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A year into the COVID-19 crisis in Kuwait

Living under shadow of a pandemic

THE TIMES REPORT

Over 189,890 infection cases and 1,078 deaths from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic have been reported in Kuwait as of Sunday, 28 February, 2021. Infection numbers and deaths recorded in the country have soared since the first case of virus infection was reported a year ago.

In a statement on a year into living under the pandemic's shadow, Kuwait's Health Minister, Sheikh Dr. Basel Al-Sabah acknowledged that despite the best efforts of the authorities, the infections and deaths have been increasing in recent weeks and those needing admittance into intensive care units were soaring. He pointed to the lack of adherence to anti-COVID protocols by some people

in society as the main cause for the resurgence of the virus and said that this would unravel the gains achieved by the country so far.

The health minister reiterated the need for everyone to cooperate with the authorities in stemming the spread of the disease, while thanking all health and frontline workers for their tremendous efforts over the past year in a bid to contain, curtail and mitigate the impact of the pandemic in Kuwait. He also appreciated the support extended by the country's leadership in the fight against the disease.

Initial cases of coronavirus infection in Kuwait were first reported on 24 February, 2020, among people arriving in the country following their evacuation from the northeastern Iranian city of Mashhad, after the coronavirus infected and claimed several lives in that city. Five days



later, by the end of February, the number of confirmed infections had climbed to 45 by the end of February

To prevent the spread of the virus, authorities immediately announced that passengers suspected of carrying the disease or who traveled

through China or Hong Kong in the last 14 days before their arrival in Kuwait will be denied entry. And, on 11 March, Kuwaiti Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) suspended all travel, except cargo flights, to and from Kuwait starting from 13 March,

effectively locking down the nation until further notice.

The government also urged people to voluntarily remain at home without venturing outside unless in an emergency. To facilitate this voluntary stay at home, the government suspended work across all government sectors except emergency services. With voluntary confinement proving less than successful, the authorities introduced a partial curfew on 22 March 2020 between 5pm until 4am. This was amended on 6 April, with the curfew extended to 6am. However, with the onset of the Holy month of Ramadan on 24 April, the partial curfew was further extended until 8am with special permissions for deliveries from 5 pm until 1am, under strict health code conditions.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



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Airport to resume 24-hour operation from 7 March

Kuwait International Airport (KIA) is expected to resume operations 24-hours a day from Sunday, 7 March. This was revealed in a letter addressed to ground service companies by the Director of the Air Transport Department at the Directorate of Civil Aviation (DGCA), Abdullah Al-Rajhi, who had requested them to be ready to provide full services and amend their time slots



so as to enable them to operate regular services at the airport from 7 March.

Currently, KIA operates only from 4am to 8pm for commercial flights so as to provide a break to health ministry staff and private laboratories involved in conducting health formalities, including PCR tests, on incoming passengers.

Starting from 7 March, private laboratories are expected to take over the

responsibility of testing arrivals around the clock, with health ministry staff only providing overall supervision of the process.

This would enable KIA to resume operations throughout the day while placing less pressure on the health ministry, and also allow the authorities to increase the airport's flight operations schedules from the current 30 percent.

Kuwait's robust economy spurs LuLu Exchange to open 26th branch

The new branch is located at Terrace Mall in Salmiya

LuLu Exchange - Kuwait's leading payments provider offering cross-border remittances and currency exchange services, opened its 26th branch at Terrace Mall in Salmiya on Wednesday. The branch was inaugurated via an online function attended by Mr. M.A. Yusuff Ali, Chairman and Managing Director of LuLu Group International, and Mr. Adeb Ahamed, Managing Director of LuLu Financial Group.

Congratulating the organization, Mr. M.A. Yusuff Ali, Chairman and Managing Director of LuLu Group International, said, "LuLu Exchange remains committed to providing state-of-the-art financial services to the people of Kuwait. The opening of our new branch will strengthen our existing network in the country and provide our customers much needed access to a reliable and seamless



solution for their payment needs."

The branch, which is located at Terrace Mall, marks the company's third in the Salmiya

area, and is the 228th Global Branch of LuLu Financial Group. Talking about the expansion, Mr. Adeb Ahamed, Managing Director of

LuLu Financial Group, congratulated the team for staying committed to their strategy for 2021 in line with evolving market dynamics.

"We have full faith in the robustness of the Kuwait economy, and are focused on positioning our branches as customer engagement centers to bridge the gap between our digital services and existing offerings. Our expansion reflects our commitment to build upon our 9-year long journey of delivering excellence, as a trustworthy financial services provider to millions of people in Kuwait."

LuLu Exchange was recently recognized as a 'Best Employer' in Kuwait, as part of an internal employee engagement survey conducted by global audit firm EY. The company presently provides services such as remittances and foreign currency exchange in a timely, transparent and reliable manner.



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Private clinics permitted to deliver COVID-19 vaccine

Last week, the Ministry of Health (MoH) announced that it would permit hospitals and health centers, as well as private health clinics to purchase and administer COVID-19 vaccines from local agents or global companies supplying the vaccine. However, the ministry added that this permission was conditional on the private clinics receiving the necessary license and approval from the ministry to provide such services.

In a statement, the ministry said that the permission to provide such services would enable more people to be vaccinated faster. Circular No. 5/2021 issued last week by the Health Licenses Department, said that private clinics would need to complete the necessary digital connections to the ministry's online platform before starting to provide the vaccination service.

The Ministry stressed the need for the data to match all the requirements of the automated COVID-19 vaccination at the Ministry of Health to issue vaccination certificates, indicating the need for hospitals, health centers, and clinics to be located in a self-contained building and not shared with other treatment institutions and to have vaccination permits from the Health



Licensing Department and the commitment to precautionary measures recommended by the Ministry of Health.

The ministry also stressed the need to stick to the standards, specifications, and guidelines related to transporting, storing, and giving the vaccines to the domestic medical sector issued by the producer and from the drug and food control sector. The Ministry affirmed that the service provider bears full responsibility for the accuracy of the data, ensuring its privacy, and following up on the vaccination dates for recipients, along with the responsibility of informing people through SMS about their scheduled dates for taking the doses.

Attack on doctor "reprehensible and unacceptable," Health Ministry says

Health Ministry condemned an alleged attack on a doctor, who was on duty at Al-Razi Hospital, as "reprehensible and unacceptable behavior," expressing "deep regret" about the incident.

On Wednesday, Shuwaikh police station filed a case against a man who allegedly broke a doctor's arm during a physical attack on him. The man had been prevented

from visiting a sick relative, infected with the coronavirus, receiving treatment at the intensive care unit. The ministry said it would "not be lenient" in holding the perpetrators accountable, adding it intends to take "all necessary legal measures to preserve the full rights of the doctor and the hospital and to protect all healthcare workers employed by the ministry."

Sheikha Intisar lauds Kuwait's achievements since independence

Social entrepreneur, philanthropist, author, film producer and columnist Sheikha Intisar Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, expressed her pride and joy at the achievements of Kuwait over the last six decades since the country's independence in 1961.

In a statement released on the occasion of the country's 60th anniversary of independence and 30th anniversary of liberation, Sheikha Intisar noted: On this happy occasion, I extend my warmest congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawwaf Al-Ahmad, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad and to all citizens, as well as all residents in this good land, wishing prosperity and stability to Kuwait and its people.

"Since independence, Kuwait has been able to assume a prominent position among the countries of the world, due to its credibility and its endeavour to achieve

peace in the world and the region, as well as provide aid to needy and affected countries, without any hidden agenda. This was also evident in the humanitarian aid provided by Kuwait and charitable organizations during the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, when the country continued to provide assistance to sister countries and its neighbors."

Highlighting that the celebration of the 30th anniversary of liberation also embodies the sacrifices of the Kuwaiti people and their cohesion and solidarity at that critical time in order to regain their land and freedom, she expressed appreciation for the role that the coalition countries played to liberate Kuwait from the clutches of the brutal occupation.

She went on to note: "After the liberation, Kuwait witnessed a new phase of growth and development that was called human concern. Praising the role

of Kuwaiti women for the sacrifices they made and their contributions to achieving societal peace, she emphasized that Kuwaiti women have provided the most precious support to their country for it to remain the beacon of the region.

She mentioned that this year Kuwait celebrates its national holidays in light of the difficult conditions the world is going through as a result of the outbreak of the coronavirus epidemic, which led to the cancellation of celebrations and marches. Sheikha Intisar Salem Al-Ali praised the measures taken by Kuwait to confront the coronavirus epidemic with all firmness, strength and will, confirming that Kuwait and the world will prevail over this epidemic. She said it was thanks to the efforts made by everyone and adherence to the instructions issued by the health authorities in the country.

She concluded by stating: "We hope



that this pandemic will soon come to an end and that stability and peace will once again prevail in the region and the world."

