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## Grill heats up even before Parliament reconvenes

### THE TIMES REPORT

Last week, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanim said that he received a grilling motion from MPs Mohammad Al-Mutair and Dr. Bader Al-Dahoum against His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

The Speaker added that the grilling motion from the two lawmakers will be scheduled in the agenda of the first ordinary session of parliament so as to set a date for discussion. The National Assembly is expected to reconvene only after 18 March, due to the suspension of regular sessions for a one-month period by His



Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on 18 February.

The crux of the grilling motion filed by the two deputies centers around the issue of "selectivity in the application of the law".

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### A NEW TAKE ON TAKE-OUTS

Kuwaitis have invented innovative ways to enjoy eating-out despite the government ban on entering restaurants to dine.

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# Ambassador Majdi Al Dhafiri

## An unassuming diplomat

In 1980, when a 22-year old Majdi Al-Dhafiri, a political science graduate fresh out of Kuwait University was selected to join the country's Foreign Ministry there were a lot of surprised faces. Questions were raised on how an inexperienced freshman would fare in an entrenched world of traditional global governance structures.

Forty years later, when the Cabinet last week approved a draft decree appointing Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafir as Deputy Foreign Minister of Kuwait, there were no such questions. Though the new deputy head of Kuwait Foreign Ministry is faced with the huge challenge of filling the wide chasm created by retirement of veteran diplomat Khaled Al-Jarallah, there was no doubt in anyone's mind that the unassuming, mild-mannered and affable Al-Dhafiri was up to the task.

The appointment of Majdi Al-Dhafiri as the new Deputy Foreign Minister was the culmination of more than four decades of diplomatic career marked by accomplishments and achievements. During this period he has diligently sought to hold aloft the flag of Kuwait, both as the country's ambassador in several countries and as representative of the country in various regional and international organizations and forums.

From the day he entered the portals of the Foreign Ministry, Ambassador Al-Dhafiri has remained committed to fostering and preserving the interests of Kuwait and contributing to strengthening the country's relations and promoting its credentials on the regional and international diplomatic stage.

In 1981, a year after joining the foreign ministry, Al-Dhafiri made his first foray into international diplomacy by attending the 36th session of the United Nations General Assembly, as part of a group of diplomats selected to undergo a course in diplomacy at New York.

A graduate of Saud Nasser Al-Sabah Kuwait Diplomatic Institute that was established by the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad, Al-Dhafiri represented Kuwait as ambassador to many countries. Even before heading the country's embassy as ambassador, Al-Dhafiri had worked in



several diplomatic missions. He was first appointed a Third-Secretary at Kuwait's Embassy in Washington, then a second secretary at the Kuwait Embassy in Italy, and he was also a permanent representative of the State of Kuwait to the Arab League, before being appointed as Ambassador of Kuwait to Canada.

However, it was during his long tenure as Ambassador of Kuwait to the Islamic Republic of Iran that Al-Dhafiri grabbed the limelight for his deft handling of several contentious issues. During his tenure that began in 2001, when he was first appointed as Ambassador to Tehran, Al-Dhafiri went on to hold the same post for nearly two decades. During this extensive period he not only managed to bring political ties between the two countries on an even keel based on mutual respect and non-interference in internal affairs of each other, but also helped consolidate relations between Iran and its neighbors across the Gulf and in the region.

A major escalation in tension between Kuwait and Iran was in 2011 when diplomatic relations between the two countries soured after three members of Kuwait's army, two Iranians and one Kuwaiti, received death sentences for spying on behalf of Iran. Kuwait expelled three Iranian diplomats alleging links to spying scandal and recalled Ambassador Al-Dhafiri from Tehran for ostensible consultations. The situation worsened with Iran expelling several Kuwaiti diplomats and later detaining two Kuwaiti citizens, Adel Al-Yahya and Raed Al-Majid on charges of espionage in Iran.

It took months of intensive efforts in the background on the part of the Kuwait government and other mediators before Tehran decided to release the two Kuwaitis. Iran's then Ambassador to Kuwait, Ruhollah Ghahramani, said that the Iranian authorities had determined that the two Kuwaitis had engaged in press activities without permission but were not involved in espionage. Relations were smoothed further in 2012 with an appellate court in Kuwait reducing the death sentence to life imprisonment on the Iranians convicted of spying. Eventually, Ambassador Al-Dhafiri returned to his post in Tehran.

In 2014, while serving as ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ambassador Al-Dhafiri was instrumental in arranging

a visit to Tehran by the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at a time of thaw in relations between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and Tehran following the election of Iran's moderate President Hassan Rowhani in 2013.

The Amir's visit at a time when he was holding the rotating presidency of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and the Arab League was of huge political significance and the visit helped coordinate peace efforts in the region, and helped further strengthen bilateral relations between Kuwait and Iran.

During his tenure in Iran, Ambassador Al-Dhafiri also served as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the State of Kuwait in Turkmenistan, and helped strengthen relations with the former Russian republic. In 2018, Al-Dhafiri held discussions with Turkmenistan's Foreign Minister R. Meredov to discuss the creation of a joint Turkmen-Kuwaiti intergovernmental group on trade and economic cooperation. During the meeting, the parties also considered the possibility of organizing business meetings on the use of the transit possibilities of the Central Asia-Middle East transport corridor, and the importance of establishing and developing cooperation in the fields of science, education and culture.

On his return to Kuwait, Al-Dhafiri was assigned to head the Boundary Committee on the neutral zone between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia that also included the contentious issue of joint oil-field activities between the two countries. He headed the Kuwaiti delegation negotiating the issue of the divided zone with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The committee successfully concluded negotiations in December 2019, and Al-Dhafiri stressed at the time that the agreement in the divided zone is an achievement that embodies a clear framework for the level of relations between the two countries.

