to lose 15 kilograms or more in the DiRECT trial reversed their condition.

After two years, more than one-third of these individuals had been free of diabetes and the need for diabetes medication for at least 24 months. A small group, however, experienced relapse, which was associated with a return to high liver triglycerides and high intrapancreatic fat levels.

The researchers say their study shows that when a person accumulates too much fat, which should normally be stored under the skin, then it goes elsewhere in the body. The amount that can be stored under the skin varies from person to person, indicating a 'personal fat threshold level' beyond which it then gets stored inside the liver and overspills to the rest of the body, including the pancreas. This then 'clogs up' the pancreas, switching off the genes that direct how insulin should effectively be produced, and this causes type 2 diabetes.

Type 2 diabetes could prove to be a simple condition where the individual has accumulated more fat than they can cope with. More importantly, this means that through diet and persistence, patients are able to lose the fat and potentially reverse their diabetes. The sooner this is done after diagnosis, the more likely it is that remission can be achieved, added the researchers.

Anger linked to depression

Anger is an emotion that everyone feels from time to time, but if a person is feeling angry constantly, that may be a sign they are experiencing depression. Generally females with depression tend to feel sad or guilty, whereas males experiencing depression are more likely to feel irritable and angry.

In a 2013 study involving 536 participants who were experiencing major depressive episodes, 54.5 percent reported feelings of irritability and anger. While depression can manifest in different ways in different people, there is clearly a link between the level of anger that people experience and the severity of depression.

Psychologists have linked feeling angry with the development of depression and have suggested that this anger stems from 'narcissistic vulnerability', where a person is extremely sensitive to any perceived rejection or loss. Experiencing rejection may cause feelings of anger, which can lead to a person fearing that their anger will damage their relationships. They may then turn this anger toward themselves, which can lead to low self-esteem and depression.

Some of the symptoms displayed by people experiencing anger and depression include irritability, hopelessness, sadness or emptiness, guilt or worthlessness, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, trouble sleeping, unexplained changes in weight, loss of pleasure or interest in hobbies, and suicidal thoughts among others.

People should seek help if their symptoms start to interrupt their daily life, affect their relationships with others, seem to be getting worse, or if a person has thoughts of hurting themselves or others.

Treatment for depression or anger include antidepressant medication, therapy, or a combination of both. Therapy involves talking to a mental health professional who may use a variety of approaches, including Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which aims to help a person recognize their negative thoughts and apply coping strategies; and interpersonal therapy where a person attempts to improve how they relate to other people.

Certain lifestyle practices may help lift a person's mood by engaging in regular exercise, spending time with loved ones or eating a healthy diet.

New protein therapy helps recovery after heart attacks

Data from various medical sources show that of the hundreds of thousands of people who suffer a heart attack, over a third experience a recurrent attack.

A common treatment after a heart attack is a technique called Reperfusion, which frees up the flow of oxygen to the heart's tissue. The downside is that a quarter of patients who undergo Reperfusion treatment develop heart failure within a year.

Researchers at the University of Sydney in Australia have explored an alternative treatment that targets the scar tissue which forms after a heart attack. The scientists evaluated the therapeutic potential of a protein therapy called recombinant human platelet-derived growth factor-AB (rhPDGF-AB). As its name suggests, rhPDGF-AB is derived

from human platelets, which are small blood cells that arrive at an injury site to help the blood clot and start the healing process.

Promising results from tests conducted by the researchers on pigs suggest that the therapy may soon help humans recover from heart attack.

The study found that pigs in which heart attacks were induced and then treated with an intravenous infusion of rhPDGF-AB, new blood vessels formed, abnormal heart rhythm had decreased and overall heart function was boosted. More specifically, the researchers found that 28 days after the initial heart attack, the new procedure improved survival by 40 percent, and that the heart's ability to pump blood improved by nearly 12 percent,compared to pigs that had been treated with a placebo, .

RhPDGF-AB is clearly a promising therapeutic option, which if it passes human clinical trials, could be used alongside existing treatments to improve heart attack patient outcomes and survival rates.

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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Ownership Concentration and Why It Matters

ALISSA AMICO
Managing Director of the GOVERN Center.

