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Low occupancy
leads to
falling rents

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LOCAL

Fines for not wearing
masks to ensure
compliance

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LOCAL

Details to lift ban
from 34 countries
being finalised



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250 Fils

Rejecting SME support dents economic revival hopes



THE TIMES REPORT

After months of discussion and debate in public forums and parliamentary committees, lawmakers eventually decided to reject the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) support bill tabled by the government, with 29 MPs voting against it, 26 voting in favor and 2 abstaining.

The final rejection vote came in the second reading of the SME financial support bill, during parliament's one-day supplementary session of its 15th legislative term on 20 October. Despite Minister of Finance Barrak Al-Shitan introducing amendments to the original bill as requested by some lawmakers, including deleting the phrase 'other clients', so as to limit the funding support only to the owners of SMEs, and reducing the budget for this purpose from KD3 billion to KD500 million, the bill failed to muster the required support.



Last week, Chairperson of parliamentary Financial and Economic Affairs Committee MP Safa Al-Hashem confirmed that the committee had met with Minister Al-Shitan, as well as the Governor of Central Bank Dr. Muhammad Al-

Hashel and the Director of Kuwait Investment Authority to discuss amendments to the bill. Explaining the allotment of only KD500,000 for SMEs, the lawmaker said that the purpose of the bill was to support the economy as a

whole. She pointed out that the private sector constitutes 32 percent of the total income of Kuwait, of which three percent is from SMEs and 29 percent from other businesses.

Clarifying that the capital of some companies that claimed to be SMEs was over KD 5 million, MP Al-Hashem said they were in fact 'upper-medium' businesses and they were accordingly categorized as 'other clients' in the bill. However, another member of the Financial and Economic Affairs Committee MP Saleh Ashour, expressed his disapproval of the bill and said that he would vote against it when it came up in parliament, as he believed that it was meant to favor large businesses at the expense of SMEs.

As expected there was a chorus of wails from owners of SMEs against the parliament's decision to ditch the financial support law. Many owners accused MPs of not only failing the tens of thousands of Kuwaiti families impacted by their decision, but also delaying the country's

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

Increasing deaths from coronavirus a cause of concern

Around 50 fatalities from coronavirus infection in the span of just the last seven days, is a rising concern among health authorities in the country and increasing anxiety among the general public. With more than 5,000 people testing positive for the virus last week the total number of infections have gone to 120,927 and the death toll increased to 744.

Although the Ministry of Health has said that the recovery rate in the country at over

92 percent is high relative to many other countries in the world, this assurance has not been enough to pacify public fears and worries about a second wave of the virus proving more lethal.

The daily figures by the health ministry have also not encouraged businesses to invest or restart their businesses in full swing for fear of a second lockdown.

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Women in Diplomacy

Women in Diplomacy is a feature that highlights women diplomats in Kuwait, as well as women who use informal 'hearts and minds' diplomacy to further strengthen relations between two countries. Through a series of interviews with these dynamic women in diplomacy, The Times Kuwait will provide readers with valuable insights and glimpses into their lives as they go about making a difference in relations between countries. In this issue Olha Seheda, Third Secretary of the Embassy of Ukraine in Kuwait, answers questions from The Times Kuwait in an exclusive interview.

See Page 3



Accounts

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Low occupancy leads to falling rents



The coronavirus pandemic has been devastating to the country's economy with all sectors impacted by the virus. The real estate investment sector, which relies heavily on expatriates, has been among the worst affected with the departure of a large number of foreign workers from the country since the start of the pandemic.

The exodus of expatriates has been exacerbated by loss of jobs from Kuwaitization in public-sector, lower salaries being offered by businesses due to fall in revenues, and the decision to stop the renewal of residency visas for those aged over 60 without a university degree. Also, new regulations banning passengers from 34 countries from arriving directly to Kuwait has left tens of thousands of expatriates holding valid residency visas stranded abroad.

The departure of expatriates and the restriction on arrival of others has left many apartments vacant, which in turn has led to sharp drop in rents in popular residential areas such as Salmiya and Hawally, as well as in many premium residential areas. In some areas such as Mahbouda and Khaitan, there are entire residential buildings lying vacant without tenants. In recent months, rents in many residential areas popular with expatriates have fallen by 15 to 20 percent. For instance, in Salmiya and Hawally where the monthly

rent for a bedroom, hall and kitchen (BHK) apartment was KD230, is now readily available for KD190 or less; a 2-bedroom apartment (2BHK) for which one had to shell out KD280 or more is now on offer for less than KD240.

Meanwhile, rents in Mahbouda and Khaitan where entire apartment blocks are lying vacant have declined by over 25 percent. The rent for a BHK in Mahbouda and Khaitan has fallen from the KD190 previously to around KD140 now, while that for 2BHK has fallen from KD260 to less than KD190.

Real estate owners, especially in the investment sector, say the sector is undergoing radical changes due to the combined effect of COVID-19 crisis and government decisions aimed at reducing the number of foreigners in the country. They warn that unless new measures are introduced soon to help building owners, the low occupancy and falling rents could force many owners to default on their loans to banks and other financial institutions.

While some building owners have preferred to let their buildings lie vacant rather than lower rents, many owners who have built or bought buildings on hypothecation to financial institutions are under pressure to repay the loans. Rather than default on their mortgage

payments, and risk losing the building, owners are trying to fill the vacant flats at lower rents. With plenty of apartments now readily available for reasonable rents, many tenants are also shifting to better locations. This has added to the pressure on realtors to offer lower rents to hold on to their existing tenants.

Real estate brokers who previously received hefty commissions by acting as middle-men in transactions between building owners and potential tenants, have also been impacted by the low occupancy situation. In the past, real-estate brokers were known to lease entire buildings from owners at a nominal amount, and refuse to lease it out to tenants unless they paid high rents. This 'building-mafia' business ensured the brokers a steady premium over the rents they paid to building owners. Tenants were also fleeced by the building 'harris' who would demand a commission when renting the apartment.

However, many building owners are now choosing to deal directly with tenants cutting out these middle-men. Tenants also prefer dealing directly with owners as they are able to negotiate better terms and reasonable rents, especially when leasing furnished or semi-furnished apartments.

Holiday on 29th October on occasion of the Prophet's Birthday

A holiday was announced for all ministries, government agencies and public institutions on Thursday, October 29, on the occasion of the anniversary of the Prophet's birthday, work will resume on Sunday, November 1, states the Civil Service Bureau (CSB).

Oil Minister notes compliance by OPEC+ deal hits 102 percent

Minister of Oil Dr. Khaled Al-Fadhel said 12 October the OPEC-non-OPEC partners committed themselves by 102 percent to the agreement on production cut in last month. "This percentage, the highest since the agreement took force in last May, contributed to gradual reduction of the glut in oil inventory," he said in a press release after leading Kuwait delegation to the 23rd Meeting of the Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMMC).

The meeting was held online under the Chairmanship of Saudi Minister of Energy Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman and the Co-Chair Alexander Novak, the Russian energy minister. Dr. Al-Fadhel, also acting minister of electricity and water, noted that recent data showed "unprecedented commitment" by the majority of partners thanks to the relentless efforts of the JMMC.

"The meeting reviewed the data and reports on oil inventories which signal that the stocks took a downward slant," he pointed out. "The State of Kuwait has played an important role as an active member of the JMMC in the activities of the committee since its inception in 2017," he stressed. Dr. Al-Fadhel called on the OPEC-non-OPEC producing countries to scale up efforts to reach even higher level of commitment to the deal on output cut which turned to be inevitable in the coming months due to the negative



impacts of the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) on economic and trade activities worldwide.

"Strict and continued commitment to the deal could help restore balance between supply and demand in the world oil market as early as possible," he added. The participants in the JMMC meeting paid tribute to His Highness the late Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his support to the OPEC decisions since its foundation in September 1960.

Prince Abdulaziz and OPEC Secretary-General Mohammad Sanusi Barkindo expressed sincere condolences to the government and people of Kuwait over the passing of His Highness Sheikh Sabah, recalling their personal relations with His Highness the late Amir. The OPEC+ includes 13 members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and 10 non-OPEC countries.

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Diplomacy is about professionalism and passion

Olha Seheda, a young and dynamic Ukrainian diplomat endorses former US diplomat Richard Holbrooke's statement, 'Diplomacy is like jazz: endless variations on a theme'. In her first diplomatic posting as the Third Secretary of the Embassy of Ukraine in Kuwait, Olha has quickly adjusted to diplomatic duties and challenges. In an exclusive interview with The Times Kuwait Managing Editor she gives a new perspective on diplomacy.

BY REAVEN D'SOUZA
MANAGING EDITOR

Please tell us a little bit about your background and how you entered the diplomatic profession?

My life is all about fascinating journeys. The first one began in my childhood, when I started traveling with my parents.

Once you discover new lifestyles, get acquainted with people from dramatically different backgrounds and learn their languages, you simply cannot limit yourself to the old dimensions of your mindset. Journeys leave so many

languages. I continued my linguistic journey with a master programme, exploring the art of translation, interpretation and teaching methodology.

Posting as a diplomat is my first professional challenge and a great responsibility. Only very few are lucky to join the diplomatic corps directly after graduation from the university, but knowledge of languages and previous international experience enabled me to participate in the open contest for the diplomatic position in Kuwait. Kuwait attracted my attention because during the years of my studentship I had completed a language course for non-Arabic speakers at Kuwait University and my nearly a year stay in Kuwait turned into one of the most fascinating and enriching socio-cultural experiences I ever had.

In my case, life showed me the path and now I am very honored to present our great country Ukraine.

What are the responsibilities you have undertaken as a diplomat so far? Tell us about your postings and also about your experience in Kuwait as a diplomat.

Kuwait is my first destination and posting as a newly accepted member of the Ukrainian Foreign office family (i.e. Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Currently I am in charge of cultural, scientific, social, public and media cooperation and my top priority in this context is to apply far-reaching efforts in promoting and advocating Ukraine by means of public, cultural, sports and education diplomacy. One of the multifaceted missions of our

friendly diplomatic team is to establish and support a continuous dialogue with our Kuwaiti counterparts to find the common ground for fruitful cooperation and successful joint projects. Each of us has an essential role in the play called 'The Art of Diplomacy' and contributes to building an effective framework of communication looking to enhance the bilateral relations between Ukraine and Kuwait.

In this regard, I cannot overemphasize how cooperative, conscientious and broad-minded our Kuwaiti partners are. Needless to say that women constitute a significant part of them. Well-educated, intelligent, energetic, creative and hard-working — Kuwaiti women break stereotypes about a woman's role in Middle Eastern society.

Since my very first visit to Kuwait I was pleasantly surprised by the level of amiability and warm-heartedness of Kuwaiti people and having worked with them on joint projects I realized how lucky we are to see the true power of effective cooperation in action. Together we initiated projects that really matter. For instance, one of the latest ambitious projects launched by our Ambassador Dr. Balanutsa was 'The Week of Ukraine in Kuwait 2020' in the framework of which we held an unprecedented amount of activities to strengthen the positive image of Ukraine in Kuwait (professionally and brightly covered by the media, in particular by 'The Times Kuwait' for which we extend our deep gratitude. We presented Ukraine as a highly developed and trustworthy investment partner as



well as a great destination for recreational and medical tourism.