The foreign policy of Kuwait is focused on creating alliances and partnerships that can protect Kuwait, smoothen difficulties in the region through diplomacy and discussion, and leverage its foreign aid to strengthen ties and help social, economic and humanitarian development around the world.

Ambassador Al Dhafiri has always believed that the system of inter-state relations is one based on morals and values that govern interaction between the various countries and parties. He remains committed to resolving differences through discussions, while pursuing and strengthening common interests thereby helping drive bilateral and multilateral relations between states to new levels and horizons of constructive cooperation that serves the interests of peoples and nations.

At a time when Kuwait's traditional way of doing diplomacy — by keeping internal and regional conflicts behind closed doors and elder leaders having the last word — appears to be fading as a younger generation of Gulf leaders take the helm, it is more than ever important to have diplomats such as Ambassador Al-Dhafiri in the forefront of Kuwait's foreign policy.

**THE TIMES KUWAIT**

### Wear a Mask Even After You're Vaccinated

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

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# Oil sector renews contract of expatriate engineers

Despite strident calls for Kuwaitization of jobs in public sector entities, including in the oil sector, by replacing foreign workers with Kuwaitis, or restricting jobs to citizens only, several hundred contracts of expatriates were renewed recently in the oil sector.

Recent employment data from the oil sector shows that around 300 expatriate engineers had their work contracts renewed, and that the relevant regulatory and legislative authorities were aware of this contract renewal.

The oil sector companies justified the contract renewals citing the expertise and experience of the foreign engineers, and the fact that they possessed technical and specialized skills not available among nationals in the local market. The companies also pointed out that allowing the foreigners to continue in their posts was imperative to the transfer of their expertise to the national workers, through training and sharing their valuable knowledge.

Employment figures reveal the number of renewed contracts, the experience of the employees in years, and the names of oil-sector companies that renewed the contracts. The largest number of contract renewals (241) was in Kuwait National Petroleum Company, with the average technical experience of the engineers involved being around 35 years in the fields of project coordination, precision machinery maintenance, maintenance, manufacturing, services and operations. Most of the professionals involved were from India.

Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) renewed the contracts of 22 engineers with the average technical experience of the engineers ranging from 25 to 38 years. Most of the engineers were from India (16) followed by engineers from Egypt, Canada and Indonesia.

Petrochemical Industry Company (PIC) renewed contracts of 20 engineers, with practical experience of up to 36 years, in

the specializations of chemical, electrical and civil engineering, and the vast majority of them (15) were once again from India, and the rest from Egypt and Jordan.

In Kuwait Petroleum International (KPI) only one Indian chemical engineer, with manufacturing experience exceeding 35 years, had his contract renewed.

Kuwait Gulf Oil Company (KGO) renewed the contract of seven engineers having experience ranging from 16 to 35 years, in the specialized sectors of reservoir engineering, planning, petroleum, and geophysical and geological operations. Four of the engineers were from India, followed by one each from Egypt, Sudan, and Australia.

Kuwaiti Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPI) renewed the contracts of nine engineers with more than 28 years of experience each.

The contract renewals reiterate the fact that the oil sector cannot ignore the expertise and skills of foreign engineers



specialized in operating modern oil installations, such as in the production field and in refining petroleum products. Moreover, since the oil sector is vital to Kuwait's economy and provides nearly 90 percent of the country's budget revenues, it is necessary to seek the help of engineers with the necessary expertise and experience, regardless of their nationalities, and ignore calls for Kuwaitization in this crucial sector.

## Domestic worker related complaints increase in February

Latest statistics released by the Department for Regulating Recruitment of Domestic Workers reveal that a total of 480 complaints were registered with the department in February.

Breakup of the complaints show that there were 33 complaints by employers against recruitment offices and companies; 169 complaints by domestic workers against their employers; 239 complaints were



referred to the judiciary, and there was one lone complaint from a recruitment

office against an employer.

The statistics also reveal that a total of 200 complaints of absconding cases were referred to the judiciary; 23 complaints of passport confiscation by employer were resolved by handing over the documents to the workers; 277 complaints were submitted by employers against their domestic workers; and 65 complaints were resolved amicably between the parties involved.

## Two MPs file grilling motion against Prime Minister

National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanim, on Monday, said that he received a grilling motion from MPs Mohammad Al-Mutair and Dr. Bader Al-Dahoum against His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

The Speaker noted that the grilling motion request will be scheduled in the agenda of the next

first ordinary session to set a date for discussion. The Assembly can meet only after March 18, because HH the Amir suspended regular sessions for a month from February 18.

The tabled grilling motion filed by the two deputies centers around the question of "selectivity in the application of the law", according to what the two deputies presented.

# TRIBUTE TO KUWAIT'S MOST LOVED INDIAN



**Sageer Thrikaripur**

03.03.1959 - 07.03.2021

Chairman, Kuwait Kerala Muslim Association (KKMA)

HR Manager, Al Kout Industrial Projects Company K.P.S.C.

Executive secretary (Ex) to CEO, Equate Petrochemical Company

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who brought ideas NOT for an  
individual but for the society.  
His vision changed the life of  
many destitute in our society.*

*We Thakkara Group pay tribute to  
the soul of Mr Sageer Thrikaripur.  
May Almighty grant him the  
highest level of Paradise.*





## A NEW TAKE ON TAKE-OUTS



Kuwaitis have invented innovative ways to enjoy eating-out despite the government ban on entering restaurants to dine. An Italian restaurant in Shuwaikh, Giulia is serving complete meals to visitors in their cars so diners can eat in their cars complete with cutlery and outdoor service.