If the global economy were a chess game, few pieces would be left on the board. Most would be relegated to the role of bystanders, observing a concentration of power in the hands of an ever-dwindling number of global players. Now let us imagine that the pieces left standing are corporate entities, with a shrinking number of ultimate owners at the helm. This analogy fundamentally characterizes the global economy today.

The globalization that embodied the 1990s unleashed the power of multinational corporations, enabling them to rapidly crush local competition in smaller markets. With the advent of the Internet economy a decade later, online distribution and network effects boosted corporate concentration further, giving rise to behemoths like Amazon, Google, Airbnb, and Facebook.

Today, corporate ownership concentration is being fostered by new factors, which could ultimately pose a systemic threat to the global economy.

> A recent study found that 80 percent of capital allocated to investment funds today goes to just three players. In 20 years, these three are likely to cast nearly 40 percent of the votes in S&P 500 companies, while their stewardship resources have not grown proportionately.

One of the most important is the decline of public equity markets across developed economies: the number of companies accessing them has halved during the past decade. In most markets outside Asia, new firms are not listing; on the contrary, in response to greater compliance and regulatory obligations, some are de-listing.

This is occurring despite policymakers' attempts over the past five years to revitalize capital markets and create incentives for fresh listings, especially of technology and state-owned firms. The recently aborted WeWork initial public offering (IPO) highlights the anemic condition of equity markets today. The listing of Saudi Aramco in December gained attention not only due to its size and symbolic importance, but also because IPOs have become rare.

With the decline in offerings globally, many of today's 'too-large-to-fail' companies are not financial institutions, as was the case during the 2008 crisis, but privately held non-financial firms. Ownership concentration is also a reality for listed firms, where the top three shareholders have majority control in 50 percent of the world's largest companies, according to recent OECD estimates.

This trend — set to continue in the coming years — is underpinning an increasing rift in economic ownership rights between company founders and ordinary investors. For example, investors in the Snapchat IPO were offered, for the first time in modern history, non-voting shares. While the IPO prompted an outcry, Snapchat is representative of the ownership structures at Tesla, Uber, Amazon, and other large companies where founders use multiple share classes to retain control with minority ownership. At the same time, with enthusiasm for privatization declining globally, governments remain significant, and in many cases, controlling owners of large pockets of corporate wealth. Indeed, in almost 10 percent of the world's listed companies, the public sector has a controlling stake. The consequences of this can be seen in the Nissan-Renault debacle, which highlights the governance perils of state-invested multinationals.

Some investors, such as Norway's sovereign wealth fund which owns 2 percent of every European listed company, take a diversified approach. Other sovereign investors, such as Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, have much more concentrated stakes and play a more active role in governance.

But not only sovereign investors are becoming concentrated players. With the ongoing shift of capital from actively to passively managed funds, asset managers' portfolios are becoming significantly more concentrated. A recent study by two Harvard researchers, Lucian Bebchuk and Scott Hirst, found that 80 percent of the capital allocated to investment funds today is going to Vanguard, BlackRock, and State Street. In two decades, these three players are predicted to cast as much as 40 percent of the votes in S&P 500 companies, while their stewardship resources have not grown proportionately.

The growing concentration of capital in these investment funds raises a host of new concerns, not least competition-related, as asset managers vote on strategic matters in companies that might be rivals. In the airline industry, for example, the ten largest institutional investors own 20 percent of the global market capitalization. Indeed, concentration-related conflicts of interest faced by institutional investors and asset managers are already raising eyebrows in policy circles.

This picture is further complicated by the concentration of other financial intermediaries. Stock markets are now no longer mutualized or state-owned, but are instead mostly organized in a few large, self-listed exchange groups. As a result, competition for new listings is not occurring between national stock exchanges, but between an oligopoly of exchange groups whose ultimate objective is to lower the protection of the rights of shareholders in listed companies and increase the defense of their own shareholders rights.

Ultimately, these trends translate into a dwindling number of large enterprises and financial intermediaries with increasingly concentrated ownership. While a degree of ownership concentration can create value, it can also create negative externalities on competition, wealth distribution, and fiscal transparency on a macro level. On a micro level, the current level of economic concentration facilitates neither fair rents for minority shareholders nor respect for consumer rights.