Property rents fall as health crisis grows

Coronavirus pandemic has severely impacted all sectors of the country's economy, with the real estate sector being among the worst affected.

Shrinking demand, growing vacancies and falling rents from apartments, commercial venues and investment blocs, have led to tumbling revenues for realty property owners and investors. Apartment rents in some areas are reported to have dropped significantly, in some specific areas the rents have fallen by 30 to 50 percent and have been in a free-fall for

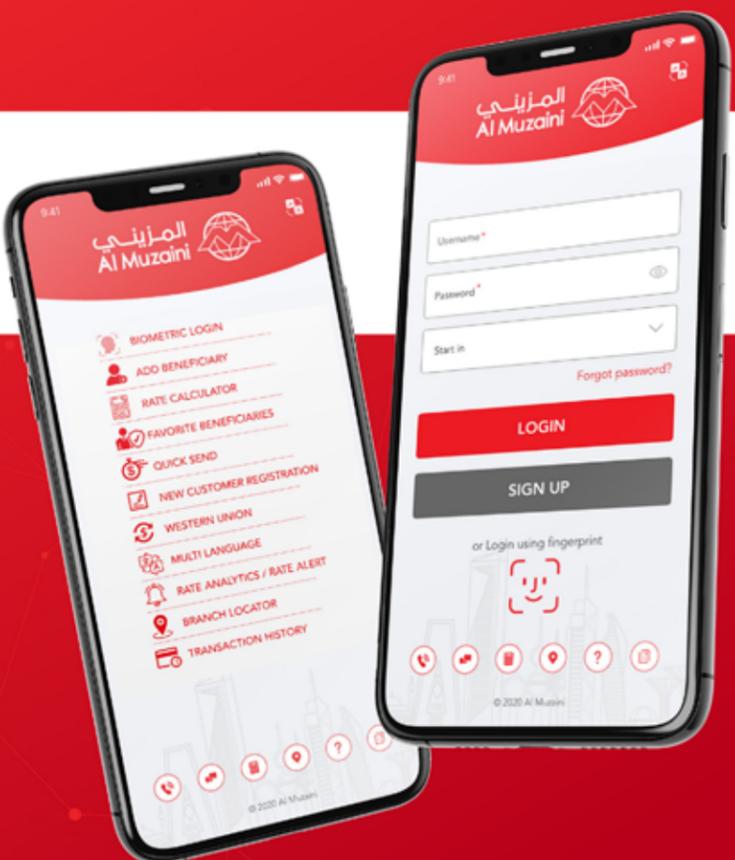


some weeks now.

Various reasons have been given for this drop, including the decision by the government and many private organisations to terminate the services of expatriates. Some foreigners faced with the tightening economic situation, also decided to send their families back home and surrendered their apartments and moved to single shared accommodations. In addition, many expatriates decided to leave the country in the wake of the coronavirus situation and this also had a

negative impact on the real estate sector.

Real estate owners expect the situation to further deteriorate in the coming months, with investors deciding to stop acquiring new plots or constructing new buildings leading to less money circulating in the sector. They added that if the government resorts to implementing new expatriate policies regarding residency visas to control the number of expatriate workers, and amending labor market conditions and demographics, the real estate sector would continue to suffer.



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Salmiya welcomes new retail destination

LuLu opens new store in Salmiya

Leading retailer LuLu further strengthened its presence with the opening of its newest concept store, LuLu Express Fresh Market, at Terrace Mall located at the heart of Salmiya. Adding to LuLu's growing retail footprint in the country, it increased the store count to 202 globally and 11 in Kuwait region.

Located at Salem al Mubarak Street, the newly launched LuLu Express Fresh Market store was inaugurated by the Chairman of Kuwait Football Association Sheikh Ahmed Al-Yousef Al-Sabah, in the virtual presence of Mr. Yusuffali M.A, Chairman & Managing Director of LuLu Group, Mr. Ashraf Ali M.A, Executive Director of LuLu Group, and Mr. Saifee Rupawala, Chief Executive Officer of LuLu Group, who were virtually present. In addition, other participants were Mr. Mohmed Haris, Kuwait and Iraq Director, Mr. Sreejith, Kuwait Regional Director, and Mr. Abdul Khader Sheikh, Kuwait Regional Manager. The inaugural event was held under strict COVID-19 health and safety protocols.



Spread across an area of 2226 sqm, the new convenience-focused store aims to meet the needs of its customer base for speedy and efficient shopping options, whose busy lives limit the time able to be spent on shopping. It has dedicated sections for fresh fruits and vegetables, chilled and frozen fish and meat, delicatessen, grocery, dairy, roaster, bakery and hot-foods, as well as non-food items and health and beauty products.

Taking the dietary requirements of

Kuwait residents into consideration, LuLu has acquired a diverse range of products to satisfy the customer interested in healthy choices.

A remarkable feature of the express market is its specialized categories: from locally sourced food products in Kuwait to support local farmers to organic-labelled range, and gluten free products, while also presenting imported products from the specialty selection. In addition, there are food options of world cuisine made



in store, baked goods that are fresh every day, healthy and diet food offerings, and a variety of seafood in stalls.

The new LuLu Express Fresh Market store's easy accessibility, its modern ambiance, clear layout, wide aisles and well-stocked shelves are all geared towards providing the utmost convenience to shoppers, as well as making shopping a streamlined experience that ensures customers save time, while enjoying the maximum benefit of shopping at LuLu.

A year into the COVID-19 crisis in Kuwait

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

On 10 May, the country was placed under full curfew based on the assessment of the Ministry of Health, until the end of May. Kuwait ended its official full curfew on 30 May and started taking steps towards a gradual return to normal life by placing a partial curfew from 6pm until 6am. This was part of a five-step phase planned by the government to gradually relax restrictions in the country, with each step tentatively lasting for three weeks. The start of the next phase of relaxations were dependent on the prevailing health situation and assessment and approval by the Ministry of Health.

The source of the pandemic outbreak has been linked to a wet market in Wuhan in the Hubei province, China). Human-to-human and patient-to-medical staff transmission of the virus were confirmed. Many of the associated fatalities have been due to pneumonia caused by the virus.

Though the virus was first detected at the end of November in Wuhan City in the Hubei Province of China it was reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) only at the end of December 2019, and on 12 January, 2020, the global health organization confirmed that a novel coronavirus was the cause of a respiratory illness reported by the Chinese health authorities. A month later, the WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak as a "very grave threat," to the global community.

Countries worldwide began introducing different levels of various virus screening and quarantining measures at their entry points and airports, as well as implementing extensive travel restrictions. Initially reported symptoms were similar to that of pneumonia, including dry cough, chest pain, fever, and labored breathing. The new coronavirus was later identified as being closely related to the influenza virus, or the flu, which is a common cause of viral pneumonia.

To reduce the general risk of transmission, people were advised to abide by various health and safety guidelines, including frequently clean hands by using alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water and to cover their mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissue, as well as throw away the

tissue and wash their hands immediately. The use of face masks, which is now ubiquitous in public places, was only an afterthought.

People were also asked to immediately seek medical care and share their latest movements in public space to their healthcare providers. These guidelines were later amended to include social distancing protocols and the wearing of face masks in public places. It is noteworthy that one year into the virus, these initial health precautions still remain valid, and in some places they remain the only protection that people can access and afford against the virus.

Around 200,000 Kuwaitis and 25,000 expats have been vaccinated, according to the latest data, despite more than half of those registered for the vaccination being expatriates. This skewed delivery of vaccines have been criticized by some people while being approved by others. The initially slow pace of the vaccination drive picked up pace in recent weeks following the arrival of new batches of vaccines and the opening of more inoculation centers.

Kuwait said that vaccine delivery was not discriminatory and that the health authorities were prioritising all frontline workers and those in high-risk groups. Nevertheless, with a rate of administering 6.1 shots per 100 people for a population of about 4.5 million, Kuwait is not among the front runners in the delivery of vaccines, though it was among the first to receive supplies of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines from the United States and AstraZeneca from India. Israel ranks among the top in administering vaccines to residents, the rate is 91 per 100 people.

Health Minister Sheikh Dr. Basel Al-Sabah had promised that most of the population would be vaccinated by September, 2021, Health Minister Basel Al-Sabah has said. The estimated 850,000 Kuwaiti citizens who want to be inoculated will get their shots within three months, as long as supplies are not disrupted, he added. Unlike Kuwait, the UAE has approved use of China's Sinopharm vaccine alongside the Pfizer-BioNTech and AstraZeneca shots.

However it was not all bleak news that

emerged from one year of living under the global pandemic. In a reflection of the aphorism that there is opportunity in every crisis, people and societies have learned to adapt to the virus, and in some cases thrive during the pandemic. Disposable face masks, gloves, PCR kits and now, preventive vaccine manufacturers, are having a hey-day meeting the ongoing global demand for these supplies.