A specially crafted table is placed inside the car so that diners can eat comfortably and enjoy the meal, while waiters serve their customers as if they are eating in a restaurant with fine cutlery and freshly prepared hot food.

A line of luxury cars are seen parked at the restaurant waiting to be served as the new normal of eating out is increasingly gaining popularity in the country where eating out is an important social activity.



## Thought for the week

“Happiness is not a where or when. It is a here and now. It is not determined by where you are or what you have. It is determined by what you are.”

— Zig Ziglar

# Veganism

## The latest health trend

Ask Mira: Eating Right to Live Happy & Healthy



Let me first start by explaining what is a vegan diet? Simply put, it is one that excludes any food that comes from an animal, which includes eggs, dairy, meat, fish, poultry, and even honey.

Although a lot of people still enjoy their steaks and chicken, many others have abandoned red meat and poultry in favor of a plant-based diet. Some people decide to go vegan because they can't bear the thought of harming living creatures. Others do it for some health benefits.

But have you ever wondered if a vegan or plant-based diet would help you manage your weight and resolve any nagging health problems?

A vegan diet does not necessarily mean it is healthy, since by definition, it does not exclude a lot of processed foods, sugar, or gluten. Besides that, look at the popularity of fake meats, which are incredibly processed and not necessarily healthy by any stretch of your imagination. So, you need to watch out for the quality of your food intake just like any other type of diet.

If followed properly, choosing smart food options, the one reason veganism could be good for you is because it can protect you against cardiovascular diseases, by reducing obesity and lowering bad cholesterol.

This is because plant-based foods contain a lot of antioxidants, phytonutrients and nitrates, while some animal products contain lots of inflammatory fats linked to cardiovascular problems and some forms of cancer.

### What about essential nutrients needed?

Vegan diets do lack certain nutrients, essential ones. You may have to use a lot of creativity to ensure you get enough calcium, iron, Omega3, and vitamin B12.

**Calcium:** Although vegans can get their calcium supply from fortified soy milk, broccoli, beans, leafy green vegetables, almonds, almond butter, sesame seeds, and soybeans, they will still need a good dose of calcium to prevent osteoporosis and bone fractures. A calcium/Vitamin D supplement is needed.

**Iron:** Anemia is the most common nutritional deficiency in the world, and both vegans and vegetarians are at high risk of this deficiency. While plant-based foods such as lentils, beans, quinoa, oatmeal, nuts, spinach, Rocca, and dry fruits, contain a form of iron, it is called "Non-Heme iron" and it is much less absorbable by the body.

Iron-deficient anemia can lead to serious symptoms including fatigue, and women of

child-bearing age should be aware of how a vegan or vegetarian diet can quickly lead to anemia. Iron supplementation is a must.

**Omega3:** Omega-3 fatty acids are found in both fish and flaxseeds, but your body does not absorb the plant-based form as complete as the omega-3s from seafood. Without a food source of omega-3 fatty acids from fish or fish oils and an increased consumption of omega-6 fatty acid from foods like nuts, vegans might be at higher risk of depression.

**Vitamin B12:** Vitamin B12 is needed to support your nerve system, and for your blood cells. Because vitamin B12 is found only in animal sources, if you are a vegan you might consider taking a supplement.

### What about Athletes?

A lot of studies were done and scientists have raised concerns that this diet is too restrictive for athletes who are travelling the world competing in competitions. There is the possibility of them become malnourished, unable to maintain their muscle mass in addition to suffering from deficiencies in Vitamin B12, which leads to fatigue and poor oxygen transport, Calcium and Vitamin D, which reduce the bone-density and lead to bone injury).

Scientists have found as well that while consuming vegetables rich in calcium, such as kale and broccoli, many vegans do not actually meet their calcium requirements. As a result, they have found a 30% increased risk of fracture in vegans when compared to vegetarians and meat eaters.

Last but not least, what I can say is that before you discard all animal-based foods, learn how to approach this style of eating in a healthy way and talk to your dietitian for any deficiency that can arise and get the right dose of supplements.

Eat like Mira  
Create healthy habits, not restrictions

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

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





# Vaccination-drive to prioritize commercial workers at risk of infection

Ministry of Health (MoH) is said to be considering expanding the vaccination campaign to include commercial workers, at high- or medium-risk of being infected by the coronavirus due to the nature of their work.

The aim of prioritizing the vaccination of commercial workers is to ensure that commercial activities can continue to take place even during emergency closures during curfews and shutdowns. The campaign is likely to be launched during the

curfew period or immediately after its end.

In another notification, the MoH announced that the vaccination campaign would continue unabated during the partial curfew hours at the designated centers. The ministry added that an exemption permit for moving during the curfew period to get vaccinated can be obtained from the Ministry of Interior. The ministry also stressed the everyone should adhere to the date and center specified for their vaccination, in line with the message

they receive from the ministry.

An exemption permit can be requested for vaccine appointments during the curfew period by visiting the Ministry of Interior website at The vaccination timing is from 8am to 7pm MoH said that an exit permit can be requested during the curfew period for vaccine appointments through the Public Authority for Civil Information website at <https://www.paci.gov.kw/Default.aspx>, for obtaining permits from Ministry of Interior.



## SIF declares winners of Kuwait Sastra Pratibha Contest



Science International Forum (SIF) Kuwait announced the results of its 7th edition Sastra Prathibha Contest in Kuwait.