Broadening corporations' definitions of their purpose and responsibilities toward stakeholders, and focusing on the stewardship responsibilities of institutional investors and asset managers— both remedies currently in vogue among corporate executives and policymakers — is insufficient. Instead, what is needed is a focus on the duties of controlling shareholders toward minority investors. Stronger checks and balances, and perhaps even Chinese Walls, also need to be introduced for large asset managers.

These and other remedies to address concentration are essential, not only in the name of better corporate governance, but also as a response to the worldwide wave of protests against the increasingly unjust distribution of national income and global wealth.

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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

End of the Free-Market Paradigm

DIANE COYLE
Professor of Public Policy at the University of Cambridge.

The 2020s will be the decade when the idea that economic problems can be 'left to the market' to solve is finally put to rest — after some 40 years during which that belief has caused untold damage to society and the environment.

We can foretell this with such confidence because of the nature of the digital economy. The long-standing economic theory, according to which firms or people deliver the best outcomes for society by acting individually to maximize profits or 'utility', has never been valid. If it were, businesses would see no advantage in becoming much larger, and advertisers would never use social pressure to manipulate consumers. But in the digital world, it is simply impossible to ignore our interdependence.

Consider today's pervasive digital platforms. One reason why there are just a few globally dominant players is the existence of network effects: whether a platform matches diners with restaurants or enables users to connect with each other, the more users it has, the better it is for all users. As a platform becomes larger, the benefits for everyone increase, often at an accelerating pace.

Or consider the evident importance of data, the rapidly increasing volume of which is fueling artificial intelligence and other innovative services, as well as, less positively, the digital advertising market. Data have the technical economic characteristics of a classic public good (like air) in the sense that they are 'non-rival' — more than one person can use data at the same time without depleting the overall stock. And basic economics shows that markets cannot be expected to generate and allocate such goods efficiently.

> Digitalization creates extended global supply chains, linking the fates of millions of businesses. Social media makes societal influences on consumer demand more important than ever. Economic progress is driven by ideas that link people and multiply with exchange.

Moreover, raw data are processed into knowledge containing valuable information, which, even when provided by an individual, generally relates to other people or other data. In other words, the value of data-driven knowledge comes from its social context.

Digitalization has created extended global supply chains, linking together the fates of millions of businesses. Social media are making societal influences on consumer demand more important than ever. And economic progress is more than ever driven by ideas, which come attached to people and multiply with exchange.