On the cultural front, I cannot but mention the international contest 'The Anthem of the Diplomat' launched through the Embassy's social media with the aim of choosing the best lyrics to be nominated as the professional anthem of Ukrainian diplomats. Another event which drew attention is educational Skype-conference between Ukrainian and Kuwaiti school pupils organised for the first time by the Embassy of Ukraine in cooperation with secondary schools of Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, and Kuwait to establish a dialogue of friendship and cooperation between our talented youth who are future leaders of our countries.

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Fines for not wearing masks to ensure compliance



Last week, as a part of a slew of measures aimed to contain the spread of the coronavirus, the Council of Ministers had approved an amendment to the law imposing severe penalties and fines on those found violating health regulations, including not wearing masks in public.

However, many Kuwaitis reacted negatively to the heavy fines, with many expressing the view that the penalty of three months in prison and/or a fine reaching KD 5,000, were too draconian. They requested authorities to review the decision, or cancel it altogether, saying that a fine ranging between KD50 and KD100 was more appropriate and practical, and that this would ensure greater compliance with regulations.

Responding to their grievance, the Council of Ministers is said to have added a clause in the law that now limits the fine for not wearing masks in public to KD100. Sources said that the clause was introduced to prevent the courts from being overburdened by cases, and to facilitate the process of paying the penalty without delay. The government has repeatedly said that the laws introduced to fight

the coronavirus were aimed at ensuring adherence to health requirements and were not meant to threaten, intimidate, or to restrict movement of people.

Kuwait, which managed to successfully control the first wave of coronavirus infections, has in recent weeks been experiencing a surge in the number of infected cases and in mortality figures. At the start of the week, a total of 116,146 infections were reported and the death toll reached 701.

The growing number of cases and surge in death of infected patients has raised concerns among decision-makers, and they are reported to be examining various measures to curtail and curb the spread of the disease.

Earlier this month, the authorities warned citizens and residents to refrain from participating in gatherings. Police

officers are said to be regularly monitoring the situation and dispersing any public gatherings, including weddings and parties.

Meanwhile, an official source at Kuwait International Airport has been quoted as confirming that there are no restrictions on Kuwaitis and expatriates, under domestic quarantine, wishing to travel abroad. The official is reported to have said that "there is no objection to the travel of any person during the 14-day home quarantine, as long as that person has not shown any sign of the new coronavirus".

People arriving at Kuwait International Airport are required to present a medical certificate attesting that they have been free of coronavirus infection, and to undertake a pledge that they would spend the next 14-days in Kuwait under home or institutional quarantine.

Cleanliness drive under threat with no cleaners

The municipality's cleanliness campaign has run into a brick-wall in Mubarak Al-Kabeer governorate. Areas in some districts of the governorate, including in Sabhan, Al-Qurain and Mubarak Al-Kabber, are reportedly suffocating under the stench from uncollected garbage. The trash is reported to have piled up over the past several months as cleaning companies do not have the necessary workers to undertake garbage collection.

The Head of Contracts Department at the Municipal Council, Eng. Abdul Salam Al Randi, and the Coordinator of the Cleanliness Committee Eng. Maha Al-Baghli recently toured the area to listen to complaints from residents and to hear from field-officers in charge of cleanliness. They said the tour helped outline a mechanism



to adopt and implement, so as to ensure that cleaning companies fulfilled their duties as per the contract they signed with the municipality.

It was observed that besides damaging the image of the governorate, the condition in some areas posed a health risk, as stray cats and other animals that were foraging on the trash had the potential to spread diseases among the public. Eng. Al-Baghli said violations were evident everywhere, and the laxity of cleaning companies was duly noted. She added that in future stringent monitoring of cleaning companies would be implemented so as to ensure that they regularly cleared the garbage piles.

Banks loan more than KD4 billion to expatriates

Statistics from the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) show that total loans to expatriates from commercial banks in the country exceeded KD4 billion. However, this was less than a quarter of the total KD16.6 billion that banks extended as credit financing during the past year.

A large share of the expatriate loans (KD3.4bn) was in the form of installment loans, while a smaller chunk (KD660mn) was given as consumer credit. Not surprisingly, the lion's share of credit financing (KD12.5bn) went to Kuwaitis in the form of consumer and installment loans. Of the total consumer loans extended by banks, 60 percent was borrowed by Kuwaitis, while expatriates borrowed 40 percent. On the installment side, 73 percent of the loans were disbursed to Kuwaitis while 28 percent was to expatriates.

The terms, consumer loans and installment loans, as used by financial institutions in the country, probably needs some clarification. According to CBK, consumer credit facilities are medium term personal loans extended to customers for the purpose of financing the purchase of their personal needs in terms of consumable and durable commodities, or for covering expenses of education or medication. This amount is repaid in monthly installments within a period of five years.

On the other hand, installment credit facilities are personal long-term loans utilized

by customers for non-commercial purposes, particularly for restoring or purchasing private residence. The loan is usually repaid in monthly installments within a period of 15 years.

Banks in general prefer lending to expatriates employed in the public-sector and those working in large corporations, as these loans are considered relatively safe since their salaries are usually guaranteed and the loans are linked to their end-of-tenure indemnities. Moreover, most of the loans to foreigners are capped at a fixed ceiling and are usually set at 10 or 20 percent of their salaries.

Though loans to expatriates constitute only a smaller share of total loans, many banks fear that foreigners who exited the country due to the COVID-19 crisis and are unable to return due to expiry of their visas or other regulations, could default on the loans. Many of those now abroad and defaulting on their loans are believed to be former employees working in teaching, engineering, and medical facilities.

Banks have made clear that the loans taken out by expats are not automatically written-off if their residency visas expire and they are unable to return to the country. Some banks are reported to have initiated loan-recovery procedures from defaulting expatriates outside the country, or from their sponsors in the country, through the help of debt collection companies.

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Osteoporosis cases in Kuwait among highest globally

Proportion of osteoporosis among women in Kuwait is very high by international standards; estimated at 35 percent of the female citizens, revealed a Kuwaiti specialist. Speaking to local media on the World Osteoporosis Day, falling on October 20, Dr. Nadia Al-Ali, the head of the endocrine ward at the Amiri Hospital and Chair of the Kuwait Osteoporosis Society, affirmed that proportion of the osteoporosis cases among the Kuwaiti women is one the highest on global scale.

Up to 35 of the female nationals aged above 50 suffer from the disease and recurrent fractures while the proportion among the men stands at 20 percent, Dr. Al-Ali said. This condition is generally serious because the rupture happens



on a large scale in the hips and thighs, she said, adding that the fractures may cause severe pain and lifelong impairment. There are some 200 million osteoporosis patients worldwide.

The illness is a main cause for breaking bones of some 8.9 million people per year. Moreover, one woman of each three suffers from the ailment. Likewise, one man per five. It is called the "silent disease" because many people are not diagnosed or receive a remedy. The Kuwaiti society, due to spread of the coronavirus, will launch an awareness campaign via the social media this year.

Vaccination against flu virus only for citizens initially

Decision by the Ministry of Health (MoH) to administer vaccination against the seasonal influenza and pneumonia virus only to citizens initially, has been criticized by many people, while some have said it was the right decision.

Supporters of limiting the vaccination only to Kuwaitis, argue that every country gives priority to its citizens with regard to treatment or vaccinating against diseases. They expressed their satisfaction with the decision, as it would help ensure citizens had access to vaccinations instead of waiting in long queues inside health centers, and risk being infected by the coronavirus.

However, critics of the decision pointed out that the virus does not differentiate

between Kuwaitis and expatriates. Since vaccinations are a preventive measure and not a cure, the ability of a society to curtail the spread of an infection depends on everyone being vaccinated. They said that priority should be given to those in high-risk groups, such as the elderly, pregnant women, children and people with respiratory and other diseases.

While the controversy over the decision was heatedly being debated on social media platforms, the MoH came out with an explanation for its decision. Health ministry officials said that it was keen to provide healthcare to patients of all nationalities. They noted that the decision to limit vaccinations to nationals was a temporary

regulatory measure as only a limited quantity of vaccines had been imported. Officials also clarified that vaccinations would soon be made available for everyone.

The decision to limit vaccinations to citizens initially was also taken so as to prevent large crowds from gathering in front of health centers, which would be in violation of health ministry guidelines aimed at curbing the spread of coronavirus, such as avoiding large gatherings and maintaining proper distancing between people.

The officials noted that last week, when the vaccinations were being administered through the 34 health centers in the country, there was a huge rush of people in front of the centers. This large crowd jeopardized



the health of vulnerable groups such as the elderly and pregnant women and therefore the decision was taken to limit the vaccinations initially only to nationals.



Campaign to end drying laundry on balconies

Capital governorate authorities have initiated a cleanliness campaign to stop people from hanging out their laundry, or cleaning and drying furnishings, from windows and balconies.

The campaign, initiated by the Governor of Capital Governorate, Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled, aims

to spruce up building facades in the governorate, in line with instructions from the Municipality.

Inspections in several areas of the governorate, including Sharq, Bneid Al-Qar, and Al-Mirqab resulted in 16 warnings being issued to building owners, while three owners signed pledges not to repeat the offense.

Officials leading the campaign said they would deal firmly with anyone found hanging clothes and furnishings, or storing old furniture and other unused items, on their balconies, and thereby disfiguring the building's facade.

They added that the municipality instructions also prohibits the cleaning of carpets and other furnishings from balconies, and to spread clothes or any other things on the rails for drying or for any other purpose.

Sheikh Al-Khaled praised the sincere efforts to monitor cleanliness in the governorate's municipality branch and stressed the need for all citizens and expats of the governorate to adhere to this decision in order to avoid legal measures being taken against them.

Indian Ambassador holds discussion with Health Minister

Indian Ambassador, H.E. Sibi George held a meeting with Hon. Minister of Health, Dr. Basel Hamoud Al-Hamad Al-Sabah on October 22, to discuss ways to strengthen bilateral relations between India and Kuwait and to contemplate the matters of the health sector and fight against the pandemic.

Dr. Rihab Alwatyan in a statement to local media said that the Minister of Health discussed with the Indian Ambassador the visions and views on addressing and containing the emerging coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) and enhancing areas of cooperation between the two countries.

She added that Ambassador George touched on the latest developments regarding



the production and use of the protective vaccination against the Corona in India, in addition to discussing areas of strengthening health relations between the two sides, exchanging experiences, seeking medical and health personnel, and benefiting from experiences to confront the new coronavirus challenge.



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Thought “ for the week

The secret of getting ahead
is getting started.

– Mark Twain.

Make a Grain Bowl



Chances are, you have inadvertently made a grain bowl out of leftovers before. But these bowls—made up of grains, vegetables, protein, and dressing—have the potential to become your go-to weeknight staple. The best part? As long as you follow the golden rule that good ingredients make good meals, they are hard to mess up. Here is how to make a grain bowl.