A major positive outcome of the pandemic has been a new sense of community and social cohesion. People as social animals who desire relationships, contact and interaction with other humans, have been suffocating under self-isolation, curfews and lockdowns imposed by the authorities. But people have been finding new ways to address the need for interconnectedness.

In some places people are joining their instruments and voices to create music from their balconies. People are leading street dance parties while maintaining social distancing. People are also using social media platforms to connect, such as the Facebook group The Kindness Pandemic, with hundreds of daily posts. There is a huge wave of formal and informal volunteering where people use their skills and abilities to help others in need.

COVID-19 has also been a major market disruptor with many businesses having to reinvent themselves to stay afloat, and in some cases thrive, during the general economic slowdown with a reinvigorated sense of 'business as unusual' philosophy. Solely dine-in restaurants have turned to takeaway and home delivery venues, retailers in many places have embraced online shopping and have rapidly digitized their offerings and payment modes.

A recent study by Mastercard, the multinational financial services corporation, has revealed a rapid growth in online shopping in the region during the ongoing pandemic period. Nearly three out of four (73%) consumers in the Middle East and Africa were found to be shopping more online than they did before the pandemic.

Shoppers have also been rapidly moving away from cash and opting for contact-free and digital payment experiences. According to the survey, data top ups, apparel, groceries, banking

and healthcare were found to have the highest surge in online activity. More than 70 percent of consumers in the Middle East and Africa said they had shopped more online for data top ups, 63 percent for clothing, and over 52 percent said they had purchased groceries online.

And, as e-commerce increasingly becomes a part of everyday life, consumers are moving other aspects of their financial management to digital, with 66 percent of respondents having started banking online, and 56 percent managing their healthcare needs online.

The survey also showed that in Kuwait, as with the rest of the region, shoppers are increasingly going online for their day to day needs including groceries, banking, managing their healthcare and much more. People have also been changing the way they consume entertainment and learn new skills. Over three-quarters of consumers said they were using the downtime as a positive learning experience. More than half of the respondents (55%) said they had taken a virtual cooking class, 41 percent said they have been mastering a new language and 32 percent have been learning to dance online. Around 45 percent of respondents have been educating themselves on Do-It-Yourself (DIY) projects, and 44 percent said they are enrolling in an online university.

As people spend more time at home, the demand for online entertainment has also surged with 72 percent of respondents having invested in entertainment subscriptions and virtual stand-up comedy shows, while over five in ten people are spending on online gaming (55%) and virtual music concerts (54%).

On the philosophical side, the COVID-19 crisis has given rise to a new sense of appreciation and gratefulness. The virus has offered a new perspective on everything we have taken for granted for so long – our freedoms, leisure, connections, work, family and friends. We have never questioned how life as we know it could be suddenly taken away from us. Hopefully, when this crisis is over, we will exhibit new levels of gratitude. This sense of gratefulness can also help us develop our resilience and overcome the crisis in the long-term.

Government seeks to withdraw money from Future Generations Fund

Tightening liquidity crunch and growing budget deficit has prompted the government to refer a legal draft to the National Assembly seeking approval to withdraw as much as KD5 billion annually from the Future Generations Fund (FGF).

In a covering note to the draft the executive stated: "As the economy of Kuwait is going through a tough time due to the sharp decline in oil revenues, which is expected to continue over the next few years, the current draft law has been drafted to amend some provisions of Decree-Law No. (106) of 1976 in the matter of Kuwait's Reserve Fund for Future Generations, in a way that allows meeting the deficit in the

state's public budgets." The legal draft included in its first article an amendment to replace the text of Article Three of the Decree with Law No. (109) of 1976 referred to, which was previously amended by Law No. (18) of 2020, so that an amount may be taken from the reserve not exceeding five billion Kuwaiti dinars annually, to meet any deficit in the state's general reserves, taking into account the government's rationalization of spending, reducing expenditures, increasing revenues, and diversifying sources of income.

However, several parliamentarians have voiced their objection and criticism of the proposed draft, terming it an example of the government's mismanagement

of the economic situation and waste of public money. They added that the legal draft showed that the government was "incapable and unable to manage state affairs" and that "rather than providing practical solutions to get out of the financial distress that they are facing, they are attempting to dip from the Future Generations Fund, after having earlier depleted the General Reserve Fund". This, they said, was absolutely unacceptable to the parliament and the people."

Many parliamentarians also decried the government's utter confusion, lack of clarity and disarray in tackling the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. They said the attempt by the authorities to impose curfew was not in the interests of the country or its economy given how many businesses were still struggling to get out of the financial mess caused by the government's earlier curfew and lockdowns.

MP Badr Al-Humaidhi stated that he does not support another curfew and instead pointed out that many countries have implemented strict measures to deal with the pandemic, including charging health violators with heavy fines and other penalties. He suggested that the authorities should implement strict measures, take all necessary precautions, carry out widespread disinfection and sterilization programs, prevent public gatherings, and increase awareness.

Al-Humaidhi also expressed surprise at the decision to impose institutional



quarantine on citizens and said, "In general, I am against this decision, as it is possible to quarantine at home with full compliance of health instructions. For his part, MP Sahil Al-Mudhaf said the best way to deal with the pandemic is to implement strict health measures. He pointed out that curfew is not the logical solution.

MP Osama Al-Shaheen questioned the decision to implement institutional quarantine for those coming to Kuwait. He asked if institutional quarantine was an important health decision or it was because of the demand of Hotel associations.

MP Abdullah Al-Tarjji considered that the curfew was a collective punishment on individuals, institutions, and owners of small and medium enterprises, calling for tightening measures to limit the spread of the pandemic. In the meantime, citizens and residents remain confused on whether a curfew has been imposed or not, after the government denied implementing a curfew.

Budget deficit soars in first ten months of FY2020-21

The country's public budget recorded a fiscal deficit of around KD5.4 billion in the ten-month period from 1 April, 2020 to 31 January, 2021 in the fiscal year (FY) 2020-21 that ends on 31 March, 2021.

Disclosing this in a statement, the Ministry of Finance (MoF) added that this deficit was a huge increase from the KD833 million deficit during the same period in the previous fiscal year. The MoF noted that total revenue collected during this period was

KD7.9 billion, an increase of 4.7 percent over the estimated budget for the same period of KD7.5 billion. Of which, oil revenues reached KD6.7 billion while non-oil revenues were nearly KD1.2 billion.

In the same period, expenditures and commitments amounted to KD13.3 billion of which capital expenditures was only KD698 million. Capital expenditures were only 30 percent of the estimated budget of KD2.3 billion.



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Love your Heart...

Ask Mira: Eating Right to Live Happy & Healthy



Start showing your heart a little more love. Let us take some time to reflect on the true fact that heart disease remains the number one killer of both women and men in the majority of the world. The good news is that you have the power to protect and improve your heart health.

To protect your heart, the first step is to learn about your own personal risk factors for heart disease. Major risk factors like getting older or having a family history of heart disease cannot be changed. But you do have control over some important risk factors such as high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure, smoking, excess weight, diabetes and physical inactivity.

The good news as well, is that simple dietary changes will keep your heart healthy. So, take a look of what you are eating.

Are you getting enough whole grains?

- Whole grains contain all the 3 edible parts of grain: The inner germ, the middle endosperm and the outer bran covering.
- This makes them rich in fiber, vitamins, minerals and many disease-fighting substances. People who eat 3 daily servings of whole grains (3 cups), have shown to reduce their risk of heart disease by 25 to 35 %, according to the Mayo Clinic.
- Start your morning off right, and diverse your selection of whole grains.
- Oat meals, one of the healthiest foods you can eat, are rich in heart-healthy fiber, which reduces LDL cholesterol (the bad one), without

lowering the HDL cholesterol (the good one).

- Flaxseed is another simple way to incorporate heart-healthy foods into your diet. These small brown seeds are very high in fiber and one of the richest sources of Omega-3 Fatty Acids which have the capability to lower cholesterol and triglycerides, LDL, blood pressure, and to increase HDL.
- Whole grain products include as well breads, pastas, and cereals that are made with 100% whole grain and not with white processed flours.

How about your Omega-3?

- According to the American Heart Association, Omega-3 Fatty Acids decrease triglyceride levels and blood pressure (hypertension).
- Fish oil is another good source of Omega-3, as it supports the body's metabolism of cholesterol, as well as the cardiovascular system by helping the heart meet its energy needs.
- That is why it is necessary to increase your consumption of white fish, salmon, tuna and oysters.

But is shrimps safe for cholesterol sufferers?

Shrimp is low in fat, but high in cholesterol. There is a big confusion about the fat and cholesterol amounts in shrimp. Shrimp is very low

in total fat, and high in cholesterol content. There are many people who will not eat shrimp because of its high cholesterol content.

However, dietary cholesterol intake has a minor effect on blood cholesterol comparing to the saturated and Trans fats. In other words, saturated fats and Trans fats, not dietary cholesterol are the primary reason for a high cholesterol level, such as full-fat dairy products, liver meat, fried foods, donuts and biscuits.