Sastra Prathibha Contest (SPC) 2020 – 21, which was held on 19 February 2021, saw the following top-scoring students from class 4 to class 10 declared 'Sastra Prathibha'

The winners are Class 4 Mohammad Shayan (FAIPS); Class 5 Naiga Githin Das (IES); Class 6 Hannah Mary Shajan (ICSK. Sr.); Class 7 Classanha Anees Shina (IES); Class 8 Fida Ancy (IES); Class 9 Nevin Noji Vaidyan (IES); Class 10 Asmi Aashay Choudhary (FAIPS).

A total of 121 students from various Indian schools were declared outstanding performers with the grade A+. The prestigious 'Acharya J.C. Bose Sastra Puraskar' for the best performing school at the SPC 2020-21 was secured by Indian Education



Nevin Noji Vaidyan  
Class 9, IES



Asmi Aashay Choudhary  
Class 10, FAIPS

School, (Bhavans). The competition was conducted online for the first time, making it the biggest of its kind in Kuwait with the participation of 21 Indian schools in Kuwait.

SIF- Kuwait along with National Science Movement, India, in organizing Sastra Prathibha Contest (VVM Vidyarthi Vigyan Manthan), a pan India and GCC Science Talent Hunt initiative by VIBHA in association with NCERT, HRD Ministry (Government of India) and the Department of Science and Technology (Government of India).

The awards for winners and outstanding performers will be distributed at the SIF Kuwait Annual Science Gala. Winners of Sastra Prathibha Title will receive a scholarship worth INR10,001/- along with the opportunity for personal interaction with top scientists in India.

## Five parameter approach in evaluating epidemiological situation

Ministry of Health (MoH) announced that evaluating the ongoing pandemic situation in the country is based on international standards, accepted and approved by global health organizations and medical specialists.

The ministry stated that health authorities in Kuwait use five specific criteria — the rate of transmissions and spread of coronavirus among people; numbers of infections in a day; the percentage of beds occupied in wards and intensive care; and the decrease in daily cases compared to daily swabs; as well as the measured epidemiological curve — to determine the current level of pandemic in the country.

A technical committee in the ministry consisting of specialized doctors monitor and analyze the five criteria on a regular basis, before arriving at a consensus on the best steps to contain and curtail the virus. The specialists also



audit daily data on the number of vaccinations being administered, its results, including any side effects, based on accurate and approved methodologies. Health teams also exert all efforts to increase the number of swabs conducted daily among the populace to detect new infections and accurately assess the evolving epidemiological situation in Kuwait.

## Exemption from institutional quarantine for vaccinated arrivals

Passengers arriving in Kuwait who have already taken the vaccination could be exempted from institutional quarantine, though they will still have to undergo quarantine in their homes for the specified period.

Announcing that the Ministry of Health is considering this option, the ministry's Undersecretary for General Health Affairs, Dr. Bothaina AlMudhaf said that the relevant entities were closely monitoring recent

international studies and measures regarding this matter before implementing it in Kuwait.

Dr. AlMudhaf also revealed that the ministry had completed vaccinating citizens and expatriates aged 65 and above, from among those who had registered to receive the vaccination. She urged everyone to quickly register for the vaccination as so far only 17.4 percent of the population had registered on the health ministry's website dedicated for registrations.



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# No exemption for walkers, joggers or bicyclists during curfew

Many citizens and residents along with their family members have begun using public walkways in their respective residential areas to walk, jog or bicycle during the curfew hours. However, a new announcement from the Ministry of Interior (MoI) has proscribed such activities, saying that these practices were in breach of the partial curfew that is effective from 5pm to 5am daily.

For their part, many citizens point out that such activities were permitted during previous curfew hours, and have requested the Council of Ministers to allow two hours for walking at night during the curfew. Citizens

noted that they were busy at work the whole day, and with relaxation and exercising venues all shut down, the only form of physical exercise they could enjoy was to walk or jog around their residential areas and denying them this was not reasonable.

However, security sources at MoI said that the ministry remains committed to implementing the cabinet's decision on the curfew to the fullest, and there are no exceptions except in the context of granting curfew permits through the MoI's barcode system, and according to the categories of people allowed to leave homes during curfew hours.

The source pointed out that walking within residential areas or using bicycles and other activities are not permitted, and clarified that the public is only allowed to go outside their homes during the curfew to perform prayers, in nearby mosques, after which worshippers must return directly to their homes.

While the authorities are spread across the areas to ensure adherence to the curfew, check permits and arrest violators, they cannot be expected to cover every street and alley and as such requested the public to fully conform with curfew rules in the interests of everyone's health security.



## Written exams cancelled for private schools

Written exams will not be permitted to be held within the school campus for private schools of all educational systems, instead students will be evaluated according to the approved decision for foreign schools, and corresponding to that approved by the Ministry of Education (MoE) for private Arab schools.

The new decision follows Ministry of Health recommendations that urge schools not to conduct exams of any kind involving the

attendance of students in school campuses, until the coronavirus situation improves.

Announcing the decision, the Assistant Undersecretary for Special and Specific Education at MoE, Dr. Abdul Mohsen Al-Huwaila, said "Foreign private schools can organize international-based examinations in coordination with international academic accreditation bodies dependent on its educational system in implementation of the provisions of this recent decision, provided that previous approvals that contradict it are canceled."

Some foreign schools under a foreign educational system held written exams for their students during the first semester after the approval of the Department of Special Education and the Ministry of Health, based on the provision of the required health regulations.

## Webinar raises awareness of mental health among women



A webinar was held last week on the occasion of the International Women's Day and its theme of 'Choose to Challenge' to highlight awareness of mental health in the region. Prominent women speakers and experts on the subject from the Arab region voiced their thoughts and provided suggestions on the issue.