Pick your grain: Go the obvious route with a layer of brown rice, or take this opportunity to work ancient protein-rich grains into your diet. Think: freekeh, quinoa, farro, and couscous. When in doubt, just open your refrigerator and scope out your leftovers. Polenta, grits, wheat berries, and that box of rice from your leftover takeout are all excellent options. Consider cooking your grain in chicken or vegetable broth to add extra flavor.

Bring Some Vegetables Into The Mix: You have some options here: Add a handful of raw leafy greens or cooked seasonal vegetables, or go all out and use both. If you opt for uncooked greens, grab a fistful of your favorite salad base (spinach, arugula, kale, and radicchio are all great options) and place it on one side of your bowl—be careful not to add too many leaves here, lest you end up with a salad.

Steamed chard, roasted beets, or sautéed mushrooms are all great options for cooked vegetables, but really, the sky's the limit. During colder months, I usually go with roasted vegetables like cauliflower, broccoli rabe, and brussels sprouts. Add just enough vegetables to your bowl to cover roughly half to three-quarters of the grains so that there's room for protein.

Pick A Protein Or Two: While you can pick your grain and vegetables independent of each other, try to consider which protein will taste best with the vegetables you have chosen. Salmon, for example, pairs well with lemony sautéed spinach, and kale and bacon are a match made in heaven. Looking for a vegetarian option? Plop in a creamy cheese like ricotta and rejoice as it spills over your greens, or fry up some tofu or tempeh. When in doubt, a poached egg is always a good idea—just make sure that the yolk is soft enough that it blankets the rest of the ingredients with its runny goodness when it breaks.

Drizzle On Your Favorite Dressing Or Sauce: Here is the part where you can decide the “personality” of your grain bowl. Is it going to be tart and tangy, creamy and dreamy, or super-duper spicy? I suggest you seek inspiration from the forgotten condiments in your refrigerator door. Pesto, harissa, Sriracha, and peanut sauce can be used with a heavy hand. Or, add a soup base like chicken broth or coconut milk to your dressing to provide a deeper flavor without overpowering the natural taste of the vegetables. I often opt for something in-between, like a vinaigrette made of red wine vinegar and honey.

The Finishing Touch: Add Some Garnishes: Garnishes are the most overlooked component of grain bowls, but they can be just the thing you need to turn an average weeknight meal into a pièce de résistance. Consider adding mandolined cucumber, pickled radishes, toasted seaweed, or avocado slices. Another idea: Get some crunch in with toasted panko crumbs, toasted nuts (like cashews and peanuts), and seeds. You can also turn to herbs like cilantro and dill for a picture-perfect finish.

RECIPE

Vegetable stuffed flower bites

(Serves 4; cooking time 20 minutes)



Ingredients

For dough:

- 1 cup semolina
- 1 tbsp curd
- 1 tbsp oil
- Salt as per taste
- Warm water as needed to make soft dough

For stuffing:

- 1 cup finely chopped cabbage
- 1/2 cup finely chopped carrot and French beans
- 1/4 cup colored bell pepper (red, yellow, green) finely chopped
- Salt as per taste
- 2 tbsp. Olive oil
- 1 tsp. Ginger-Garlic paste
- 1 tsp. chilly flakes
- 1/2 tsp. black pepper powder
- 1 tsp. Vinegar
- For coating
- 1/2 cup soaked rice

Directions

- Add semolina, salt, oil and curd mix well in a bowl; knead to a soft dough with warm water.
- Cover and set it aside to rest for 5 minutes.
- Saute ginger-garlic paste with olive oil in a pan.
- Add chopped carrot and French beans, mix well, cover and cook for 2 minutes.
- Add cabbage, salt, black pepper powder, and chili flakes to the pan. Sauté well on high flame for 2 minutes. Finally, add vinegar and transfer the mixture to a bowl.
- Knead dough on the kitchen-top, divide into small balls and slightly flatten them out on the palm.
- Place the stuffing in the center of flattened dough and stick the sides together to form a tight ball. Coat the ball with soaked rice, sprinkle with chilli powder and place on cabbage leaves in a steamer. Steam for 10-12 minutes and serve hot with schezwan sauce.



Chef Chhaya Thakker

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

Freeze-Dried Fruit Makes Any Meat Taste Better

Fruit and meat is a timeless combination. Cantaloupe and prosciutto, mango and chicken, cranberry and turkey, apricot and lamb. There is a pantry-friendly alternative to channel the fruit-and-meat concept year-round: freeze-dried fruit.

Available at many grocery stores and online, this ingredient is deserving of so much more than trail mix. When finely ground, it becomes the floral, tart essence of fruit, able to permeate any meat dish without overpowering.

How to Make Freeze-Dried Fruit Powder

If you can only find whole freeze-dried fruit (often easier to locate than pre-ground), here is how to DIY: Use a spice grinder, high-power



blender, or food processor to grind the fruit into a very fine powder. Depending on how large of

a batch you are making, you may need to pause the motor and use a spoon or spatula to move around the fruit to ensure the powder grinds evenly. The finer the grind, the more highly concentrated—and therefore, flavor-packing—the powder will be. Post-grind, this mixture can be stored in an airtight container in the pantry for future use.

Freeze-Dried Fruit in Marinades

Juiced, smashed, or pureed fruit is a common marinade ingredient for cuts of poultry and beef. You know marinades' deal: These mixtures of oil, acid, and seasoning flavor and tenderize meat in a relatively hands-off manner. Adding fruit to a marinade offers sweetness tinged with tang in

the way only fruit can do.

As it does not offer the same enzymatic tenderizing properties as fresh kiwi or pineapple—which can, in fact, be so powerful that they turn meat mushy if left for too long—ground freeze-dried fruit can be mixed into any simple marinade without affecting the timing of the recipe. A couple tablespoons is a good place to start.

Try adding an extra punch to a kombucha-based marinade by tossing in fruit powder that goes with the lemon-ginger brew, like cherry or pomegranate; it works on steak and other meat, but do not forget tofu, too! Or add a bit of mango, apricot, or plum powder to a yogurt-marinated chicken.

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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

New 15-year, 5 (3+2+3+3+4) program of Indian Education System

The Times Kuwait, in collaboration with eminent educationist and principal of Indian Learners' Own Academy in Kuwait, Asha Sharma, is starting a regular fortnightly column on education that aims to apprise our readers about the latest developments in education, and in particular on the new National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) that was unveiled recently by the Indian government. If you have any queries about NEP 2020, its clauses and its implications on you as a student, or as a parent of a school-going child, we would like to hear from you, send your queries to editortimeskuwait@gmail.com. Principal Sharma will be providing you with the most accurate answers and right guidance to all your questions.



ASHA SHARMA
Principal
Indian Learners' Own
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National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) envisions an India-centric education system that contributes directly to transforming our nation sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society by providing high-quality education to all.

The new education policy has increased one year of schooling for children. Schools will have to take the 3+ age group of children into their folds. Earlier this age group had been kept away from schools and in many places 'anganwadis' or 'preparatory schools' were functioning in their place. But now the charge has been given to affiliated or recognized schools to look after and channelize education for even 3+ children.

The new five-tier system of education is as follows:

- 3+, 4+ and 5+ years of age = Kindergarten (3 years pre-primary)
- 6+ and 7+ years of age = classes 1 and 2 (2 years lower primary)
- 8+, 9+ and 10+ years of age = classes 3, 4 and 5 (3 years upper primary)
- 11+, 12+ and 13+ years of age = classes 6, 7 and 8 (3 years middle)



- 14+, 15+, 16+ and 17+ years of age = classes 9, 10, 11 and 12 (4 years secondary)

As per the recommendation there will be checkpoints at the end of class 3, 5 and 8 on national scale. All the students will face a national examination to check the quality of education rendered and uniformity in educational standards throughout India after class 3, 5 and 8. It will be like any international examination. This exam will not be declaring pass or fail results for any student.

New Education policy decided to implement national exams because of the shockingly poor performance of Indian students in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests. The PISA test is an international assessment that measures reading, mathematics, and science literacy every three years. First conducted in 2000 the PISA test also includes measures of general or cross-curricular competencies, such as collaborative problem solving. PISA emphasizes functional skills that students have acquired as they near the end of compulsory schooling. PISA is coordinated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), an intergovernmental organization of industrialized countries. In India unfortunately, there is too much of variance in

educational standards of various educational boards and among the schools registered under each board. The NEP 2020 aims to bring uniformity in education throughout India.

Why should schools look after 3+ children?

It has been scientifically proven that children's brains develop the most from birth till 7 years of age. The brain of the child is like wet clay which can be molded easily and has capacity to absorb the maximum

At birth, a baby's brain has 100 billion neurons or brain cells. By the age of two or three, each neuron is able to build around 2,500 synapses, or connections between brain cells. Scientists believe that language is acquired most easily within the first 7 years of age. A repeated exposure of words forms a circuit in the brain. Language develops through casual conversation, storytelling, songs, rhymes, reading, music and through many more activities. Love and care of adults stimulates the brain of the child. And if at this tender age children are not looked after properly by experts much harm can be done. Children with positive and strong emotional bonds grow better which can be ensured by trained teachers. For this reason, a special four-year training course has been devised for early education teachers.

The NEP 2020 begins by viewing early childhood care and education (ECCE) as an essential part of the foundational stage of school education (three years of pre-primary education plus Grades 1 and 2 of lower primary). This single curricular and pedagogical phase of play- and discovery-based learning is for very young children between the ages of 3-8 years. The flexibility in the first five years will enable equalizing of the multiple cognitive abilities of children.

This is followed by an Upper Primary phase consisting of three years (Grades 3, 4 and 5) of basic education incorporating some textbooks as well as aspects of more formal classroom learning. The next three years of Middle school education (Grades 6, 7 and 8) would involve developing more abstract thinking and subject teaching leading up to a Secondary education phase of four years (Grades 9, 10, 11 and 12). This last phase of four years of secondary school education will facilitate multidisciplinary studies with appropriate exit options besides preparing for the next phase of undergraduate program of study, including early introduction to Liberal Arts education.

"We are guilty of many errors and many faults, but our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the fountain of life. Many of the things we need can wait. The child cannot. Right now, is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made, and his senses are being developed. To him, we cannot answer 'Tomorrow'. His name is 'Today'."

**- Gabriela Mistral,
Nobel Prize recipient**



The self-explanatory observation of Gabriela, the Chilean poet laureate and educationist almost seven decades ago is still relevant today. 21st-century children need an education that aims at their holistic development and caters to their academic, physical, social, psychological, and emotional evolution. They also need a home away from home, a nest that represents love, growth, safety, possibilities, opportunities, skills and potential that enable them to venture into new horizons with confidence.

A well-designed goal, supported by an achievable vision, a mission that encourages each child to achieve livelihood and life skills that equip him or her for facing the future competently and confidently is needed. A plan that takes care of students of all age groups is required to develop skills that translate knowledge, understanding, attitude and values so that they are able to cope with the positive and negative events in their lives.