Grilled shrimps have none of those.

What if I don't eat seafood?

Choose a fish oil supplement that is pure and pleasant to taste. A pure fish oil supplement means it is free from mercury and other contaminants. Pleasant to taste means that it does not have a fishy taste or an aftertaste.

Start today to keep your heart strong. Talk to your doctor and dietitian about possible risks and create an action plan to ensure your heart remains strong and healthy.

Love your heart.

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

Thought
for the
week

No one is more hated than he who speaks the truth!

- Plato

RECIPE

Beet Chard Oats Dhokla



Some people have oats daily as smoothies or as overnight oats. However, many feel oats are bland. Indians are used to spicy food, and especially enjoy treats such as upma, poha, dhokla, idli and dosa. We can make all this from oats too. Oats dhokla is a fusion of good taste and healthy ingredients.

Total time: 40 min.

Ingredients

- 1 cup oats
- ½ cup sooji or semolina
- ½ cup curd
- ¼ cup water
- 1 tbsp ginger chilli paste
- ¼ cup beetroot puree
- 1¼ tsp Eno fruit salt
- ½ tsp sugar
- Salt as per taste

For tempering:

- 2 tbsp oil
- 1 tsp mustard seeds
- 12 chopped green chillies
- 67 curry leaves

Directions

- Dry roast oats (whole oats or grained) for upto 15 minutes on a slow flame and set aside.
- Dry roast semolina for 10 minutes on low flame, set aside.
- Mix all ingredients and beet puree into a smooth batter except eno fruit salt.
- Grease a dhokla plate with oil.
- Add Eno fruit salt to batter and mix well. Pour the batter into the greased bowl.
- Steam for 15-20 mins or until cooked.
- Allow it to cook, cut into pieces.

For Tempering:

- In a pan, heat oil.
- Add mustard seeds, curry leaves and chillies.
- Spread this mixture on the steamed dhokla.
- Garnish with coriander leaves.
- Serve hot with chutney.



Indian Chef Chhaya Thakker, who has a huge following online on WhatsApp and YouTube will be sharing her favorite recipes and cooking tips with readers of The Times Kuwait. For feedback, you can write to editortimeskuwait@gmail.com



Chef Chhaya Thakker

Kuwait celebrates 60th anniversary of National Day and 30th anniversary of Liberation



Celebrations of the two commemorative days (February 25&26) were the first being held under the new leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Crown Prince Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. During the two-day national celebrations, Kuwait also fondly recalled the great efforts exerted by the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in service of the country, as well as his remarkable leadership in humanitarian and reconciliation efforts regionally, in the Arab world and on the wider international stage.

National and Liberation Day celebrations that are usually held each year with great fervor and enthusiasm across the country, was a muted affair this year, in view of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. Though many streets, buildings and main thoroughfares were festooned with flags and lights and other colorful decorations, the atmosphere was decidedly more somber this year, as a mark of respect to the more than 1,000 people in Kuwait who succumbed to the coronavirus pandemic over the span of a year. died this year duese lives were claimed by the coronavirus pandemic over the span of a year. The government had also cancelled all official celebrations marking the commemorative days this year, as a precautionary health measure/ Despite the occasional instances of people violating



health and safety regulations by attending social gatherings and not maintaining mandatory health protocols and procedures, by and large all segments of society have been cooperating and supporting the authorities in their attempt to contain and curtail the pandemic.

Kuwait had celebrated the first national day on 19 June, 1962, organizing a huge military parade as the then Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah raised the National Flag of independent Kuwait. Speaking on the occasion, Sheikh Abdullah promised that

Kuwait and its people would unite as one and strive to build a great future for their new country based on the principles of democracy and social justice and equality for all its people. He also ordered the formation of a constitutional council to draft a new constitution for the country.

In November 1962, the Constitution of Kuwait came into effect with Sheikh Abdullah approving and putting his signature on the constitution drafted by the council, which also established a National Assembly.

The first legislative elections were held on 23 January, 1963 with 50 legislators being elected by citizens to represent them in parliament.

Between 1961 and 1964, National day celebrations were held on 19 June -- the day in 1961 when Kuwait ended its protectorate status with Great Britain and became a fully independent nation. An Amiri decree issued on 18 May 1964, shifted Independence Day to 25 February -- the day of Sheikh Abdullah's ascension as Amir of Kuwait.

Over the years since its independence, Kuwait has pursued a foreign policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states and peaceful resolution of conflicts through discussions and dialogue in order to achieve global peace and prosperity. Kuwait also built strong relations with the Arab and Muslim Worlds, and exerted great efforts in support the work of the GCC, Arab League and the United Nations. The country's foreign policy also focused on cooperation and coordination with regional and international organizations to support humanitarian efforts around the world. Kuwait's humanitarian efforts were recognized by the United Nations in September 2014, by granting the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad the title of 'Humanitarian Leader' and heralding Kuwait as a 'Humanitarian Center'.





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Filipino domestic workers' recruitment to possibly return on March 9th

Badr Al Sama Medical Center Farwaniya launches Badr Health Card to KMA members



During an event held at Badr Al Samaa Medical Center, Abdul Razak, Branch Manager offered a special Badr Health Card to all members of Kuwait Malayali Association (KMA).

With this card, the members can benefit from various discounts in all departments

including Doctor Consultations, Xrays, Laboratory and Pharmacy. The event was held in the presence of Preema Marketing Coordinator, Badr Al Sama Medical Center and KMA Executive members

This health card will be issued free of cost to all of their members.

A meeting was held between Kuwaiti and Filipino domestic workers' offices on 23 February, over the Zoom app which involved discussing some pending issues in preparation for the reopening of the recruitment of Filipino domestic workers to the country again next March, Al-Qabas daily reported. The main condition to be mulled is the presence of a liaison officer between offices and workers to check up on the contracts and the extent of commitment by employers.

Informed sources said that March 9 will be decisive for the return of the recruitment of Filipino domestic workers, as representatives of the offices will hold a meeting on the requirements to be applied once the employment resumes again.

Once the mechanism for implementing the new requirements is agreed upon, new contracts and recruitment from the Philippines will happen in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Also taken into account will be the registration on the Shlonik app and the issuance of new visas from the Ministry of Interior.

The sources indicated to daily that resuming



the recruitment to Kuwait will be preceded by handling the situation of some workers who are stranded in Kuwait and want to leave, after they turned to their embassy for help and revealed they no longer wanted to be employed after the end of their contracts, or the sponsors failed to pay their monthly salaries.

It is possible for facilitating the departure of domestic workers after coordination with the Philippine Labor Office at the embassy, the Department of Domestic Workers, and the Ministry of the Interior at the beginning of March.

IEC delegation meets with Ambassador of Pakistan



A delegation from Islamic Education Committee (IEC) Kuwait led by its President Javed Iqbal recently paid a visit to the ambassador of Pakistan, H.E. Syed Sajjad Haider at his residence.

The IEC President briefed them about the activities of the committee in Kuwait. The Ambassador highly praised the hard work and dedication of IEC during the last year lockdown in which they took active part in helping the Pakistani brethren.

The Ambassador expounded the problems of Pakistanis and the role played

by the Embassy. During the time, both sides discussed in detail the issues faced by the Pakistani community in Kuwait.



Wear a Mask Even After You're Vaccinated



It takes a while for the Covid vaccine's protection to kick in. Even after you're fully vaccinated, others will be unprotected. Scientists are hopeful that vaccinated people won't spread the virus, but more research is needed.



Businesses to be shut that do not comply with health regulations

Heads of monitoring teams in the governorates are granted the ability to close businesses, in the event of overcrowding and non-compliance with health regulations, said the Chairman of the Committee for the Application of Health Conditions, Director General of the Municipality, Eng. Ahmed Al-Manfuhi, that the committee decided, in its meeting, Al Qabas reported.

Al-Manfuhi said in a statement to Al-Qabas that the aim of the monitoring teams in commercial complexes is to ensure their continued opening, because if there is pressure on the health system, the Ministry of Health will take more drastic measures.



Al-Manfuhi added that the authorities' checking up on businesses is to ensure that the epidemic does not spread, while the shops continue to operate, and not to restrict people.

Indian Embassy and IDF conducts symposium on 'Combating COVID-19'

A symposium titled 'Combating COVID-19 - India-Kuwait Partnership' was organized by the Embassy of India in Kuwait, in association with the Indian Doctors' Forum (IDF) and Kuwait Medical Association (KMA). Ambassador of India to Kuwait H.E. Sibi George inaugurated the event with his inaugural address which encapsulated India's success story in handling the pandemic, its vaccine program, its stellar role as the 'Pharmacy of the World' and the ever-growing bilateral cooperation between India-Kuwait, especially in the health domain.