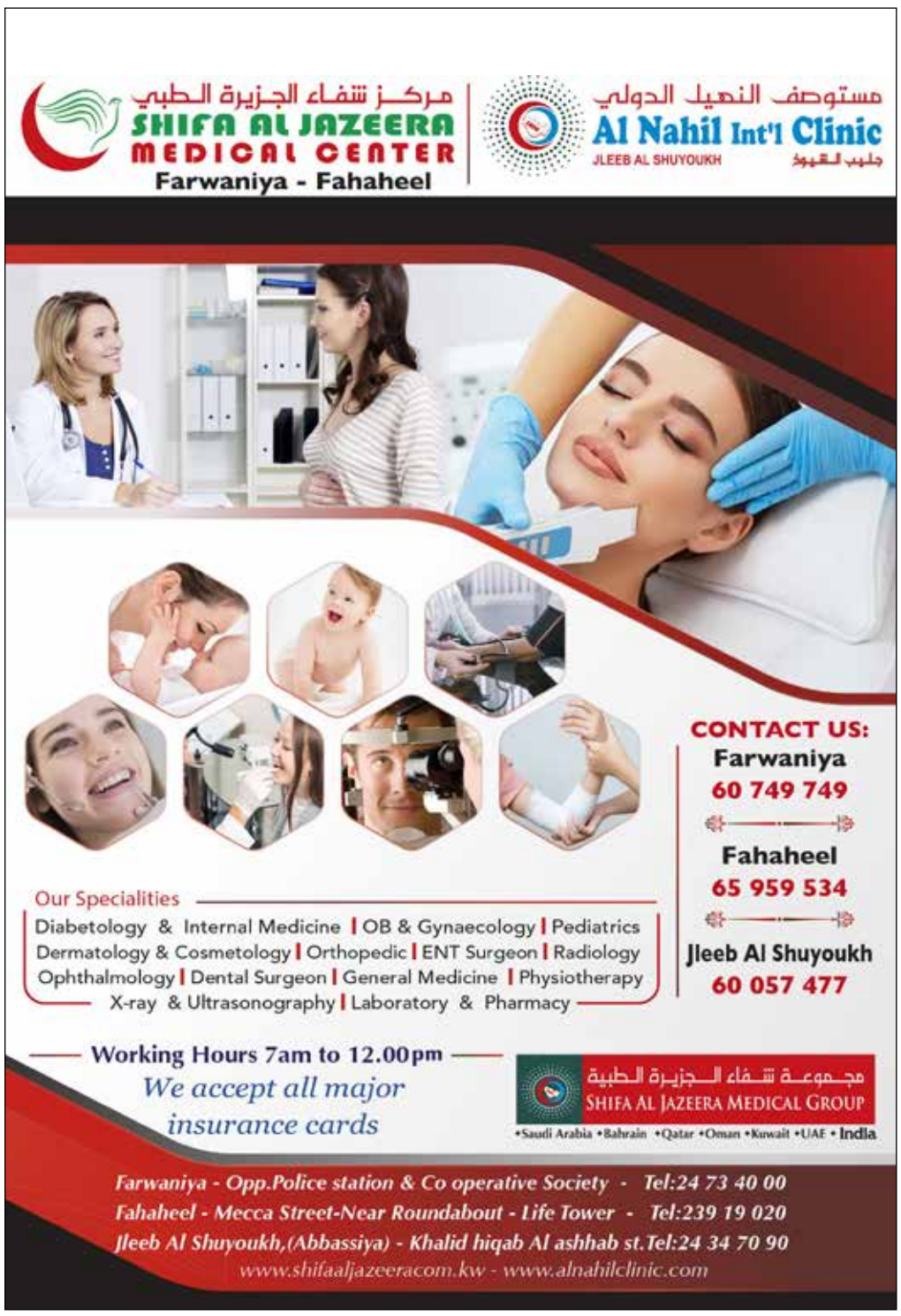
The observation of fundamental flaws with the methodological individualism that underpins conventional economic prescriptions is far from new. In a 1952 book based on his PhD dissertation, the late American economist William J. Baumol noted that people influence one another's preferences, and that companies affect one another's costs of production, depending on the scale of their operations. The assumption that interdependence could be ignored made economic analysis simpler, of course. But, Baumol wrote, "Such an assumption is not neutral; it leads inexorably to the acceptance of laissez-faire."

Furthermore, if the assumption is false, then the conclusion is wrong, as we have seen with certain damaging economic policies since the 1980s. The deregulation of financial markets resulted in the 2008 global financial crisis, while the 'market for corporate control' led to merger booms and the increased concentration of many sectors of the economy. In addition, Milton Friedman's view that a company's sole social responsibility is to increase its profits encouraged overpaid executives to ignore the environmental and social damage caused by their businesses. The 'free' market of laissez-faire is a chimera, and if individuals do not recognize the consequences of their actions for others, the result will be markets shaped by greed and power.

This is not to argue that alternative policy approaches are easy. As I have explained in detail elsewhere, both government and market failures tend to occur in the same contexts and for the same reasons, including information asymmetries, uncertainty, incomplete contracts, and principal-agent problems. Standard government action is no more likely than laissez-faire to succeed. The nature of the digital economy makes these classic challenges even more acute, and we are just in the early stages of thinking about how best to regulate it. When hundreds of millions of people live in densely populated areas, interact in myriad ways, and depend on the actions of others who are thousands of miles away, there is no reason to expect easy solutions.

As the recent global surge of reports on competition policy and digital regulation suggests, the search for possible answers is underway. Unfortunately, academic economics is behind the curve. As Thomas Philippon remarks in his excellent recent book The Great Reversal, in studying the growing dysfunction of the American economy, "I was surprised by the gap between economic research and policy."

Policymakers know they need sharper analytical tools to direct the economy so that it once again starts to deliver broad-based progress. To help them, economic researchers must ditch their unscientific attachment to the assumption of isolated individuals transacting in free markets, and instead focus on the economy of the 2020s.



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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Killing Suleimani ethically, legally unjustified

PETER SINGER

Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University and founder of the charity The Life You Can Save. His books include Animal Liberation, Practical Ethics, One World Now, and The Life You Can Save.