Next feature on the New Education Policy will throw light on early childhood care and education which is the foundation of learning.



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UN launches a Global Humanitarian Response Plan #PledgetoPause to Combat COVID-19 Misinformation

As part of the United Nations Secretary General's global push to stop the spread of COVID-19 misinformation online, UNSG asks supporters and the global population to join the movement on 21 October 2020.

From thought leaders, businesses and policymakers, to activists, celebrities and influential voices across a range of sectors will act together, making a #PledgetoPause and inviting audiences and networks to do the same.

How to Get Involved?

To participate you have to post a 'Moving Selfie' on social media platforms.

All you have to do is look into the camera, pause quietly for approximately 5-10 seconds, you do not have to be frozen but represent the 'pause' by sitting fairly still but blinking, etc

Break the pause and then make your #PledgetoPause to the camera by reading or adapting a script such as:

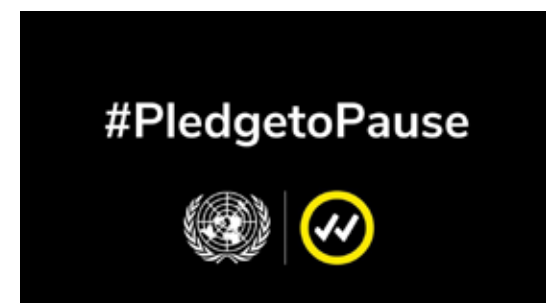
"I'm taking the Pledge to Pause before I share information online. Because

during the Covid-19 pandemic, the wrong information can be deadly. Please join me and stop the spread of misinformation online."

The video can be shot anywhere, UNSG request you to include your own face, the pause, and the pledge in your own voice.

You can post your film on 21st October 2020 using the hashtag #PledgetoPause and by tagging the United Nations

All assets, including videos, graphics, stickers, GIFs, and examples for creating your own posts will be available for quick



and easy download starting 12 October at www.takecarebeforeyoushare.org

Health app 'Shlonik' resounding success

Shlonik, the interactive app launched by the Ministry of Health (MoH) to engage and interact with citizens and expatriates to ensure their health-safety in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, is seen as a significant success for the ministry in its efforts to tackle the coronavirus pandemic.

According to Dr. Fahad Al-Ghimlas, the director of the Public Health Department and head of the main committee of the 'Shlonik' app at MoH, nearly 500,000 people in Kuwait have downloaded the app, which has assisted MoH in monitoring and curbing the spread of the virus in Kuwait.

He pointed out that the 'Shlonik' app has assisted the ministry in its plan to face the COVID-19 spread in society. The app allows MoH to follow up on those infected, as well as those suspected of COVID-19 during their home quarantine period. The Shlonik app — a combined effort of MOH, the Kuwait Central Agency of Information Technology and Zain Telecommunication — was launched in mid-April with the aim of checking up on people coming from abroad during the citizens' evacuation campaign. Its use was then expanded to include contacts of positive cases and coronavirus patients.

The app offers the latest health updates,



provides a self check-in mechanism for quarantined patients, allows for reporting health vitals, and acts as a means of communication between MoH medical teams and people infected or suspected of infection from the coronavirus.

It allows quarantined people to enter important data and report symptoms as soon as they appear so that medical teams can discover positive cases as quickly as possible and put them under appropriate medical care, said Dr. Al-Ghimlas. He urged all people to register on the 'Shlonik' app and to follow the instructions and respond to the notifications sent to them, as well as to abide by the quarantine procedures to prevent the spread of the virus.



No travel restrictions on Kuwaitis and expats during the home quarantine period

An official source at the Kuwait International Airport confirmed that there are no restrictions on Kuwaitis and expatriates, under domestic quarantine, wishing to travel abroad.

"The airport authorities have no objection to the travel of any person during the 14-day home quarantine as long as that person has not shown any sign of the new coronavirus," an Arabic daily reported. Arrivals in Kuwait are required to present a document showing a negative result of the PCR test, which checks the person's coronavirus status, and are also

required to sign a pledge to spend 14 days in domestic or institutional isolation.

In August, Kuwaiti authorities announced suspending flights from dozens of countries, citing health concerns over the spread of COVID-19. Many domestic workers have been unable to return to Kuwait as a result of the flight ban on their home countries.

Domestic workers coming from those countries holding valid residency permits can enter Kuwait, but only after spending 14 days in another country not on the ban list.

Diplomacy is about professionalism and passion

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We share the success of these projects with our reliable Ukrainian and Kuwaiti partners to whom we renew the assurance of our deep gratitude and appreciation. And that is just the beginning; we are still incredibly enthusiastic to continue and even boost realization of our ideas since it is an open secret that cultural diplomacy is a resourceful soft power that can really make a difference.

What challenges you faced as a woman diplomat and how easy or difficult do you think it is for women to work in diplomacy?

As US diplomat Richard Holbrooke once noted, 'Diplomacy is like jazz: endless variations on a theme'. So is our life: endless variations within the time limits granted to us. Indeed, diplomacy in the broad sense of the term, is what we do every day in communication with our families, friends or colleagues. At the same time, diplomacy as a profession is a big challenge itself. Diplomats have to be well-versed in numerous skills: stress resistance, quick reaction, creativity, life-long learning, analytical thinking, sense of humor, concentration, attention, constant application to the subject of negotiation or discourse as well as permanent self-development.

I believe diplomacy is not about gender prejudices, it is about professionalism and passion. Success in reaching the target is not related to gender, the question is whether you are ready to spare no efforts to climb the peak.

Women in Ukraine have always been active players in social and political life. Promoting gender equality is a driver of sustainable development in the country, and women empowerment is a crucial element of overall prosperity. In Ukraine you can see this principle in action. For example, Ukraine's Foreign Ministry is no longer a 'men's diplomatic club' — 43 percent of its employees are women, including many women ambassadors.

Kuwaiti women have also proven their ability in key and decision-making posts. By the way, the first woman in the Arabian Gulf appointed as an ambassador was Ms. Nabeela Al-Mulla, a Kuwaiti, and she made history becoming an influential role model for other Kuwaiti women diplomats. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to neglect difficulties which married diplomats may face (equally men and women). To be honest, it is rather difficult even to start a family when you change countries every 4 years; but if you are lucky to marry, then will your partner agree to participate in the kaleidoscope of your postings?

Thus, I feel that challenges which diplomats face do not refer to their gender, age, character etc. This profession offers equally tough conditions for men and women. In other words, no pain no gain.

What do you enjoy most in being a diplomat?

I fully agree with the opinion that a diplomat is someone who must possess sufficient knowledge on a maximum range of issues. A good diplomat is to some extent linguist, historian, orator, journalist, interpreter and psychologist preferably with some knowledge of arts. That is what I like the most about this profession, there are no limits for self-development and intellectual growth.

I also believe that diplomacy is a great opportunity to develop creative talents. The tasks are always multidisciplinary and it only depends on your skills and creativeness how to reach the goal. I often look for new algorithms of work for each unique case and this encourages me a lot.

Where do you see yourself in the coming years in your career?

I do not consider myself a sprinter in the career race. I am more interested in practical outputs

and moral satisfaction in my occupation. Moreover, the very first steps in my career path clearly showed me that there are still so many directions to explore.

I guess whatever field might interest me in the future, it would be definitely related to languages, interaction and inspiration.

What are your pastimes or hobbies?

I am keen on jogging and rollerblading, especially near the sea. The sea and the marvelous sunsets are another reason for my fascination with Kuwait. One of my favorite hobbies that brings me joy and delight is traveling. I feel happy when I explore new lifestyles and cuisines.

Perhaps, writing a PhD thesis will soon become my hobby since I am already doing preliminary research.

Any experience you would like to share with us?

'Professionalism and patriotism are absolutely essential for a diplomat'

Ambassador Dr. Yurii Kochubey, Ukrainian diplomat with more than 40 years' experience, historian, linguist, orientalist, Arabic language researcher.

'Professionalism, decency, patriotism' Motto of the Diplomatic Academy of Ukraine.

Details to lift ban from 34 countries being finalised

Tens and thousands of expat residents stranded abroad are expected to get relief soon as minister of health Dr Basel Al Sabah has promised to look into the proposal by local airlines to fly them direct into Kuwait.

The comprehensive proposal presented by the aviation sector in Kuwait, represented by Kuwait Airways and Jazeera Airways is moving towards implementation, which would mean the lifting of the ban on 34 countries from where flights were not permitted to enter Kuwait.

The Minister of Health, Dr. Basil Al-Sabah and the Ministry's senior team met with representatives of the aviation sector, where the proposal and ways to implement it were discussed extensively particularly regarding requirements and procedures followed in a way that would prevent the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, a daily reported, quoting informed sources.

The Arabic daily reported that the meeting ended with an agreement to hold intensive meetings between the various concerned authorities and the technical committees in the Ministry of Health to finalize the requirements, implement them efficiently with an aim to lift the ban on flights coming from the banned countries.

In accordance with the plan, the list of 34 banned countries will be canceled, and countries will be classified into two categories, the first low risk (A), and the second high risk (B) and includes the 34 countries according to the assessment of the health authorities in Kuwait.

The return of expatriates through direct flights will be limited to those who hold valid residency visas only, therefore the returnees will be employees who have jobs and a source of income and have a suitable residence to be isolated at home, according to sources.



Among the options will be home quarantine for all arrivals if the required conditions are met, but if the returnee does not prove that they have a suitable place for quarantine, they will be obligated to be institutionalized in a quarantine building and bear all the required costs until the end of the mandatory quarantine period.

The state will not bear any costs of the return of expats, who shall bear responsibility for all costs arising from his return trip, whether for tests or quarantine or anything else.

With regard to testing facilities upon the arrival of travelers, medical staff will be made available to take swabs from travelers arriving through each passenger terminal at Kuwait International Airport, and passenger data will be recorded in addition to swab samples at all the three inspection centers for arriving passengers, in T1, T4 and T5.

The Building Operation Department is responsible for setting up contracts with approved centers and coordinating with airlines to ensure all necessary data is obtained. A joint or separate agreement can be entered into with any laboratory

accredited by the Ministry of Health to conduct PCR tests.

Actions of arrivals from countries are as follows:

- 1 - Provide PCR certificate showing the negative status upon arrival at the Kuwait International Airport.
- 2 - Providing all passenger data required by MoH from airlines automatically to the system before arriving at the airport.
- 3 - After arrival, the arrivals' data is verified in the Shlonik app.
- 4 - Home quarantine for 7 days.
- 5 - Submit for a second PCR test on the seventh day from the date of arrival. In the event that a "negative" result is announced, the quarantine is automatically canceled after 7 days of quarantine have passed by the accredited laboratory under the supervision of the Ministry of Health.
- 6 - In the event the result is "positive", the quarantine period will be extended and the Ministry of Health procedures will be applied.
- 7 - The airline will bear the cost of the second "PCR" test after 7 days, which

will be collected from the passenger in advance.