Dr. Ahmad Thuwaini Al-Enezi, President, Kuwait Medical Association was the Guest of Honour on the occasion who delivered the keynote address and emphasized the excellent cooperation between the two friendly countries particularly in the healthcare field. Dr. Amir Ahmed, President of the Indian Doctors Forum, also delivered his remarks on the occasion and introduced the esteemed panel speakers of the Symposium.

The addresses were followed by the

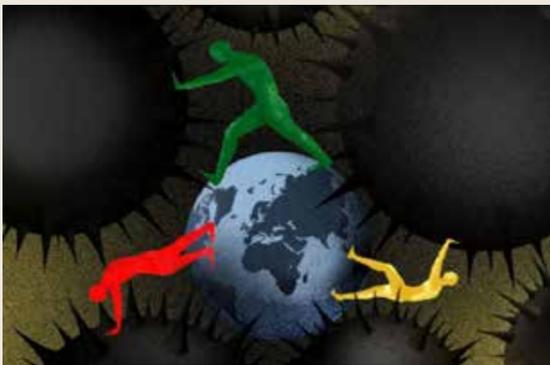


panel discussion featuring specialist Indian medical doctors working at reputed healthcare institutions in Kuwait.

The discussion was moderated by Dr. P Shankar Narayanan Menon, Consultant & Head, Department of Pediatrics, Jaber Al Ahmed Armed Forces Hospital, Kuwait. Other members of the esteemed panel included: Dr. Arijit Chattopadhyay, Consultant Endocrinologist, Medical Department, Al Sabah Hospital, Ministry of Health Kuwait; Dr. Manu Kurian Baby, Senior Registrar, Department of Respiratory Medicine, Jaber Al Sabah Hospital; Dr. Rohit Lohani Senior Specialist, Department of Anesthesia, Al Sabah Hospital; and Dr. Saroj Bala Grover, Senior Physician, Department of Medicine, Infectious Diseases Hospital.

The Symposium generated a tremendous response with hundreds of people from different walks of life in Kuwait participating virtually. The symposium provided a unique opportunity for participants to listen to frontline healthcare warriors providing much-needed insights on the ongoing pandemic.

An Invisible Enemy



*It's too tiny yet named corona
No one knows whether a boy or girl
Born in China, with no surname
Being brought up to conquer the world*

*He became an invisible foe
He struck us dumb at our home
Please don't come near me
He made me earnest for health*

*He made us lose our hopes
He made the world mad
Busy time for doctors and nurses
He is tiny but dangerous*

*Schools are closed, mouths are shut
Tents are opened, tears are shed
You locked us with no freedom
Silent villain, you can't defeat us*

*You forcefully made us wear masks
You limited our social activities
You prevented us to breath fresh air
You nasty little tiny creature*

*Why are you disturbing our freedom of life?
How are you able to defeat us?
We will fight against you until we succeed
I am longing to fly away*



Miriam Alphonsa George
Class 6, Indian Community
School Junior, Salmiya

Expatriates who are stuck in transit countries are running out of options

The expenses of those stranded passengers on their way to Kuwait are increasing day by day. These passengers are stuck, as they cannot return to their home countries and also are not permitted to enter Kuwait, Local daily reported.

Sources told the daily that 3000 Kuwait-based expats are stranded in UAE. Some of them have also extended their stay for the last 2 months after successive decisions by the authorities in Kuwait regarding the entry of expatriates. These expatriates are losing money stuck in a

third country and after returning there expenses will increase will have to pay for 14 days of institutional quarantine.

The recent decision to constantly suspend entry to expatriates changed the strategy of many stranded people. After their long wait in transit countries, and they are considering returning to their own country.

The sources indicated that there are residents, who were pleased with the circulars issued recently, before suspending flights again and had already made institutional hotel quarantine



reservations, with their savings. But the suspension decision was shocking, as they would not recover what they paid in time.

GCC 'Covid passport' would store vaccine, travel eligibility info

Preparations are underway for 'Covid-19 passports' to be introduced in the Gulf region which would contain vaccination and Covid-19 test data as well as provide details like pre-travel eligibility requirements underlined by the airport for the destination. It is expected to facilitate travel between various countries under a certification, verification and validation system that would authenticate all country travel, while ensuring adherence to health regulations. It would also ensure all documentation is handled digitally to the benefit for the passenger and authorities to streamline the travel process. This is expected to revive the travel sector which suffered significantly under the coronavirus threat as flights were suspended and airports shut down to limit the spread of the pandemic.

The passport would be discussed at a meeting of health officials as early as next week, in addition to travel and movement between GCC countries. There is worldwide support from world

leaders, airlines and trade associations like IATA for a novel digital solution aimed at fuelling economic recovery in the travel sector.

Efficient digital management of health credentials is vital to restart a recovery phase post Covid, said Alexandre de Juniac, director-general and CEO of the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

Manual processes will not be able to cope with volumes once the recovery begins, De Juniac noted. "Digital solutions must be secure, work with existing systems, align with global standards and respect data privacy. In developing the IATA Travel Pass, these are fully in focus. The IATA Travel App will help to set the bar very high for managing health credentials, protecting against fraud and enabling a convenient travel process."

Promoting the IATA Travel Pass, De Juniac noted: "It is becoming clear that vaccines and testing will play a role as



the pandemic comes under control and economies ramp up, including the travel sector. The IATA Travel Pass will enable travellers to securely control their health data and share it with relevant authorities.

"A growing list of airlines, including Etihad Airways, Emirates, Qatar Airways, Malaysia Airlines, Air New Zealand, Copa Airlines, RwandAir, and Singapore Airlines have done or are committed to doing trials with IATA Travel Pass."

EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

An Open Letter to Joe Biden on International Corporate Taxation



**JOSÉ ANTONIO OCAMPO,
JOSEPH E. STIGLITZ, AND JAYATI GHOSH**

José Antonio Ocampo, a former finance minister of Colombia and United Nations under-secretary-general for Economic and Social Affairs, is a professor at Columbia University and Chair of the Independent Commission for the Reform of International Corporate Taxation. Joseph E. Stiglitz, a Nobel laureate in economics, is University Professor at Columbia University and a member of the Independent Commission for the Reform of International Corporate Taxation. Jayati Ghosh, Executive Secretary of International Development Economics Associates, is Professor of Economics at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and a member of the Independent Commission for the Reform of International Corporate Taxation.



Dear Mr. President,

The world has welcomed your election and commitment to restore diplomatic engagement with the international community to the center of US foreign policy. By rallying governments to create the conditions for an equitable and environmentally sustainable global economic recovery, your leadership can encourage transformative changes.

For too long, international institutions have failed to deal with one of the most toxic aspects of globalization: tax avoidance and evasion by multinational corporations. Fair taxation of multinationals is needed to create the type of societies that we aspire to, and it must be a central part of any progressive tax system aimed at driving economic growth and creating high living standards for all. Ending corporate tax avoidance is also one of the best ways to tackle rampant inequality of wealth and income.

By shifting their profits to tax havens, large companies deprive governments worldwide of at least \$240 billion per year in fiscal revenues. This shortfall affects not only the United States, where some 50% of overseas profits made by US multinationals are transferred to tax havens each year, but also the Global South, where revenue sources are more limited and hence reliance on corporate tax receipts to fund public services is greater.

As members of the Independent Commission for the Reform of International Corporate Taxation (ICRICT), we urge you to fulfill your promise to "lead efforts internationally to bring transparency to the global financial system, go after illicit tax havens, seize stolen assets, and make it more difficult for leaders who steal from their people to hide behind anonymous front companies." To do that, your administration

should engage actively in ongoing efforts to overhaul the international tax system to ensure fair taxation of multinationals, which is currently being discussed within the G20-mandated OECD process.

Unfortunately, these negotiations have not gone well. The governments of leading member states (including the previous US administration) have negotiated under the misplaced assumption that their national interest is best served by protecting those multinationals headquartered within their borders. Discussions on the reform of international taxation have thus sacrificed common ambition to the lowest common denominator.

Meanwhile, multinationals continue to avoid taxes that could help pay for public expenditure to support the post-pandemic recovery. The world cannot afford this.

The negotiating process has, nonetheless, reached agreement that multinationals should be considered unitary businesses. This means that their worldwide profits should be taxed in line with their real activities in each country. This is a familiar concept in the US, where corporate profits are allocated to different states on a formulaic basis, according to the key factors that generate profit: employment, sales, and assets. But the current proposal applies this allocation criterion to only a small share of a firm's global profits – particularly those of highly digitalized multinationals, which are mainly US-based.

E-commerce grew by nearly a third during the pandemic, and it is critical that not only digital multinationals, but all multinationals' digital business operations pay their fair share

of taxes. An ambitious and comprehensive reform therefore should be adopted to replicate the US system at the international level, without distinction between digital and non-digital businesses. Such a rule would help to establish a more level playing field, reduce distortions, limit opportunities for tax avoidance, and provide certainty to multinationals and investors.