The webinar, organized by 'She is Arab' the first platform dedicated to increasing the representation of Arab women in business leadership and at speaking events, had a panel of speakers including, Sheikha Intisar AlSabah, founder of Intisar Foundation from Kuwait, Sayyida Basma Al Said, mental health specialist and founder of Whispers of Serenity Clinic from Oman, and Dr. Mariam Ketait, founder of Ebb & Flow from the UAE. The event was moderated by Mental Health Specialist and Psychotherapist, Rania Atalla.

The 90-minute conversation explored the diversity of the Middle East and the issues of relevance to mental health and overall wellbeing in the region. The participants called for focused and targeted efforts in responding to specific needs facing Arab men and women living through these realities.

Anxiety, depression, and myriad other conditions have been on the rise in the Middle East. However, the culture surrounding mental health in the region is full of misconceptions, prejudice, and judgement stemming from religion, tradition, and family, among others. The talk highlighted the importance of mainstreaming the mental health discourse in the Arab world.

During the webinar, Sheikha Intisar AlSabah said: "We have gathered great evidence that women keeping what they think are great secrets and not sharing them with anyone else, even if to find solutions, is one of the biggest causes of poor mental health." She urged them to share their problems with others in order to help them lead better lives.

For her part, Sayyida Basma Al Said said: "Women need to appreciate where they are and what they've done and not doubt themselves a lot as they do. In the end, once a woman's mental health is well, then the whole family's mental health becomes well and the society's mental health becomes better."

Dr. Mariam Ketait added: "It is very important to remind ourselves that life continues to ebb and flow, and that we are able to restore the light of hope and create the future we seek."

For her part, the session moderator Rania Atallah noted: "The COVID-19 pandemic has fueled a global mental health tsunami, the ramifications of which we are yet to fully comprehend, and women are affected disproportionately." She continued: "This challenging situation also presents an opportunity to place mental health higher on the priority list."

Explaining the purpose of the webinar, Samar Alshorafa, founding CEO of She is Arab, said: "The notion of mental health still remains a stigma in the Arab world, even though it shouldn't. We hope that through our conversations, we can bring to light the importance of addressing such issues without fear or judgement."

## Risk allowance provides relief to fatigued medical staff

In what could be a breath of relief for overworked and fatigued medical staff in the country, the Minister of Health Sheikh Dr. Basel Al-Sabah is reported to have approved the granting of a risk and infection allowance to all medical personnel in hospitals, medical centers, laboratories, and all places of vaccination and health quarantines, as they are exposed to daily risks, directly and indirectly.

However, the personnel have to maintain a minimum amount of predetermined working hours before they become eligible to enjoy their leave balance.

More than a year of remaining constantly on alert to handle the repercussion of the coronavirus pandemic has caused exhaustion and fatigue among medical staff in the country.

The health minister is reported to have expressed his worry at this alarming situation during his recent weekly report to the Council of Ministers. Stressing the need for strict measures to limit the rise in spread of coronavirus infection, the health minister pointed to an increase in the number of infection cases in intensive care units and in rising fatalities from the disease. The



minister also blamed the use of hospital beds not designated for coronavirus patients as having contributed to the increase in the infection rate among patients at these hospitals.

Emphasizing the need to speed up the vaccination drive, the health minister said that over a year of attending to the pandemic, and the current increase in coronavirus infections, have exhausted the medical staff. He noted that medical staff have been in a situation of high alert and have been working at maximum capacity in all health sectors for over a year.

al-Hadi, the complainant, said that due to the ineffectiveness of the decision and economic losses that are expected to be incurred as a result of the closure, he petitioned the court to immediately halt the implementation of the curfew, until its merits can be determined.

The court set next Wednesday, 17 February to hear the lawsuit, which was joined by three other parties. The Lawyers Association, the Salon Union and the Small and Medium Enterprises Union joined lawyer Adel Abdel Hadi in his lawsuit.

## Lawsuit filed against partial curfew

A lawsuit has been filed in the Administrative Court challenging the government's recent decision to impose a partial curfew starting on Sunday, 7 March.

The lawsuit, filed by lawyer Adel Al-Abd



# MoI recommends extending amnesty for six months

**F**ailure of repeated amnesty periods for residency law violators in the past has compelled the authorities to examine reasons why many people have not responded to previous amnesties.

A study of the various factors behind non-compliance with past amnesties has apparently prompted the General Department of Residency at the Ministry of Interior (MoI) to issue a new plan of action.

The department has suggested that a new ministerial decision be announced that would extend the amnesty period for a period of six months; allow violators to amend their legal status with the option of

either transferring to another sponsor or voluntarily exiting the country; and exempt violators from fines incurred during the violation period.

The General Residency Department also recommended that the amnesty should begin only after flights and travel to all countries resume, and following a proper evaluation made at each stage of the situation.

Outlining the plan, the Director General of Residency Department, Brigadier General Hamad Al-Tawala, stressed the importance of removing the fines conditions on violators who are able to transfer their residency and



allow for converting the visit visas to family visas for all nationalities, especially Syrians and Yemenis, which would be applicable for wives, children, parents, and relatives due to their special circumstances.

The plan called for empowering those under the family visas who have reached working age and are holders of Article 18, to transfer their residency visas to the private sector, pointing out that the 'Leave Safely' campaign did not achieve its desired goals due to the circumstances of Coronavirus, the suspension of flights, and the inability by many people to pay the huge fines already incurred, as well as other reasons.

The plan is said to have been forwarded to the Assistant Undersecretary for Residency Affairs, who in turn is expected to raise the matter with the Undersecretary of the Ministry and then to the Minister of Interior.