Procedures for arrivals from "B" countries:

- 1 - Presenting a "PCR" test certificate with a "negative" result upon arrival at Kuwait International Airport.
- 2 - Automatically providing the passenger data from the airline to the MoH system before his arrival at the airport.
- 3 - After arrival, the arrivals' data is verified on the Shlonik system.
- 4 - Taking a second PCR test on all passengers at the airport upon arrival.
- 5 - Home quarantine for 7 days.
- 6 - Conducting a third PCR test on the seventh day from the date of arrival, and the home quarantine period ends when a "negative" result is announced. If there is a "positive" result, the quarantine period is extended and the Ministry of Health procedures are applicable.
- 7 - The airline will bear the cost of the second and third "PCR" tests on arrival, which is collected from the passenger in advance.

The decision of the Supreme Committee for the Restoration of Commercial Flights, Saad Al-Otaibi, said that the Directorate General of Civil Aviation welcomes any step that reduces the burden on incoming travelers and strengthens air transport in Kuwait, provided that it is in compliance with the preventive requirements and health procedures.

Al-Otaibi revealed, in a statement to a local daily, that the Supreme Committee had previously submitted to the health authorities a recommendation on 12 August to arrange an institutional quarantine for all passengers coming from the banned countries inside Kuwait hotels for a period of 14 days, to maintain the health system in Kuwait and abide by the instructions of the Ministry of Health.

Increasing deaths from coronavirus a cause of concern

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Especially since most businesses are only beginning to emerge from the economic devastations caused by the previous prolonged lockdown and curfew, that led to hundreds of thousands losing their jobs and many small businesses having to shut down.

Health authorities and decision-makers have said they are reviewing new measures to contain and curb the outbreak. With the nation on the cusp of a potential surge in cases and with the winter flu season on the horizon, the government has decided to implement a slew of measures aimed at containing the spread of the virus.

Recently, the Council of Ministers approved an amendment for imposing immediate and severe fines on violators of health regulations. Earlier this month the authorities had warned residents and citizens in the country to refrain from gatherings, and made it mandatory to wear face masks when venturing out of home.

The Ministry of Interior has stated that through its follow-up to prevent the holding of gatherings in all parts of the country, it has dealt legally

with people conducting weddings or public gatherings in contravention of the decision by the health authorities. The people responsible for these violations were summoned to the ministry and appropriate legal measures were initiated against them.

The government has also warned of the coronavirus situation worsening ahead of winter and the potential for a second wave of the virus infecting the country. The authorities reiterated their call to citizens and expatriates to strictly adhere to the precautionary and preventive rules and guidelines provided by the health ministry, and urged them to be aware of the seriousness of the situation and take extra care during the winter months, especially maintaining social distancing, avoiding crowded areas, wearing facemasks, and practicing proper sanitary measures.

The world is in the midst of a pandemic and any hopes of an early and speedy recovery have been dashed with a second wave of the virus now afflicting many countries. According to data from Johns Hopkins University, the global death toll has crossed 1,150,000 and infections hover over 42.5 million. For its part the World Health Organization (WHO) has warned that these figures on deaths and infections are on the lower side and that the actual numbers are likely to be much higher.

Kuwaiti and expat celebrities breaking social decency laws to be punished

Kuwaitis and expatriate celebrities will be severely punished for publishing pictures or clips on social media that violate public decency laws, vowed the Public Ethics and Cybercrime Department of the Ministry of Interior, said a local daily reported, quoting reliable security sources.

Higher authorities have issued instructions to deport expatriates to their respective countries immediately and adding their names to the list of persons barred from entering the country. Kuwaitis will be summoned and given a warning, and made to sign a pledge of good conduct or referred to the Public Prosecution depending on the severity of the offense.

The daily said, quoting a source that the issue was not subject to whims, but the summons will be issued depending on the evidence of a deliberate violation of customs, traditions and rules of modesty without any justification, and stressed that while freedoms are guaranteed, it is not permitted to show off disruptive behavior by publishing inappropriate or shameful pictures.

Criminal Security Sector has maintained a list of names of personalities who have recently published unacceptable material across their social media, which will be investigated for action to be taken, the daily said, quoting a source that indecency will not be tolerated.

Providing examples of deportation for erring online media celebrities, the daily highlighted the deportation of Lebanese TV presenter Sazdel within 72 hours of her arrest, and the arrest of an Iranian 'Fashionista' for publishing pictures on social media, which the Ministry of Interior decided was 'vulgar' and as punishment, she was deported.



The daily said, quoting a source that the Iranian provided no explanation to justify the clips and pictures on her account, and the account of others, some of which were deemed as 'vulgar'. Also reported was the arrest of a well-known Kuwaiti woman, who was sent to the Public Prosecution for publishing a clip that was in clear violation of public morals, a security source said yesterday.

A Kuwaiti Fashionista and her husband were also arrested after she posted a clip on social media, which they considered contained unacceptable connotations that went against public morals. The ministry emphasized the Cyber Crime Department monitors and follows up on any pictures and videos published on social media that violate public morals and does not tolerate anyone who misuses social media platforms regardless of reasons.

Assembly unanimously passes law to cut expatriate numbers



The National Assembly in its truncated one-day supplementary session of the 15th legislative term held on 20 October, unanimously passed a law that aims to realign the lopsided demographic imbalance in the country, by steadily reducing the number of expatriates in Kuwait in the coming years.

The law was passed in the second and final reading after several key amendments were introduced, including one that struck out the section calling for reducing the number of expatriates using a quota system for each nationality.

The new population law stipulates that the government will issue 'mechanisms' to deal with the population imbalance within one year of issuing the law and that these mechanisms should be designed to place a ceiling on the number of expatriates in the country. The law also authorizes the Cabinet to issue executive decisions each year to implement the mechanisms, and to provide the Assembly with annual reports on progress made.

In addition, the new law calls for the mechanisms to take into account the number of expats at the time of issuing

the decisions, and to consider the annual requirement of expatriate workers to implement the national development plan. The law also says that the mechanisms should issue guidelines governing the transfer of residency permits for expatriates, and introduce policies to train and replace expatriates with nationals in employment sectors.

In September, the parliamentary Human Resources Committee said it had finalized its report on the bill to adjust the demographic imbalance in the country. Member of the committee MP Badr Al-Mulla revealed that the bill consists of 10 articles including one that authorizing the Cabinet to specify the maximum number of expatriate workers that the country needs, as well as the maximum number of expatriates of every nationality within six

months after the ratification of the bill.

The bill adds that the concerned minister will be responsible for implementing the Cabinet's decision within a period of five years, and that the Cabinet should specify the number and specializations of the required expatriate workers within two years following ratification of the bill. The Cabinet should also issue reports on the number of required expatriate workers on a regular basis. The bill exempts some categories of workers from the maximum number of expatriates, including members of diplomatic delegations and their families, military delegations, medical and educational jobs, civil aviation operators like pilots and co-pilots, laborers needed in the implementation of infrastructure and development projects, and domestic workers.

Rejecting SME support dents economic revival hopes

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

revival in the wake of the huge economic crisis that has arisen from the coronavirus pandemic. One SME owner expressed his anger at the decision by saying, "We were

always suspicious of the government's intentions, but we did not expect that the blow would come to us from the nation's MPs, who are entrusted with the role of preserving the interests of the people. Unfortunately, some MPs stood against the financial support

law for political and electoral reasons, not technical ones, and we will remember them when we go to the polls."

Kuwait's economy which was already sluggish at the start of the year due to fall in oil revenues from a prolonged low international oil-price scenario, was thrown into deeper disarray with the onset of the COVID-19 crisis in late February. Extended curfews, lockdowns and business shut-downs over the last nine months have devastated many businesses in the private sector, especially among the country's many small and medium enterprises.

In all fairness, it needs to be said that with unusual alacrity and uncharacteristic cooperation from lawmakers, the government approved a slew of measures to revive the economy early on in the pandemic. Among the government's stimulus package aimed to revive the economy, was support to provide liquidity for SMEs, by postponing their loan repayment installments to the National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (NFSMED). Local banks also agreed to a request from the Central Bank and offered a moratorium of six months, starting in April, on loan repayments by SMEs. Furthermore, in a bid to encourage local banks to provide soft loans to SMEs, the Council of Ministers agreed to provide up to 80 percent of the SMEs' funding needs from the NFSMED (National fund for Small & Medium Enterprise Development, while banks would finance the balance 20 percent at an annual interest rate not exceeding 2.5 percent. In a further sop, the government also agreed to pay the interest on the loan for the first two years from the country's general budget, with clients having to share the interest only from the third year.

To further incentivize banks to extend soft loans to SMEs, the Central Bank reduced the risk weights for SME loans from 75 to 25 percent and agreed to include several stipulations designed to protect banks from default risk by SMEs. Among the conditions imposed on the loans was that the SME requesting a loan should be an existing client of the bank; should not have defaulted on any of its loan obligations in the past; and had to be a profitable venture before the virus outbreak.

Moreover, the loan could be utilized only to finance operational expenses, such as salaries, rents and for paying vendors, and should not go to repay instalments or loans. The SME would also not be allowed to make any dividend payout till the loan was completely paid off. Other stipulations included that the business should be in a value-adding sector of the country's economy and capable of creating national employment.

The downside to all these stringent conditions is that it turned away the majority of prospective SME borrowers — only around 150 SMEs from the nearly 30,000 small and medium enterprises in the country applied for the soft loans. Probably businesses in Kuwait, long accustomed to government bail-outs to see them through financial crises, were not ready to accept loans, no matter whether it was soft or hard.

What many SMEs wanted and expected the government to provide was more direct support in the form of grants or debt write-offs. But, this time around, with falling oil revenues and recurring deficit budgets straining liquidity, the government was unwilling, or

more probably unable, to hand-out anymore doles to businesses.

In July, as the virus was gaining ferocity in the country, Kuwait Financial Centre 'Markaz', one of the leading investment management and research companies in the country, issued a special report on SMEs in the country. The report highlighted the importance of SME sector to Kuwait's economy and pointed to some of the challenges the sector faced from the COVID-19 onslaught.

According to the report, the SMEs sector in the Kuwaiti economy contributes around 3 percent of the GDP, with the gross value added by the SMEs to the economy in 2019 a little over KD1.2 billion. The report also highlighted that there were around 30,000 licensed SMEs, representing around 90 percent of the total number of companies in the country. Around 40 percent of these companies were in the wholesale or retail trade, hotels and restaurants, while a further 33 percent were in construction and in the industry sectors.

Noting that most of the SMEs had limited cash reserves to start with, the report underlined that this situation deteriorated with new challenges specific to the pandemic. The temporary shut-down of business operations and labor shortages, from precautionary restrictions on movement of people by the authorities led to a severe loss in revenue to SMEs and constricted their cash flow. The report added that the financial impact on SMEs made it difficult for many of them to resume operations.

The COVID-19 crisis is unique in the unprecedented nature of its concurrent impact on economies around the world, and in the simultaneous blow that it has dealt to the global economy on both the supply and demand side. Consumers are not keen to keep consuming due to uncertainty over the future, while companies are unable to maintain production due to bottlenecks in supply chains or financial constraints.