This system should be supported by a global minimum tax on multinationals, putting an end to harmful tax competition between countries and reducing the incentive for multinationals to shift profits to tax havens. But the 12.5% minimum rate being discussed at the OECD and elsewhere could become the global ceiling, in which case the laudable initiative to oblige multinationals to bear their fair share of taxes would end up doing the opposite.

Your campaign promised to raise the US minimum tax on US corporations' foreign earnings (known as "GILTI") to 21%. This measure would not only have the merit of increasing your country's fiscal resources; it would also provide the political support for other countries' policymakers to follow suit.

An ambitious global minimum tax could be a game changer in the fight against tax avoidance. If G20 countries were to agree to impose a 25% minimum corporate tax (as the ICRICT advocates) on the global income of their multinational firms, more than 90% of worldwide profits would automatically be taxed at 25% or more. Of course, it is also essential that such a tax should be designed to allocate taxing rights fairly between firms' home and host countries.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said at her

confirmation hearing that your administration looked forward "to actively working with other countries" in order to "try to stop what has been a destructive, global race to the bottom on corporate taxation." There is no evidence that the recent trend toward lower corporate tax rates has stimulated productive investment and growth. The 2017 US rate cut mainly ended up funding dividend payments and stock buybacks.

Corporate taxation is in effect a tax on pure profits, and so lowering the rate has little effect on economic activity. In other words, corporate taxes are essentially a withholding tax on dividends, and thus an income tax on the wealthy, because equity holdings (directly, or indirectly through, say, pension funds) are even more unequally distributed than income.

We ask you to ensure that the US once again leads by the power of example and cooperates with other countries willing to deliver a comprehensive reform that is equitable for the US and the rest of the world. Until such equitable reform is adopted, trade sanctions against countries that have already decided to tax digital businesses – many of them developing countries desperate for additional revenues – will be counterproductive.

Re-engaging with the multilateral system while accepting a weak international compromise on taxation of multinationals will further erode, not restore, trust in the system. It is fully within our power to build a post-pandemic world that is more sustainable, cooperative, and fair, where multinationals pay the taxes they should. The ICRICT would be honored to support your administration in achieving this crucial goal.

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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Bitcoin: what goes up must come down



WILLEM H. BUITERS
Visiting Professor of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University.

On 8 February, Elon Musk's electric-car firm Tesla announced that it had invested \$1.5 billion of its cash reserves in Bitcoin back in January. The news helped to boost the cryptocurrency's already skyrocketing price by a further 10 percent, to a record high of more than \$44,000. But, especially in Bitcoin's case, what goes up can just as easily come crashing down.

Bitcoin was invented in 2008 and began trading in 2009. In 2010, the value of a single Bitcoin rose from around eight-hundredths of a cent to eight cents. In April 2011, it traded at 67 cents, before subsequently climbing to \$327 by November 2015. As recently as 20 March last year, Bitcoin traded at about \$6,200, but its price has since increased more than sevenfold.

Today, Bitcoin is a perfect, 12-year-old bubble. I once described gold as "shiny Bitcoin," and characterized the metal's price as a 6,000-year-old bubble. That was a bit unfair to gold, which used to have intrinsic value as an industrial commodity (now largely redundant), and still does as a consumer durable widely used in jewelry.

Bitcoin, by contrast, has no intrinsic value; it never did and never will. It is a purely speculative asset, a private fiat currency, whose value is whatever the markets say it is.

“Tesla's recent Bitcoin buy-in shows that a large additional buyer entering the market can boost price significantly. But an exit by a single important player would likely have a similar impact in the opposite direction.”

But Bitcoin is also a socially wasteful speculative asset, because it is expensive to produce. The cost of 'mining' an additional Bitcoin, through solving computational puzzles using energy-intensive digital equipment, increases at such a rate that the total stock of the cryptocurrency is capped at 21 million units.

Of course, even if Bitcoin's protocol is not changed to allow for a larger supply, the whole exercise can be repeated through the issuance of Bitcoin 2, Bitcoin 3, and so on. The real costs of mining will thus be replicated, too. Moreover, there are already well-established cryptocurrencies, for example, Ether, operating in parallel with Bitcoin. But as the success of government-issued fiat currencies shows, the universe



of speculative bubbles is by no means restricted to cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin. After all, in a world with flexible prices, there is always an equilibrium where everyone believes the official fiat currency has no value, in which case it consequently has no value. And there are infinitely many 'non-fundamental' equilibria where the general price level — the reciprocal of the fiat currency's price — either explodes and goes to infinity or implodes and falls to zero, even when the money stock remains fairly steady or does not change at all.

Finally, there is the unique 'fundamental' equilibrium at which the price level (and the value of the currency) is positive and neither explodes nor implodes. Most government-issued fiat currencies appear to have stumbled into this fundamental equilibrium and stayed there. Keynesians ignore these multiple equilibria, viewing the price level (and thus the price of money) as uniquely determined by history and updated gradually through a mechanism like the Phillips curve, which posits a stable and inverse relationship between (unexpected) inflation and unemployment.

Regardless of which perspective one adopts, real-world hyperinflations — think of Weimar Germany or the recent cases of Venezuela and Zimbabwe — that effectively reduce the value of money to zero are examples not of non-fundamental equilibria, but rather of fundamental equilibria gone bad. In these cases, money stocks exploded, and the price level responded accordingly. Private cryptocurrencies and public fiat currencies have the same infinite range of possible equilibria. The zero-price equilibrium is always a possibility, as is the unique, well-behaved fundamental equilibrium.

Bitcoin clearly is exhibiting neither of these equilibria at the moment. What we have instead appears to be a variant of a non-fundamental explosive price equilibrium. It is a variant because it must allow for Bitcoin to make a possible, if unexpected, jump from its current explosive price trajectory to either the nice fundamental equilibrium or the not-so-nice zero-price scenario. This multiple-equilibrium perspective doubtless makes it appear risky to invest in intrinsically valueless assets like Bitcoin and

other private cryptocurrencies.

The real world is of course not constrained by the range of possible equilibria supported by the mainstream

economic theory outlined here. But that makes Bitcoin even riskier as an investment.

Tesla's recent Bitcoin buy-in shows that a large additional buyer entering the market can boost the cryptocurrency's price significantly, both directly (when markets are illiquid) and indirectly through demonstration and emulation effects. But an exit by a single important player would likely have a similar impact in the opposite direction. Positive or negative opinions voiced by market makers will have significant effects on Bitcoin's price.

The cryptocurrency's spectacular price volatility is not surprising. Deeply irrational market gyrations like the one that drove GameStop's share price to unprecedented highs in January (followed by a significant correction) should serve as a reminder that, lacking any obvious fundamental value anchor, Bitcoin is likely to remain a textbook example of excess volatility.

This will not change with time. Bitcoin will continue to be an asset without intrinsic value whose market value can be anything or nothing. Only those with healthy risk appetites and a robust capacity to absorb losses should consider investing in it.

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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Social Returns of Ending Son Bias



M. NIAZ ASADULLAH, NAZIA MANSOOR, TERESA RANDAZZO, AND ZAKI WAHHAJ

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KUALA LUMPUR/LONDON/VENICE/
CANTERBURY

In much of emerging Asia, persistent bias in favor of sons remains a barrier to girls' life prospects – and often to life itself. Pre- and postnatal sex selection, including abortion and infanticide, have led to significant demographic imbalances.

Son preference also perpetuates large-scale social problems. Because a majority of the population still values sons more highly than daughters – a preference reinforced by cultural traditions in which sons play an important role (like performing funeral rituals in Hinduism) – South Asia is rife with domestic violence, child marriage, and deaths due to dowry disputes. And parents' cultural preference for sons can create additional human-development challenges.

Nowhere is this more evident than in India. Educational and economic opportunities for boys and girls remain deeply unequal, as the country's rapid economic growth since the 1990s was not accompanied by large-scale changes in gender attitudes and traditional social values. And, owing to sex selection, the country's ratio of males to females is imbalanced, with millions of girls and women missing from schools and the labor market.

The problem is getting worse. Most deaths among girls under five are due to postnatal sex selection, and the spread of ultrasound technology has aggravated the imbalance. Consequently, the number of "missing" women in India has doubled over the last 50 years. According to the United

Nations Population Fund's State of the World Population 2020 report, India alone now accounts for 46 million missing girls, nearly a third of the global total of 142 million.

Understanding sex bias in fertility is important for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 5 (gender equality), because it helps to explain parents' unequal treatment of daughters, particularly in rural or poverty-stricken areas. The large gender disparities in South Asian educational outcomes must be addressed at the root.

“Ending son bias in desired fertility, curbing the preferential treatment of boys, and addressing parents' underinvestment in daughters requires increased spending on public education for girls.”