# French startups to pitch before Kuwaiti investors

**A** webinar organized by Paris Europlace, with support from Kuwait's Capital Market Authority scheduled for 23 March will see five French-based startup companies pitch their projects before investors in Kuwait.

France is now the new investment champion in Europe. According to EY European Investment Monitor, in 2019 France was the leading host country for foreign investment in Europe, attracting 19 percent of all job-creating foreign investments in Europe.

There are currently more than 12 unicorns in France, including ride-sharing company Blablacar; online doctor booking platform, Dotolib, and Miraki, which helps businesses build innovative marketplaces. Since he became President, Emmanuel Macron has been committed to making France more investor- and business-friendly through a series of reforms.

France also has a pool of dynamic startups which can pride themselves as ranking first in the European Union in terms of fundraising for transactions under 100 million euro. In addition, the country has Station F, the world's largest startup campus.

Opened in 2017 and privately funded by the French businessman Xavier Niel, Station F welcomes more than 1,000 startups and gathers all the services entrepreneurs could need to grow their businesses under one roof. Focused on early-



stage startups, the station offers personalized support to all startups, Station F and its partners have designed 30 different acceleration and incubation programs. Each of them focusing on a specific vertical. 1/3 of these programs are run by corporates (Microsoft, Ubisoft, LVMH...), 1/3 are done by schools (HEC, EDHEC, INSEAD...) and the last third is by entrepreneurs networks (Entrepreneur First...). The campus also runs two in-house programs: the Founders Program and the Fighters Program dedicated to people coming from underprivileged backgrounds.

Companies based at STATION F benefit from multiples services that go from a maker space to prototype their projects to 30 public administrations (Cnil, BPI, URSSAF...) in French Tech Central and in mentorship offices of Apple, Google, AWS and OVH to help them use their

solutions. An investor community of more than 100 funds from France and from abroad is also part of Station F to help entrepreneurs raise funds.

Currently, 1/3 of the entrepreneurs are from abroad and 40 percent of the companies are founded by women entrepreneurs. Moreover, only 3 percent of startups failed since the opening. Station F is now selecting nine percent of the companies which apply to join the campus, so startups in Kuwait go grab this opportunity.

# Co-op branches may remain open during curfew hours



**B**ranches of cooperative societies may remain open during the partial curfew hours to facilitate food deliveries.

Revealing that there was a need to pursue this matter further, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Khalidiya Cooperative Society, said the opening would be based on approval from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) and in coordination with the Ministries of Interior, Health and other relevant authorities. He added that barcodes would be used to provide appointments during the partial curfew timings.

Meanwhile, MoCI has launched a website to enable expatriates and residents to book appointments to shop at cooperative societies in

their area at specific dates and times.

To book appointments, customers have to enter their Civil id number, cell phone number, and email address. They also have to choose their booking destination and an appointment time from the available time slots.

The appointments are available between 5:00 pm and 10:00 pm every day. To book appointment log on to <https://www.moci.shop/Associations/WebPages/index.aspx>

The reservation system is expected to reduce crowding, and mixing among customers, and to limit waiting time near the market. This move is part of the measures to curb the spread of coronavirus in the country by limiting gatherings.

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## Bird-flu fears lead to culling of poultry in Wafra farm

The discovery of bird flu in some poultry farms in the Wafra area has led to the large-scale culling of the birds in affected farms.

Public Authority for Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources Spokesperson, Talal Al-Daihani, said that the authorities had immediately implemented approved emergency plans and veterinary health measures to confront the bird flu. He added that relevant official authorities in the country had been informed of the outbreak and requested to join in efforts to control

and eradicate the infection.

Following the discovery of bird flu cases in some poultry farms, specialized teams from the Public Authority for Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources moved to contain the disease by culling thousands of poultry in two affected farms in Al-Wafra after bird flu infection was confirmed there. Poultry and other livestock from the two farms have been isolated to ensure that the disease is not transmitted to workers there or even to neighboring farms.

Bird flu is a viral disease caused by 12



types of viruses, and it specifically targets birds, with the possibility that it may be transmitted to humans in very rare cases. It is possible to avoid infection by moving away from the center of its spread, whether in farms or elsewhere. While the virus is not easily transmitted from infected animals to humans, it may be transmitted in the case of severe and extensive contact with infected birds. The use of personal protection tools such as masks and gloves in case of dealing with infected birds and animals is recommended.

## Integrated youth platform to boost local talents

An integrated youth platform to incubate and promote young talent in the country was launched last week by several Kuwaiti women.

The first Kuwait-based platform for incubating young talents, named VO, is a collaborative effort by the Chairman of VO, Sheikha Ohoud Salem Al Ali Al Sabah, and the platform's CEO, Riham Al Ayyar. The platform aims to provide Kuwaiti youth with innovative avenues to develop and exhibit their talents to the global market.

"We all witnessed the outstanding and engaging content demonstrated by Kuwaiti youth throughout the lockdowns on different digital platforms. It was evident that Kuwaiti youth enjoy multiple interests and talents. The stellar rates of public engagement and acknowledgement received from followers all over the region made us realize the importance of unleashing and highlighting Kuwait's hidden gifts to help position the country globally," stated Sheikha Ohoud Al Sabah.

Explaining the importance of providing a dynamic physical and virtual space for youth to develop and exhibit their talents, Sheikha Ohoud added: "Acknowledging that those young talents are Kuwait's most valuable resources, we are launching VO. It will be the main platform for Kuwaiti youth to access the international market and showcase their creative talents."