Previous economic crises that have affected the supply side have usually been limited to companies that were financially vulnerable or were competitively inefficient. However, this crisis is unusual in that it has not differentiated between efficient or inefficient firms, or between companies that are resilient or vulnerable.

Also, unlike previous global economic crises, such as the one in 2008, this crisis clearly warrants both fiscal and monetary responses. However, with interest rates at near-zero levels previous monetary responses by the Central Bank, such as interest rate cuts or encouraging the easing of short-term liquidity problems for businesses, will clearly not be enough.

The overarching nature of the COVID-19 induced economic crisis has made it imperative for the authorities to undertake broad response measures aimed at concurrently reviving demand and removing supply and financing gridlocks. Experts recommend that the government should leverage all its resources to strengthen the fiscal response, and simultaneously address solvency issues exacerbated by the pandemic. They warn that failure to respond appropriately and in a timely manner could lead the country to an economic stagnation that could in the long-term prove prohibitively expensive economically, politically and socially.

BEFORE YOU SHARE, THINK:

WHO made it?

WHAT is the source?

WHERE did it come from?

WHY are you sharing this?

WHEN was it published?

#TAKECAREBEFOREYOUSHAKE



Food Journeys of a Life Time

Eat at extraordinary places around the globe

Eating is part of what makes travel so exhilarating. When one thinks of a place, one of the memorable experiences recalled is either because of the food eaten or the people one has shared it with. A meal abroad is more than an intake of calories, it is an exercise in cultural immersion. What people eat, when they eat, where and how they source their food, what gastronomic rituals they observe – all offer telling insights into a place and its people. Celebrating a unique relationship between food and travel, between place and plate, this endlessly fascinating adventure will be regularly featured on our pages.

ITALY

MILAN

A hub of style, sophistication, and creativity, this most modern of Italian cities is also a bastion of traditional cooking.



It only takes a mouthful to understand why Milan personifies the Italian concept of the *bella figura* (beautiful figure) like no place else. The idea goes far beyond the chic couture and stylish slippers for which the city is famous. It also implies beauty, quality, and taste, all of which are abundant in Milan's food. And it walks down a shiny runway at innovative chef Carlo Cracco's eponymous restaurant Cracco, just a few paces from the iconic Duomo cathedral. Here a warm chocolate croquette bursts like a liquid bomb in your mouth, while the pile of cool, saline fish eggs squeezed beside it on the spoon



does the same in miniature. If chocolate spells indulgence and caviar shouts extravagance, then a dessert that combines them both is surely luxury embodied. Down the street is a gourmet food shop called Peck, where cured hams are worth their weight in gold and the wine bottles in the cellar are older than some countries. Here opulence has been sold since 1883. But fortunately, the treats begin at just a few Euros. As you lick a cone of luscious honey gelato and admire the store's display cases, you can be confident that while not everyone is as well heeled as some of the clientele here, it is easy to be as well fed.

When to go: The best time to visit is during spring, early summer, or fall when the weather is fine. The summer months (July and August) can be too hot for shopping and sightseeing.

Planning: In Italy, many shops and most restaurants are closed on Sundays. Cracco is also shut for Saturday and Monday lunch. Ask to sit at the chef's table in the kitchen, where all of the kitchen is in view through an automatic sliding glass door. The chef will come in and talk to you about what would you like to eat; he might even deliver a course or two. The folks at Peck take a break on Sundays and Monday mornings. Saturday afternoons is when the rest of Milan stocks up on food and wine for the big Sunday family meal, so make the trip on a weekday afternoon instead.

Websites: www.ristorantecracco.it, www.peck.it

Wurst and Arepas

■ Milan's food is rustic and refined, classical and contemporary. And both Cracco and Peck reflect that in different ways.

A creamy pool of the classic risotto alla Milanese gets its golden hue from strands of saffron and its characteristics richness from-of all things-bone marrow. Order some to go at Peck or sit down to a plate at Cracco.



■ Vitello alla Milanese,

or veal cooked in the style of Milan, is Italy's answer to wiener schnitzel. At the prepared food counters of Peck you can find it as a traditional thin cutlet of breaded meat fried in olive oil and served with a wedge of lemon. Cracco offers building-block-size cubes of crispy carne that come flanked by ingredients that range from tomato and zucchini to savoy cabbage and pumpkin, depending on the season and the chef's whim.



LIVE LIKE A LORD

UNITED KINGDOM

Step into a refined, genteel past with a visit to one of England's country house hotels.



Tucked between Oxfordshire's rolling hills, since Norman times, the manor house that makes up Raymond Blanc's Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons, with its ancient walled garden, 17th century pond and orchards, and acres of herb and organic planting, is the epitome of English country luxury. A trip to an England manor house hotel such as this can make you feel like you are living in the pages of a Nancy Mitford novel. In each individually designed, elegant bedroom at Le Manoir, a decanter of fine Madeira awaits, ready for sipping as a nightcap. Alongside the luxurious surroundings, of course, Le Manoir is all about fine food. From the moment you wake up in the morning to the time you slip beneath the



covers at night, you will be in foodie heaven-and more than encouraged to indulge in a traditional English breakfast, cream teas in the lounge, the champagne bar, and, to cap it all, one of England's finest restaurants. Awarded two highly prized Michelin stars, Raymond Blanc's cooking is intimate, rich, and elegant; look out for his sophisticated treatments of luxurious ingredients and the perfectly fresh produce from Le Manoir's own beautifully maintained gardens, through which guests are invited to wander (and wonder at the diversity-there are 70 different herbs). Stay here for a couple of nights, and you will leave feeling to the manor born.

When to Go: To get the most out of a trip to one of these manors, with their carefully tended gardens, it is worth scheduling your visit for the late spring or early summer, when the kitchen gardens and herbaceous borders are at their very best.

Planning: English manors are formal places to stay, and you should make sure that the way you dress is suitable. Many manor houses require jacket and tie for gentleman diners; ladies should also be dressed formally. Be sure to book your meals at the same time you reserve your room.

Websites: www.manoir.com, www.lewtrenchard.co.uk, www.georgehotelofstamford.com

Country-house Favorites

■ Country house hotels with attached restaurants are a wonderful way to sample upper-crust English lifestyle

■ At the Jacobean Lewtrenchard Manor in Devon you can sleep in the bed that used to belong to Charles I's queen, Henrietta Maria. The manor's excellent restaurant also serves food fit for royalty.

■ A hostelry has stood on the site of The George Hotel in Stamford, Lincolnshire, for more than 900 years. Today, two gourmet restaurants, ancient walled gardens, inglenook fireplaces to snuggle in front of, and four-poster beds make staying here a luxurious way to experience British history.



EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Realizing Low-Carbon High Seas



JOSÉ MARÍA FIGUERES,

President of Costa Rica from 1994 to 1998, he is the founder of Ocean Unite and a board member of the Rocky Mountain Institute.

This month, delegates from governments around the world are meeting (virtually) for a crucial, albeit under-the-radar, climate summit at the United Nations International Maritime Organization (IMO). The topic is how to decarbonize the global shipping industry, which accounts for over 80 percent of world trade and more than one billion tons of greenhouse-gas emissions per year — more than any but the top-five emitting countries.

This massive source of emissions cannot be ignored. Our fossil-fuel addiction is having a disastrous impact on the planet, particularly on our oceans. Increased heat and acidity, melting sea ice, and decreasing oxygen levels are wiping out coral reefs, threatening marine life, and undermining the ocean's ability to function as a key ecosystem and climate regulator. Considering that every second breath we take comes from the ocean, our own health is directly linked to that of this natural system.



Scientists warn that we have just ten years at most to take the steps needed to keep global warming within 1.5 °C of pre-industrial levels, and thus to avert significant

risks to nature and humanity. Yet, despite a surge in public concern about the climate crisis, the IMO's meetings still attract barely a flicker of media attention. Most people have no idea who is representing their country in these talks, much less whether their governments are supporting or opposing stronger climate standards.

Back in 2018, nearly all countries supported the adoption of a meaningful decarbonization roadmap for halving the global shipping sector's emissions by 2050. But the crucial question of how to enforce this target has remained unanswered. Governments will try to break the impasse at this month's IMO meeting, and again at the 75th session of the Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC75) next month.

To that end, countries as diverse as China, India, France, and Nigeria are already coalescing around a sensible proposal: 'goal-based operational efficiency'. Under this approach, which is not as technical as it sounds, the international community would agree on targets for the maximum amount of carbon dioxide that each type of ship may emit per ton of cargo per mile traveled. With these caps in place, shipowners will then decide for themselves how to meet the decarbonization targets. With a steep enough target — reducing CO2 intensity by, say, 80 percent by 2030 — the shipping industry can both achieve emissions reductions in line with the Paris climate agreement and accommodate further growth in global trade.

As always, the devil will be in the details. One potential problem is that Japan and a few other countries are pushing to delay mandatory enforcement of tighter CO2 regulations until 2029 or 2030. If they succeed, the shipping industry's annual emissions will continue rising throughout this decade, pushing the Paris targets further out of reach.

But if governments can get their act together and adopt tough CO2 regulations, shipowners will have no shortage of options for meeting the new targets. For example, Flettner rotor sails can cut fuel consumption by more than 8 percent, and air-lubrication systems can reduce it by another 12 percent. Despite their demonstrated effectiveness, neither system has been installed in more than a handful of the world's 60,000 or so commercial vessels. And even if shipowners

are short of cash to invest in these common-sense measures, merely reducing their vessels' speed by 20 percent would cut emissions and fuel costs by 24-34 percent.

To be sure, getting the industry to net-zero emissions also will require a much broader shift away from fossil-fuel propulsion systems. But, here, the shipping industry itself is ahead of the laggard governments that are trying to block progress at the IMO. Under the auspices of the Getting to Zero coalition, more than 120 major companies are already working to commercialize zero-emission vessels within the next ten years.

“With a steep enough target — reducing CO2 intensity by, say, 80 percent by 2030 — the shipping industry can both achieve emissions reductions in line with the Paris climate agreement and accommodate further growth in global trade.”

These plans will yield far-reaching benefits for developing countries that are rich in renewable energy. Clean shipping offers a triple win: In addition to shrinking the burden of air pollution, it also reduces hefty oil-import bills and boosts inward investment to national renewable-energy sectors. For example, according to a study by the Environmental Defense Fund, Chile could unlock up to \$90 billion of investment in renewable-energy infrastructure if its ships were to shift from fossil fuels to green hydrogen-based fuels manufactured with renewable energy.

As with so much else in the climate debate, the real obstacle to achieving a sustainable future is not technology, but politics. If governments can finally agree to set tough emissions regulations for all the world's ships at the IMO this year, they will have charted a course for a cleaner, greener global trade system, powered by abundant renewable energy. That would be good for the planet, the ocean, and humanity.