On January 3, the United States assassinated Qassem Suleimani, a top Iranian military commander, while he was leaving Baghdad International Airport in a car with Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, an Iraqi leader of Kata'ib Hezbollah, an Iran-backed militia. All the occupants of the car were killed.

The next day, at a special press briefing, an unnamed senior US State Department official said that Suleimani had been, for 20 years, "the major architect" of Iran's terrorist attacks and had "killed 608 Americans in Iraq alone." He added that Suleimani and Muhandis had been designated as terrorists by the United Nations, and that "both of these guys are the real deal in terms of bad guys."

In 2003, US intelligence about Iraq's supposed possession of weapons of mass destruction was completely wrong. Those errors led to the invasion of Iraq, which cleared the way for the involvement of Iran and Suleimani in the country. But let us assume that this time the facts are as the US administration says they are. Was the double assassination ethically defensible?

> The Executive simply decides, without any legal due process or approval by any other branch of government, who is to be killed. Accepting such an action makes it difficult to find any principled objection to similar killings planned or carried out by other countries.

We can begin with the presumption that it is wrong to take human life. President Donald Trump will not deny that. A year ago, for example, he said: "I will always defend the first right in our Declaration of Independence, the right to life." Trump was addressing his remarks to anti-abortion campaigners, but a right to life that applies to fetuses must also apply to older humans.

Is there an exception for "bad guys," though? Again, to keep the argument as straightforward as possible, let's assume that the right to life protects only innocent humans. Who is to judge innocence? If we favor, as Americans often say they do, "a government of laws, not of men" there must be a legal process for deciding guilt. Since 2002, the International Criminal Court has sought to apply that process globally. The ICC has had some notable successes in prosecuting perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity, but the court's scope is limited, and its reach has not been helped by the refusal of the US to join the 122 other countries that have accepted its jurisdiction.

In the wake of Suleimani's assassination, Agnès Callamard, a Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions at the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, noted that there is no oversight of targeted killings carried out beyond a country's borders. The Executive simply decides, without any legal due process or approval by any other branch of government, who is to be killed. Accepting such an action makes it difficult to find any principled objection to similar killings planned or carried out by other countries. That includes the 2011 'Cafe Milano Plot', supposedly masterminded by Suleimani himself, in which Iranian agents planned to kill the Saudi ambassador to the US while he lunched at a well-known restaurant in Washington, DC. The only thing the US can say in defense of its assassinations is that it targets really bad guys, and the Saudi ambassador was not such a bad guy. That puts the rule of men above the rule of law.

The other justification that the Pentagon offered for the killing referred vaguely to "deterring future Iranian attack plans." As Callamard pointed out, this is not the same as the "imminent" attack required to justify acting in self-defense under international law. She also noted that others were killed in the attack — reportedly, a total of seven people died — and suggested that these other deaths were clearly illegal killings.

A careful reading of the transcript of the January 3 press briefing, held by three unidentified senior State Department officials, reveals the Trump administration's real thinking. In response to repeated questions about the justification of the assassination, one official compared it to the 1943 downing of a plane carrying Japanese Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, who was visiting Japanese troops in the Pacific – an incident that occurred in the midst of war, more than a year after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Another official said: "When I hear these questions it's like you're describing Belgium for the last 40 years. It's the Iranian regime. We've got 40 years of acts of war that this regime has committed against countries in five continents." At one point, the official who had compared the assassination to the killing of Yamamoto burst out: "Jesus, do we have to explain why we do these things?"

If senior State Department officials believe that the US is engaged in a just war with Iran, as it was with Japan in 1943, the killing of Suleimani makes sense. According to standard just war theory, you may kill your enemies whenever you have the chance to do so, as long as the importance of the target outweighs the so-called collateral damage of harm to innocents.

But the US is not at war with Iran. The US Constitution gives Congress the sole authority to declare war, and it has never declared war on Iran. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi suggested that congressional leaders should have been consulted on the plan to kill Suleimani. If it was an act of war, she is right.

If, on the other hand, the killing was not an act of war, then, as an extrajudicial assassination that was not necessary to prevent an imminent attack, it was both illegal and unethical. It risks severe negative consequences, not only in terms of escalating tit-for-tat retaliation in the Middle East, but also by contributing to a further decline in the international rule of law.

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