For her part, the CEO of VO underlined the importance of diversifying Kuwait's economy by capitalizing on Kuwait's young talents and



Sheikha Ohoud Salem Al Sabah



Riham Al Ayyar

equipping youth with the tools required to enter the global market. Praising the current national efforts being made in the realm of youth and talent development, she stated that VO was established to support Kuwait's national efforts in globally positioning the country.

"VO was founded to innovatively complement the various initiatives and programs conducted to support Kuwaiti youth. This platform will not only provide an academic space for young and emerging creators to develop their talents but it will also include fully equipped studios for them to fertilize and express their ideas in a nurturing environment, and a digital app to unleash and export Kuwait's hidden resources to the world," stated Ms. Al Ayyar.

VO, an integrated youth platform and Kuwait's first talent incubator, will be officially launched in summer 2021 and will provide an academic program for Kuwaiti youth to identify and nurture their talents, an all-inclusive studio to empower and express their ideas, and a 'smart' app to promote their creative productions on a seamless, high-tech and efficient digital platform.

## Newly recruited Indian domestic workers to arrive soon

The first batch of newly recruited domestic workers are slated to arrive in the country from India within the next 10 days.

Disclosing this, the Head of the Federation of Domestic Workers Recruitment Agencies, Khaled Al-Dakhnan, said the new recruitments come after the government reopened this service after more than a year of suspending the recruitment of new domestic workers from abroad due to the pandemic.

He noted that agencies were suffering economically for over a year and a half due to the ban on recruitment, and also because the volume of requests for domestic workers from employers was not adequate to operate the recruitment process effectively. Al-Dakhnan added that it will take time to deal with providing domestic workers to the local

market, which may take about a year or more in light of the challenges they face against the spread of the Coronavirus.

Regarding the 280 Filipino domestic workers, Al-Dakhnan confirmed that their evacuation from the country recently was a positive indicator in the process of resolving the outstanding issues with the Philippines in the employment of new Filipino domestic workers.

He clarified that though there are visas available for Filipino domestic workers, at present their work contracts remain suspended at their embassy in Kuwait pending approval from the Philippines. He hoped that in the coming days progress could be made on this matter and that Filipino domestic workers will return to Kuwait.

## ABCK-Amcham hold webinar on commodities

ABCK-AmCham Kuwait in coordination with Citigroup and supported by the AmCham units in the other five Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states held a webinar with the Global Head of Commodities Strategy at Citi Group, Dr. Edward Morse.

Dr. Morse thanked the chambers for their efforts in setting up the webinar and hoped that next year's webinar would be in person. On the oil market, Dr. Morse noted that it risen by 75 percent since November 2020 and that there are several factors behind this, including a dramatic drop in global oil inventories on the back of OPEC and its non-OPEC allies willingness to withhold oil from the market for a longer period, and aided by Saudi Arabia's decision to take out one million barrels extra a day for the February and March months. In addition, demand saw a boost with the pandemic appearing to be controlled.

Concluding the webinar, Dr. Morse spoke about the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energies. He said energy companies want to reduce their carbon footprint without



changing the nature of their business by altering their supply line so they are supported by cleaner energy and they believe they can survive as an energy firm and continue to produce hydrocarbons. They do not believe it is worth their investing in alternative energy and eradicate oil and natural gas from their energy systems. He also noted that alternative energy like solar energy has seen their costs come down by 15 percent per year for ten years making it now competitive with coal.

## Tulukoota Kuwait (TKK) launches 2021 year calendar



In association with Badr al Samaa Medical Centre- Farwaniya, Tulukoota Kuwait launched their New Year calendar during an event held at Conference Hall- Badr al Samaa.

TKK management handed over the first

copy to Chief Guest Ms. Debbie Montero, Head Nurse, Badr al Samaa Kuwait. In her speech, Ms. Debbie appreciated TKK for their unconditional support towards the clinic. The calendar will be distributed among the 900 TKK members.

## Indian embassy announces new timings from 8:00 am to 1:00 pm

In view of the announcement by the Government of the State of Kuwait dated 4 March 2021, to deal with the emerging situation pertaining to Covid-19 pandemic, it has been decided to change the timings for Consular Services being offered at the premises of the Embassy of India in Kuwait.

The revised timings will be from 8:00 am to 1:00 pm from Sunday to Thursday (with the last service token being issued at 12.30 pm).

Emergency consular services will continue



to be rendered by the Embassy as per existing procedure.



# Highest costs, lowest quality education, at public schools

The government's cost to educate students in public schools is among the highest in the world, noted the Public Authority for Combating Corruption (Nazaha) in a new report while underlining that the quality of education imparted at these schools was not commensurate with the high costs expended

Pointing out that the annual cost of educating a Kuwaiti student in government school ranges from KD4,693 in kindergartens, to KD3,280 in primary school, KD3,426 in the intermediate level,

and KD3,651 at the secondary school level. Noting that "educational institutions in countries have a pivotal role in achieving sustainable development", the authority warned that unless the fees reflected the quality of education imparted they would prove unsustainable in the long run.

Revealing new statistics on public school expenses in Kuwait, the new report titled 'For Kuwait, to teach our children integrity', states that "the Ministry of Education's budget for the year 2020 amounted to KD2.3 billion, from which 90 percent

is allocated on salaries of the 120,000 employees. The report also shows that the number of students in the year 2018 was approximately 683,000, distributed among 822 public schools and 566 private schools.

Emphasizing that when it comes to the quality of education imparted at public schools, the situation is dire, the report notes, "in view of the basic education performance index, the quality of primary education, mathematics and science education decreased by one percentage point compared to the previous year, while



Kuwait ranked 104 and 106 out of 137 countries in the two subjects."