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Weighted blankets can decrease insomnia

Studies by Swedish researchers have suggested a relatively simple technique to overcome or mitigate insomnia, a common sleep disorder that has been found to affect 10 to 30 percent of the global population. The use of weighted blankets was shown to improve the sleep pattern of people suffering from chronic insomnia.

Most cases of insomnia are related to poor sleep habits

and lifestyles, however, chronic insomnia, characterized by symptoms that occur at least three times per week for at least three months, could be caused by depression, anxiety, chronic illness, or certain medications.

Symptoms of insomnia include finding it difficult to fall asleep or to stay asleep, it can cause a person to wake up too early and then be unable to get back to sleep. While the symptoms

are more common in older adults, women, and in people with medical and mental ill health, it can affect anyone and impair their ability to function effectively when they wake up.

For most people affected by insomnia, practicing healthy lifestyle habits and good sleep hygiene can alleviate their insomnia symptoms and help them sleep more soundly. However, for those affected by chronic insomnia, doctors may recommend prescription medications or cognitive-behavioral therapies.

The new study showed that weighted blankets are a safe and effective intervention in the treatment of insomnia. Results of the randomized, controlled study show that participants using the weighted blanket for four weeks reported significantly reduced insomnia severity, better sleep maintenance, a higher daytime activity level, and reduced symptoms of fatigue, depression and anxiety. The study involved 120 adults (68% women, 32% men) previously diagnosed with clinical insomnia and a co-occurring psychiatric disorder: major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or generalized anxiety disorder. They had a mean age of about 40 years.

Participants were randomized to sleep for four weeks at home with

either a chain-weighted blanket or a control blanket. Participants in one group chose blankets ranging in weight from 6 to 8 kilograms, while those in the control group slept with a light plastic chain blanket of 1.5 kilograms. The primary outcome of a change in insomnia severity, was evaluated using the Insomnia Severity Index (ISI). Wrist actigraphy was used to estimate sleep and daytime activity levels.

Nearly 60 percent of weighted blanket users had a positive response with a decrease of 50 percent or more in their ISI score from the baseline to the four-week endpoint, compared with 5.4 percent of the control group. Remission, a score of seven or less on the ISI scale, was 42.2 percent in the weighted blanket group, compared with 3.6 percent in the control group.

Participants who switched from the control blanket to a weighted blanket experienced a similar effect as patients who used the weighted blanket initially. After the initial four-week study, all participants had the option to use the weighted blanket for a 12-month follow-up phase. After 12 months, 92 percent of weighted blanket users were responders, and 78 percent were in remission.

The researchers said they were surprised by the large effect size on insomnia by the weighted blanket and pleased by the



reduction of levels of both anxiety and depression. Participants in the weighted blanket group were almost 26 times more likely to experience a decrease of 50 percent or more in their insomnia severity compared with the control group, and they were nearly 20 times more likely to achieve remission of their insomnia. Positive results were maintained during a 12-month, open follow-up phase of the study.

The study results support the psychoanalytic 'holding environment' theory, which states that touch is a basic need that provides calming and comfort. A suggested explanation for the calming and sleep-promoting effect is the pressure that the chain blanket applies on different points on the body, stimulating the sensation of touch and the sense of muscles and joints, similar to acupressure and massage.

Brain cells indicate confidence level



Researchers at the University of Bonn in Germany have unexpectedly found that the activity of specific cells in the brain determines how confidently we make our decisions. The finding was serendipitous, as the researchers were actually studying a completely different evaluation mechanism.

Every day we have to make decisions, and we tend to be much more confident about some of them than others. Researchers have now identified nerve cells in the brain whose activity indicates the confidence in decisions. For their study, the researchers showed participants in the experiment photos of two different snacks and asked them to use a slider to indicate which of these alternatives they would rather eat. The confidence level of their decision was indicated by how far they moved the slider from its center position towards the left or right photo.

Participants had to judge a total of 190 different snack pairs in this way. At the same time, the scientists recorded the activity of 830 nerve cells in the so-called temporal lobe of the

brain which is responsible for creating and preserving both conscious and long-time memory. The researchers found that the frequency of electrical pulses in some neurons, referred to as the 'firing rate' of the cell, changed with increasing decision confidence. For instance, some cells fired more frequently, the more confident the respective test person was in their decision. It is the first time that such a correlation between activity and decision confidence has been identified. Since the affected neurons are located in a brain region that plays a role in memory processes, the team suggested that it is possible that people not only store what decision they make, but also how confident they were when making it. They speculated that such a learning process probably saves us from making wrong decisions in future.

The researchers were actually working on finding a treatment for epilepsy by studying an area of the brain where epileptic seizures always seem to originate. Since ethical reasons usually prohibit the study of the state of individual neurons in living humans, in order to pinpoint the exact location of the defective site in the brain, the researchers implanted several electrodes in the patients over the entire potentially affected area. It was the response from these electrodes that allowed the researchers to gain insight into the functioning of individual nerve cells in the brain, and by chance, in the decision-making process.

Anxiety, worry, feature high in Google searches

Searches on Google for the terms 'anxiety', 'worry', and therapeutic techniques to manage these conditions have soared in response to the ongoing pandemic, say researchers studying the burden that COVID-19 pandemic has placed on people's physical and mental health.

Rising infection numbers and death toll from the virus has had a devastating effect on the physical health of people around the world. In addition to their physical health, it is now increasingly clear that this crisis is also having a significant effect on the mental health of people.

In their new study, researchers at Tulane University in the United States seeking an alternative way to determine the pandemic's impact

on mental health turned to Google search requests, since it reflects the relatively uncensored desires of people for information.

The researchers compared pre- and post-pandemic search terms by accessing the weekly Google search terms in the US from 21 April 2019 to 21 April, 2020.

Their study turned up four relevant data. Firstly, following the announcement of the pandemic, search terms related to 'worry' increased significantly. These terms included 'worry,' 'worry health,' 'panic,' and 'hysteria.' Secondly, people shifted to searching for anxiety symptoms, which spiked after the initial flurry of worry-related search terms.

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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Recovery needs development aid



KEVIN RUDD

A former prime minister of Australia, he is a member of the International Monetary Fund's External Advisory Group, Chair of the United Nations Global Partnership on Sanitation and Water for All, and President of the Asia Society Policy Institute.

At the start of the year, when COVID-19 was ravaging Wuhan, China, and beginning to envelop the West, I warned that the crisis would likely be replicated across much of the developing world, with significant long-term consequences for us all. Sadly, this prediction was correct.

As of mid-October, India is on track to overtake the United States as the country with the highest total of COVID-19 cases, and Latin America has experienced the most deaths of any region of the world. The World Bank warns that the pandemic could push around 50 million people in Asia and around 30 million in Africa into extreme poverty this year alone. If so, it will be the first time in more than two decades that the global rate of extreme poverty has increased.

“Increasing development aid during the pandemic is not only the right thing to do, it is also a smart strategy to buttress our own economic recovery. Too often, we see foreign aid as a handout rather than as a stepping-stone to prosperity.”

The COVID-19 crisis has also accelerated other concerning shifts that were already underway, including the escalation of tensions between the US and China, rising protectionism, and a carbon-intensive recovery that threatens to set the world back in the fight against climate change. All of these trends will



make the pre-pandemic development agenda even more difficult to achieve.

At the global level, the challenge is to ensure that vulnerable people everywhere are protected. Failing that, we will be entering a much more dangerous world, and the prospects for a robust global economic recovery will be severely diminished.

I know from experience just how important the current moment is. Even in the midst of the global financial crisis a decade ago, my government remained steadfast in our commitment to increase Australia's foreign-aid budget to 0.5 percent of gross national income (GNI). Unfortunately, that change was delayed, and Australia's foreign assistance has since fallen to its lowest ever at less than half that committed level.

To their credit, British Prime Minister David Cameron's government pursued a similar course of action in 2013 legislating, even in the midst of the austerity that followed, a commitment to the foreign-aid target of 0.7 percent of GNI called for under the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at the time. And even earlier, at the height of the crisis in April 2009, my government worked with that of British Prime Minister Gordon Brown to ensure that the world's largest economies reaffirmed their commitments to achieving

the MDGs despite the crisis.

As the ones holding the purse strings, legislators have a particularly important role to play in ensuring that governments do not lose sight of the development agenda as they rush to protect their own populations from the devastating health and economic fallout of this pandemic.

The good news is that some governments, especially in Europe, have already recognized the importance of increasing their foreign aid at this time. The bad news is that the UN secretary-general's call for a \$2 billion recovery fund for the world's poorest countries has not yet been met, nor have mission-critical organizations like Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance — which helps to deploy vaccines in developing countries — received anywhere near as much support as they need. And other development needs that will be crucial for resolving the crisis, not least water and sanitation, are crying out for attention.

Increasing development aid during the pandemic is not only the right thing to do. It is also a smart strategy for buttressing our own economic recovery. But foreign-aid increases by some countries obviously have been offset by the actions of others, notably the US, which has cut its assistance during this crisis, including to critical institutions

like the World Health Organization.

The problem is that too often, we see foreign aid as a handout rather than as a stepping-stone to prosperity. I have made this point in Australia, where economic recovery will depend on the broader recovery across Asia. Australia relies heavily on regional trade, and international education has become Australia's third-largest export: one-sixth of all university students in the country hail from somewhere else in the region.

Under Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva's leadership, the International Monetary Fund has been at the forefront of cushioning the pandemic's blow to the global economy, and especially to the world's most vulnerable populations. Having learned from the experience of the global financial crisis a decade ago, the IMF has already funneled more than \$100 billion in financial assistance to countries in need.

Still, more reforms to the international financial system could be made to put us on the road to a full global recovery. For example, we need to ensure that today's increased support for the IMF is seen not as a one-off injection, but rather as the start of an effort to provide more resources over the long term. Equally important, at some point the distribution of membership shares must be realigned to increase the weight of dynamic emerging-market economies in the IMF's decision-making.

At the same time, actions taken by the G20 and groups like the Paris Club are critical, and have already allowed more than 40 countries to suspend debt repayments, sparing them the hard choices between servicing debts and saving lives. But the challenge for lenders now is to figure out how to provide more systemic relief, rather than simply turning the tap back on once the crisis seems to have passed, or once their own economic recovery or domestic interests demand it.

Whether we emerge from this crisis stronger or weaker will depend as much on governments' decisions affecting people elsewhere rather than on decisions only for their own populations. Now more than ever, we need governments to act as global citizens.

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Hollow optical fiber reduces signal noise

A new hollow optical fiber, developed by researchers at the University of Central Florida in the United States, significantly reduces the 'noise' in its transmitted signal compared to current optical fibers.

An optical fiber is a flexible, transparent fiber made of glass (silica) or plastic with a diameter slightly thicker than that of a human hair. Optical fibers usually transmit light between the two ends of the fiber and are widely used in fiber-optic communications, where they permit the transmission of data over longer distances and at higher bandwidths (data transfer rates) than electrical cables. Optical fibers are used instead of metal wires in the transmission cable because signals travel along them with less loss; in addition, fibers are immune to electromagnetic interference, a problem from which metal wires suffer.