Traditional gender norms – men as breadwinners and women as homemakers – could explain the higher value placed on male children, as could the perceived economic benefits of having sons (who, for example, will receive a dowry rather than costing his parents one). These traditional views underpin gender inequality in educational attainment, with the gap perpetuating further inequalities in the next generation. In contrast, more educated women tend to have smaller families, with healthier and

better-educated children. Ending son bias in desired fertility, curbing the preferential treatment of boys, and addressing parents' underinvestment in daughters requires increased spending on public education for girls. Bangladesh offers an example of the long-term social returns of such an approach.

In a recently published paper, we analyzed the desired and actual fertility choices of thousands of Bangladeshi women of childbearing age. Although fertility decisions are still influenced by son preference, our results confirm a decline in the desire for sons.

Moreover, women with secondary schooling are more likely to desire gender balance in fertility. This finding contrasts with a 1994 study, which suggested the opposite relationship between Bangladeshi mothers' secondary education and son preference. What has changed?

Three decades ago, educated Bangladeshi women had limited income-earning opportunities, and their economic status remained low. There simply were not enough educated women to shift son preference in favor of daughters. Since then, however, girls'

education has benefited from the nationwide Female Secondary School Assistance Project, which was introduced in the early 1990s. The program provided financial aid for girls, and encouraged them to delay marriage in favor of education. Bangladesh has since leapfrogged neighboring India in girls' secondary education.

Moreover, Bangladesh is closing the large gender gap in school enrollment that prevails throughout South Asia, aided by changes in the labor market. Improved access to schooling coincided with a boom in the ready-made garment export sector, which now employs millions of young Bangladeshi women. We found that the desire for gender balance in fertility was stronger among women living in areas with more opportunities for paid work.

Thus, as a consequence of increased female education and employment, son preference is giving way to a desire for gender balance. This is reflected in improvement in Bangladesh's sex ratio. Excess female deaths as a share of overall under-five mortality rate is now around 3%, indicating a decline in pre- and postnatal sex selection.

In 1992, former World Bank chief economist Lawrence H. Summers famously identified women's education as the single most influential investment that can be made in the developing world. Our research confirms this finding. The policy lesson from Bangladesh is that investment in girls' schooling and the creation of economic opportunities can have important intergenerational effects at birth, in education, and beyond.



Foreign Embassies & International Organisations in Kuwait

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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Winning the COVID-19 vaccination race, the India way



SEMA SGAIER, PRASHANT YADAV

Sema Sgaier, an adjunct assistant professor at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, is Co-Founder and CEO of Surgo Ventures. Prashant Yadav, a Senior Fellow at the Center for Global Development, is an affiliate professor at INSEAD and a lecturer at Harvard Medical School.

As the world enters the second year of the coronavirus pandemic, vaccination has moved front and center in policymakers' responses. But while vaccines offer the surest way out of the crisis, countries are approaching them in different ways. Some are racing to vaccinate their populations, while others await longer-term efficacy data before beginning. Still other countries find themselves in a long line to receive or purchase desperately needed doses.

Many have noted the rapid rate of Israel's vaccination drive, the ambition of the United Kingdom, which was the first country to approve a COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use, and the stumbles to get supplies distributed in the United States and the European Union. But for those seeking lessons on how to protect a population through vaccination, there's another country to watch: India.

With 1.3 billion people, and an estimated 11 million cases of COVID-19 to date, India faces a seemingly mammoth vaccination challenge. But the government recently announced a plan to vaccinate around 300 million people by early August. And, judging by the country's preparations and actions so far, it may be well equipped to handle the task.

That's because India can meet the challenges of scale with massive manufacturing capacity, a strong public-health infrastructure with experience in vaccine delivery, an army of frontline workers, and meticulous planning. Add to that some innovative digital tracking, and the results could put the country in an enviable position by later this year.

Frontline health workers are central players in India's vaccination rollout, and the first in line to receive the shots. The drive to vaccinate around 30 million frontline and other health workers began on January 16, and in the first 34 days, India achieved ten million vaccinations. The US took 31 days to vaccinate the same number after



it authorized vaccines (the rate of China's vaccine rollout is unclear).

After India's health workers are vaccinated, frontline workers and people aged over 50 – and younger people with serious health conditions – will be next in line. That's a further 260 million people that the government plans to vaccinate in under seven months.

India has the capacity to manufacture all its COVID-19 vaccines domestically. The Serum Institute of India, the world's largest vaccine producer, has boosted its capacity in order to manufacture one billion doses of the AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine (known locally as Covishield), while Bharat Biotech

destinations. About 150,000 staff people in 700 districts have been specially trained to administer the vaccines.

India already runs the world's largest public-health immunization programs, targeting 27 million infants and 29 million pregnant women each year. Since a national campaign to vaccinate children against measles and rubella began four years ago, several states have achieved coverage rates of over 90%. The COVID-19 vaccination push is certainly ambitious, but its scale is not fundamentally different.

As some countries – including the US – have found, multi-level government systems can hamper speedy vaccine

“ India has created a dedicated Co-WIN system to streamline tracking and accountability, as well as procurement and distribution of vaccine supplies, and allows people to pre-register for vaccinations. ”

will produce the government-backed Covaxin shot. This should be enough to vaccinate the country's priority groups this year. And, because the vaccines produced domestically are priced to be the cheapest in the world, India has already supplied vaccines worth \$47 million to 13 countries.

India will rely heavily on its public-health infrastructure to scale up its vaccination drive. Three thousand COVID-19 vaccination centers have been established across the country, along with 27,000 cold chain points to keep supplies cool en route to and at their

rollout if there is inadequate information flow, lack of clarity on decision-making authority between the various levels, and diffuse accountability. India proactively addressed this issue when planning the deployment of COVID-19 vaccines by establishing a well-defined governance structure between the central government, state government, district government, and local administrative blocks. Roles and responsibilities for each level are clearly defined, allowing a nationally coordinated response.

In addition, India is using technology to streamline tracking and accountability. In record time, the authorities have created the dedicated Co-WIN system to track procurement and distribution of vaccine supplies, and allow people to pre-register for vaccinations. Co-WIN builds on Aadhaar, the country's nationwide digital ID system. On the supply side, it uses e-VIN, the national vaccine information system. Bringing them together has been the key to making the system work, and initial glitches have been quickly fixed. Citizens can receive a text message informing them when and where to get the vaccine, and will receive a unique QR code certificate after they've received the second dose.

Although the prospects look good, India must still overcome significant hurdles. Building a comprehensive and accurate database of individuals with comorbidities, in order to prioritize them for vaccination, remains a huge challenge.

And, as in other countries, there are worrying levels of vaccine hesitancy. India's impressive COVID-19 immunization figures in the first weeks could have been even higher, but some medical staff have been reluctant to get the shot, especially because the locally developed Covaxin received emergency authorization before all the trial data on its efficacy had been reviewed. The government will need good communication campaigns to persuade older people and those with medical conditions that the vaccines are safe.

India's experience holds at least three lessons for other countries. First, they should make the most of their strengths. Not every country can develop or manufacture its own vaccines. But almost all can draw upon committed frontline workers, public-health infrastructure, or prior experience confronting epidemics or holding immunization drives.

Second, prioritizing vaccine access and tracking rollout should be built into the vaccination drive from the start. Digging deep into the data to allocate vaccines most effectively may require building upon existing data systems, or using new tools, such as the COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Planner for the US, and the Vaccine Coverage Index, which highlights which geographies are likely to have problems achieving high levels of COVID-19 vaccine coverage and why.

Finally, vaccine hesitancy will require a tailored response in each country. Policymakers and public-health experts must devise effective strategies to reassure people that vaccination is safe – and the only road out of the pandemic and toward recovery.

EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Silent revolution in economic policy



ROBERT SKIDELSKY

A member of the British House of Lords, is Professor Emeritus of Political Economy at Warwick University. The author of a three-volume biography of John Maynard Keynes, he began his political career in the Labour party, became the Conservative Party's spokesman for Treasury affairs in the House of Lords, and was eventually forced out of the Conservative Party for his opposition to NATO's intervention in Kosovo in 1999.

Something extraordinary has happened to macroeconomic policymaking. Partly owing to the impact of COVID-19, the old orthodoxy has morphed into a new one – but without anyone acknowledging the implications of the shift, or indeed that there were any problems with previous convention.

In a recent interview, for example, former Bank of England (BOE) Deputy Governor Paul Tucker said that “monetary policy should now take a back seat to fiscal policy.” Other central bankers, finance ministry mandarins, and OECD and International Monetary Fund officials are saying much the same.

What our financial paladins never or only rarely acknowledge is how wrong they were in the past. The Financial Times came closest with its recent limping admission that the spending cuts it advocated in 2010 “may have had a bigger negative impact than expected.” That is about the nearest thing to a mea culpa as we can expect from this citadel of the financial establishment, and it does not come close to capturing the magnitude of the rupture with the theory of macroeconomic policy that prevailed only a few years ago.