However, disturbances collectively termed as 'noise' can mask or disrupt a signal being sent by light through an optical fiber. One such disturbance is caused by phonons — quantized acoustic or sound waves that occur at atomic and subatomic levels, in this case in the glass of an optical fiber.

Phonons cause a beam of light to 'scatter' off the acoustic waves, creating splinter beams of different frequencies, or colors, that can interfere with, and reduce the energy of, the main beam. While some forms of scattering can be useful for specific applications, it interferes with quantum applications and even basic optical communications.

Noise can be reduced by cooling the fibers to extremely low, cryogenic temperatures, but that is a very expensive and complicated process. The new anti-

resonant hollow-core fiber, developed by the researchers, represents a straightforward lower cost solution that works even at room temperatures.

The new fiber features a unique arrangement of seven hollow capillaries arranged around a hollow core inside the fiber. This results in minimal overlap between the fiber's outer layer of glass and the light traveling through the core, eliminating interference from acoustic phonons emanating from the glass.

This arrangement has been found to be 10 times more effective at reducing noise than other hollow fiber designs. "The little noise that remains is caused by acoustic waves in the air inside the fiber, so if you were to evacuate that air it would be another 100 times more effective," said the researchers.

The new anti-resonant hollow-core fiber



has been shown to produce a thousand times less 'noise' — and is the lowest levels ever recorded from interference caused by acoustic phonons arising from the glass in the fiber at room temperatures.

The new fiber could be a promising platform for low noise applications, such as for quantum information processing and optical communications.

New app combines Messenger and Instagram chats



Small business owners can now manage pages and profiles across Facebook, Messenger, and Instagram, through a new app launched by Facebook.

Announcing this recently, Facebook Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg said in a blog that the new app called Facebook Business Suite, will merge the back end infrastructure of the three apps so small business owners can receive messages from customers, alerts, and notifications in one unified inbox.

The COO also confirmed that Facebook plans to add WhatsApp

integration in the future.

The new app will also allow small businesses to post to Facebook and Instagram at the same time and provide insights about how ad campaigns are performing on the platforms. Much of this cross-posting functionality already is available for admins of Instagram business accounts linked to Facebook Pages Facebook has reportedly been working on integrating its services since last year. The aim is to keep WhatsApp, Instagram, and Messenger as three separate apps but to allow cross-app communications.

Amazon launches cloud gaming product

During its Devices and Services event last week, Amazon surprised many by launching Luna, a cloud gaming competitor to established players including Google Stadia and Microsoft xCloud.

The company is launching the product in early access at an introductory price of \$5.99 per month. Users will be able to stream titles wirelessly without downloading the games and can play across PC, Mac and iOS (via the web).

In its announcement of the launch, Amazon added that more than 50 games would be available at launch in the Luna+ app, including at least one Sonic title and Remedy Entertainment's Control. The company has also reportedly partnered with Ubisoft but users will probably have to subscribe separately to get access to those titles. The whole service is powered by Amazon Web Service (AWS), the Amazon subsidiary providing on-demand cloud computing. Elaborating on the performance of the new product, Amazon said that users will be able to play titles at up to 4K resolution and 60fps speed. One of the big selling points for



the platform will be its integration with Twitch, the world's leading live-streaming platform for gamers. This will theoretically allow gamers to dive right into the titles they just saw their favorite streamers playing; however, this will depend heavily on coaxing streamers to play the limited subsection of titles that are present on Luna.

Much like Google Stadia, Amazon will also be selling a custom controller that connects directly to the service

to reduce latency. The Alexa-enabled Luna Controller will retail for \$49.99 during the early access period.

With Amazon entering the fray to define the new gaming platform, Google Stadia and Microsoft xCloud will invariably face a tough competitor, though it needs to be said that Microsoft has a head start with games as it can leverage its existing relationships with developers and its own network of Microsoft-owned studios.

Industrial waste found to absorb carbon dioxide

Geological researchers at the University of British Columbia in Canada have discovered that crushed rock could be used as a vault to perpetually lock in carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions, which have been implicated as among the reasons for global warming.

Working at the Gahcho Kué open pit diamond mine, just south of the Arctic Circle — where the global mining company De Beers has so far unearthed some four million carats' worth of diamonds — the researchers bubbled a mix of CO₂ and nitrogen gas simulating diesel exhaust through a grayish green slurry of crushed mine waste in water. Over the next two days, iron in the slurry was found to be oxidizing while its magnesium and calcium

were sucking up CO₂ and turning it into carbon-based minerals.

The special CO₂-devouring waste from the diamond mine is an exotic deep-earth rock that shoots up to the surface in volcanic eruptions that bring up the diamonds. But a wide array of rock and mud-like wastes from mining, cement and aluminum production, coal burning, and other large-scale industrial processes share a similar affinity for the greenhouse gas. Known as alkaline solid wastes, these materials have a high pH, which causes them to react with CO₂, a mild acid. And unlike other schemes for drawing excess CO₂ from the atmosphere, these reactive rocks can both capture the gas and store it, locked away



permanently in a solid mineral.

"The potential is real and it could make an important contribution to lowering CO₂, said

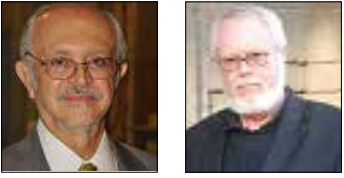
the geological team. They believe that if their findings can be adapted it could address two environmental problems at the same time. Today, mines and industry generate some 2 billion tons of alkaline solid wastes every year, and more than 90 billion tons are stored behind fragile dams and heaped in waste piles, a threat to people and ecosystems. Moreover, caustic leachates from mountains of steel slag waste flow into rivers and wipe out fish populations in many mining districts around the world.

Using the industrial waste to trap the CO₂ could be a big win for the environment and for industries looking to eradicate the piles of waste in a green-manner.



EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Time Bomb at the Top of the World



MARIO MOLINA AND DURWOOD ZAEKE

Mario Molina, a 1995 Nobel laureate in chemistry, was a professor at the University of California, San Diego, and the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Durwood Zaelke is President of the Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development and a co-director of the Program on Governance for Sustainable Development at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

It is hard to imagine more devastating effects of climate change than the fires that have been raging in California, Oregon, and Washington, or the procession of hurricanes that have approached and at times ravaged the Gulf Coast. There have also been deadly heat waves in India, Pakistan, and Europe, and devastating flooding in Southeast Asia. But there is far worse ahead, with one risk, in particular, so great that it alone threatens humanity itself: the rapid depletion of Arctic sea ice.

Recalling an Alfred Hitchcock movie, this climate 'bomb' — which, at a certain point, could more than double the rate of global warming — has a timer that is being watched with growing anxiety. Each September, the extent of Arctic sea ice reaches its lowest level, before the lengthening darkness

“ Loss of all Arctic ice during the entire sunlit months would be equivalent to adding one trillion tons of CO₂ to the atmosphere. In context, in 270 years of the Industrial Revolution, only 2.4 trillion tons of CO₂ were added to the atmosphere. ”

and falling temperatures cause it to begin to expand again. At this point, scientists compare its extent to previous years.

The results should frighten us all. This year, measurements from the National Snow and Ice Data Center in Boulder, Colorado show that there is less ice in the middle of the Arctic than ever before, and just-published research shows that winter sea ice in the Arctic's Bering Sea hit its lowest level in 5,500 years in 2018 and 2019.

Over the entire Arctic, sea ice reached its second-lowest extent ever on September 15. Amounts vary from year to year, but the trend is inexorably downward: the 14 Septembers with the least sea ice have all been in the last 14 years.

But sea ice is not only covering less area; it is also thinner than ever. The oldest sea ice (more than four years old), which is more resistant to melting, now comprises less than 1 percent of all sea ice cover. First-year ice now dominates, leaving the sea cover more fragile and quicker to melt. Scientists now expect the Arctic Ocean could be almost ice-free in late summer within a decade or two.

The effects would be catastrophic. In the extreme scenario, which could happen within decades, loss of all ice during the entirety of the sunlit months would produce



global radiative heating equivalent to adding one trillion tons of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. To put this in perspective, in the 270 years since the Industrial Revolution began, 2.4 trillion tons of CO₂ have been added to the atmosphere. About 30 percent of the Arctic warming has already been added to the climate because of the ice lost between 1979 and 2016, and more warming follows quickly as more of the remaining ice is lost.

This extreme scenario would drive climate change forward by 25 years, and it is hardly farfetched. Just last month, a block of ice about twice the size of Manhattan broke off from the largest remaining Arctic ice shelf, in Northeast Greenland, after record summer temperatures.

Meanwhile, on land, the Greenland Ice Sheet is also in peril. With Arctic warming occurring at least twice as fast as average global warming, Greenland's rate of melting has at least tripled over the last two decades. It is believed that this will become irreversible in a decade or less. Eventually, this melting will cause sea levels to rise by up to seven meters, drowning coastal cities, though this peak will most likely not be reached for hundreds of years.

Compounding the problem of accelerating Arctic warming is the self-reinforcing feedback risk of permafrost thawing. With about twice as much carbon locked away in permafrost as is already in the atmosphere, releasing even some of it could be disastrous. Permafrost thawing would also release even more potent greenhouse gases: nitrous oxide and methane. As global temperatures rise, it also is possible that even more methane could be emitted from the East Siberian Arctic Shelf's shallow seabed.

Clearly, urgent action is needed to mitigate these tremendous, even existential, risks. Rapidly reducing CO₂ emissions is necessary, but not nearly sufficient. In fact, studies show that even rapid cuts in CO₂ would mitigate only about 0.1-0.3°C of CO₂ warming by 2050.

That is why it is also vital to slash emissions of so-called short-lived climate pollutants: methane, black carbon, hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), and tropospheric ozone. Such action could mitigate six times as much warming as reductions in CO₂ emissions by 2050. Overall, eliminating emissions of these super pollutants would halve the rate of overall global warming, and reduce projected Arctic warming by two-thirds.

Some progress is being made. Almost four years ago, in Kigali, Rwanda, 197 countries adopted an amendment to the Montreal Protocol focused on phasing

out HFCs. (Already, the Montreal Protocol has facilitated the phase-out of nearly 100 chemicals that fuel global warming and endanger the ozone layer.)

Moreover, in the United States, the Senate reached a bipartisan deal last month to cut the production and importation of HFCs by 85 percent by 2036. California, for its part, has slashed black carbon emissions by 90 percent since the 1960s, and will halve the remainder by 2030. And the US Climate Alliance, a bipartisan group of 25 state governors, has set the goal of reducing methane emissions

by 40 to 50 percent by 2030.

These are laudable goals. But reaching them, let alone the more ambitious targets needed to stem the rise in global temperature, will require us to overcome strong headwinds. The Arctic, and the entire planet, will be in grave danger unless we radically strengthen efforts to cut emissions of both CO₂ and short-lived climate pollutants. People all over the world are already losing their homes and livelihoods to deadly fires, floods, storms, and other disasters. Far worse could be yet to come.

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