Before the 2008-09 crash, many believed that macroeconomic stabilization was entirely a matter for monetary policymakers, and should be carried out by independent central banks targeting a mandated inflation rate by means of interest-rate policy. This followed from the orthodox belief that economies were cyclically stable, provided that inflation was controlled. Fiscal policy should be passive, or even contractionary if spending cuts would boost market confidence.

The belief in the superiority of monetary policy survived even the savage 2008-09 downturn. Quantitative easing (QE), or ‘unconventional monetary policy’, would replace orthodox interest-rate policy when the nominal benchmark rate hit its ‘zero bound’. Central banks worked out all manner of fanciful ‘transmission mechanisms’ by which the extra cash they placed in bond sellers’ hands would flow into the real



economy, ignoring the possibility that most of it would instead be used to replenish depleted bank reserves or swap financial assets. Meanwhile, governments would play their part by cutting their own spending.

Although the combination of monetary expansion and fiscal contraction failed to bring about the expected recovery, belief in monetary therapy was still strong when the COVID-19 pandemic struck in 2020. This prevented governments from thinking seriously about channeling the hundreds

of billions of new QE money to those parts of the real economy that remained open for business, rather than giving millions of people months of paid leave.

“ In these conditions, fiscal policy is the only game in town. We urgently need a new macroeconomic framework, covering the aims of active fiscal policy, the rules for conducting it, and its coordination with monetary policy. ”

The outstanding feature of Western governments’ responses to the pandemic was their untargeted character. Policymakers preferred mass lockdowns and furloughs to any attempt to keep people working by deploying technically feasible mass testing, tracking, and tracing systems, as many East Asian countries did.

Now the penny has dropped. In the absence of stimulus, the post-COVID European and US economies are expected to have shrunk in 2020 at the highest rate since World War II, with a concomitant rise

in unemployment. Now, furlough schemes will end, and central banks say that they are running out of ammunition – meaning their ability to keep bondholders confident about being repaid.

Given that we are suffering from both a

secure the economy’s sustainability, not just its cyclical stability.

The case for fiscal policy is not only that it is a more powerful (because more targeted) macroeconomic stabilizer than monetary policy, but also that the government is the only entity apart from the financial system capable of allocating capital. If we are not willing to allow investment in technology and infrastructure to be shaped by a purely financial logic, then the need for what Mariana Mazzucato calls a “mission-oriented” public investment strategy that includes taxation policy becomes inescapable.

The second big discussion we need to have concerns the relationship between fiscal and monetary policy. In the United Kingdom, the expansion of QE since March 2020 has exactly tracked the increase in the budget deficit. Can the perception of BOE independence and the credibility of its inflation target survive when the central bank has been acting as an agent of the Treasury for the past year?

If the government is to be the active macroeconomic player, we need to work out how or whether the central bank should revert to its traditional role of checking fiscal excesses. But the fiscal rules themselves should be rewritten to allow for both more active counter-cyclical policy and a much larger government role in allocating capital than has recently been fashionable.

The pandemic presents an opportunity for an open public discussion of these matters. One hopes that this debate will replace the system of insider nods and winks and subterranean understandings that has shaped our economic fortunes, or misfortunes, for too long.

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Childhood diet has lifelong impact

About 100 trillion bacteria, both good and bad, and collectively known as gut microbiota, live inside your digestive system. Within those trillions of gut bacteria are around 1,000 different species that are represented by some 5,000 distinct bacterial strains.

In recent years scientists have been examining in detail how this enormous system of organisms influence, and often enhances, health conditions from heart disease to arthritis and even cancer. Studies have shown the main factors that affect a person's microbial mix are age, diet, environment, genes, and medications, in particular their exposure to antibiotics, which can deplete gut bacteria.

Most of these microorganisms are found in the intestines, and most of them are helpful, stimulating the immune system, breaking down food and helping synthesize key vitamins. Everyone's gut microbiota is unique, but there are certain combinations and collections of bacteria that are usually found mainly in healthy individuals. In a healthy

body, there is a balance of pathogenic and beneficial organisms. However, if the balance is disturbed, either through the use of antibiotics, illness, or unhealthy diet, the body could become susceptible to disease.

Gut microbiota plays many roles in the body, including metabolizing nutrients from food and certain medications, serving as a protective barrier against intestinal infections, and producing vitamin K, which helps make blood-clotting proteins. But the gut microbiota may do much more, including being the key to preventing or treating some diseases. A new study on mice by scientists at the University of California suggests that eating too much fat and sugar as a child can alter your microbiome for life, even if you later learn to eat healthier.

The study is one of the first to show a significant decrease in the total number and diversity of gut bacteria in mature mice fed an unhealthy diet as juveniles. Though the team studied the effect on mice, they said the effect they observed was equivalent to young children having a Western diet, high in fat and sugar and their gut microbiome still being affected up to six years after puberty. For the study, the research team looked for impacts on the microbiome after dividing their mice into four groups: one group was fed the standard, 'healthy' diet, another group, the less healthy 'Western' diet; a third group were given access to a running wheel for exercise, and the fourth group had no such exercising access.

After three weeks spent on these diets, all mice were returned to a standard diet and no exercise, which is normally how mice are kept in a laboratory. At the 14-week mark, the team examined the diversity and abundance of bacteria in the animals.

They found that the quantity of bacteria such as *Muribaculum intestinale* was significantly reduced in the Western diet group. This type of bacteria is involved in carbohydrate metabolism. Analysis also showed that the gut bacteria are sensitive to the amount of exercise the mice got. *Muribaculum* bacteria increased in mice fed a standard diet



who had access to a running wheel and decreased in mice on a high-fat diet whether they had exercise or not.

Researchers believe this species of bacteria, and the family of bacteria that it belongs to, might influence the amount of energy available to its host. Research continues into other functions that this type of bacteria may have. One other effect of note was the increase in a highly similar bacteria species that were enriched after five weeks of treadmill training in a study by other researchers, suggesting that exercise alone may increase its presence.

Overall, the researchers found that early-life Western diet had more long-lasting effects on the microbiome than did early-life exercise. The team now hopes to repeat this experiment and take samples at additional points in time, to better understand when the changes in mouse microbiomes first appear, and whether they extend into even later phases of life. Regardless of when the effects first appear, however, the researchers say it is significant that they were observed so long after changing the diet, and then changing it back.

The takeaway from the study is that, "you are not only what you eat, but what you ate as a child", said the researchers.

Brain provides solution to overeating

Science and pharmaceuticals have come a step closer to addressing the global issue of obesity following studies by researchers at two universities in the United States.

In the first study, a ten-member team of researchers at the University of Florida have discovered a specific area of the brain that is linked to recollection and to desire to seek and consume food. The discovery could lead to a way to inhibit the desire to overeat, which is a major reason behind the global obesity epidemic. People tend to overeat when exposed to



cues or environments that remind them of treats, which is one reason why people opt for dessert even after a filling meal. The study showed that neurons in a specific part of the brain control the link between the cue (seeing the dessert) and the action (ordering the dessert). The researchers found that animal subjects consumed fewer treats when they regulated that specific region of the animal's brain.

The techniques and the data developed by the researchers is also expected to eventually help overcome some issues linked to obesity such as stroke, Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high levels of bad cholesterol, and coronary heart disease.

The team said that their experimental tools allow them to turn off neurons in a specific part of the prefrontal cortex of the brain that is important in the initial stages of learning to seek food. Ability to control the neurons while the subjects engage in a specific behavior is key to controlling food seeking habits.

In a related global study, this time by researchers at the University of California, it was found that one-third (35%) of people who took a new drug for treating obesity lost more than one-fifth (greater than or equal to 20%) of their total body weight.

The findings from the large-scale international trial, which involved nearly 2,000 people from 16 countries, are being hailed as a 'gamechanger' for improving the health of people with obesity. The drug, semaglutide, works by hijacking the body's own appetite regulating system in the brain leading to reduced hunger and calorie intake.

The findings of the study represent a major breakthrough for improving the health of people with obesity. Three quarters (75%) of people who received semaglutide lost more than 10 percent of their body weight and more than one-third lost more than 20 percent. No other drug has come close to producing this level of weight loss and allowing people to achieve through drugs what was only possible through weight-loss surgery.

The researchers noted that impact of obesity on health has been especially highlighted during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, where it was found that obesity markedly increased the risk of dying from the virus, besides increasing the risk of many life-limiting serious diseases, including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, liver disease and certain types of cancers.

The average participant in the trial lost 15.3kg; this was accompanied by reductions in risk factors for heart disease and diabetes, such as waist circumference, blood fats, blood sugar and blood pressure and reported improvements in their overall quality of life.

Semaglutide is already approved and used clinically at a lower dose for treatment of diabetes, so doctors are already familiar with its use. With evidence from the new study, the drug has been submitted for regulatory approval as a treatment for obesity to various national health approval agencies, including the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE), the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

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