## ICF holds seminar on self-empowerment for Arab women



Intisar Charitable Foundation (ICF) organized a symposium last week titled 'Achieving the Self-Empowerment of Women for a Better Arab World' to support Arab women affected by wars.

The virtual seminar was attended by the Ambassador of the United States H.E. Alina L. Romanowski, the Ambassador of France H.E. Anne-Claire Legendre, Representative of the United Nations Dr. Tariq al-Sheikh, Head of Regional Delegation of the Red Cross Omar Odeh, and the President of ICF Sheikhha Intisar Salem Al-Ali. The event was moderated by Dr. Anoud Al-Sharekh.

Kicking-off the symposium, Sheikhha Intisar Al-Ali stated that empowering Arab women will bring peace to the Arab world. She added that ICF is committed to improving the mental health of Arab women affected by war and violence. The mission of the Foundation she said is the psychological healing of Arab women who suffer from traumatic experiences.

Empowering traumatized Arab women can transform them into influential peacemakers in the Arab world, said Sheikhha Intisar, while adding that the Foundation aims to act as a center of knowledge to empower Arab women by providing psychological support programs, and conducting internal research to improve the therapy program.

She stated that all the strategic goal is to support one million Arab women affected by wars, a 30-year plan to alleviate the psychological trauma of one million Arab women through the use of therapy. She added that ICF cooperates with Arab and international researchers and academics in the field of clinical psychology, neuroscience, drama therapy, and trauma-informed psychology to achieve these goals.

She added, "We have already published a qualitative

research paper on the impact of drama therapy on Syrian refugee women, and we are currently working on six different projects that explore different angles of drama and trauma therapy."

Sheikha Intisar explained that the goals of the foundation go beyond expanding the field of drama therapy, fieldwork, and research, as Intisar has entered into a partnership with USEK, the only university in the Arab world to offer a master's degree in drama therapy, it offers scholarships and training for students who will continue to work as drama therapists in the Arab world. She also indicated that the Foundation is continuing its drama therapy programs during the period of Corona in war-affected areas in Lebanon, via the Internet.

For her part, the American ambassador expressed her happiness to participate in the virtual symposium organized by the Intisar Foundation on the occasion of International Women's Day. She expressed the importance of the symposium by saying, "This is important not only because it coincides with the International Women's Day, but because it is a pivotal issue that concerns us all." She also praised the efforts of the Intisar Foundation.

Ambassador Romanowski reviewed with the audience the most prominent efforts and methods of her country in empowering women, and in particular their efforts in Kuwait. She pointed out the efforts of different countries around the world in the field of achieving gender equality and promoting and developing women's rights.

She also said that the US State Department has invested heavily in empowering women in various parts of the world, including Kuwait, through a set of programs to train women leaders to work together in solving problems. She also indicated that the US embassy has a partnership with the Kuwaiti Society for Human Rights.

## OBITUARY

### Well-known Indian community leader passes away

Sageer Thrikarippur, a well-known Indian community social worker and leader passed away in Kuwait today after battling with COVID-19 infection for more than a month.

Mr. Thrikarippur was a patron of Kuwait Kerala Muslim Association (KKMA) and had worked tirelessly to help the poor and downtrodden during his more than 30 year stay in Kuwait.

He was a popular and familiar personality among the large Keralite diaspora in Kuwait and was actively engaged in various social programs aimed at uplifting the weaker sections of the community.

Mr. Thrikarippur, who lost his wife Sauda last week, after she succumbed to the coronavirus, is survived by his two daughters, Dr. Suad Abdulla and Sama Abdulla and son-in-laws, Dr. Ashraf and Aflaq.

Indian Ambassador to Kuwait H.E. Sibi George expressed his sadness and shock to learn about the untimely demise of Shri Sageer Thrikarippur, and praised his efforts in assistance to the Indian community.

In his statement, Ambassador George said, "With his passing away today, we have lost a dear member of the Indian Community in Kuwait. A renowned and committed social worker, he had worked tirelessly to help the needy among the Indian Community in Kuwait during his thirty years of stay in Kuwait.

"He was a very active and a familiar face among the Community and was always at the forefront in promoting social and cultural harmony.

"My sincere and heartfelt condolences to his family and friends. May his soul Rest in Eternal Peace. Shri Sageer Thrikarippur will be missed by the Indian community in Kuwait."

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## Kuwait Flour Mills to fortify wheat flour with vitamin D

**K**ubbos, bread and other wheat products made by the government entity, Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Company could soon arrive fortified with vitamin D.

Announcing this the company's Chief Executive Officer Mutlaq Al-Zayed said in a statement that in line with health and nutrition standards in some Arab states and many countries around the world, and in coordination with Kuwait's Food and Nutrition Authority, Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Company would begin fortifying

wheat flour with iron and folic acid which is an effective way of maintaining the level of vitamin D in the body.

Vitamin D is essential for strong bones, because it helps the body use calcium from the diet. Deficiency of vitamin D in the body has traditionally been associated with soft, or brittle bones and skeletal deformities. However, new research has implicated vitamin D deficiency with a host of health problems, while other studies have shown the important role it plays in strengthening the body's immune system.



Al-Zayed noted that flour enriched with vitamin D can eliminate the dangerous effects of vitamin D deficiency. And, in light of the current health situation and the need to confront the spread of COVID-19, the company's wheat products will soon include vitamin D fortified wheat as the main ingredient.

He revealed that initially a small study will be conducted on flour enriched with vitamin D to follow up and evaluate the flour enhancement program and to prepare reports on the final product.

## Grill heats up even before Parliament reconvenes

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

No matter what the interpellation topic may be, it is abundantly clear that many legislators in the current parliament have no intention of cooperating with the government, and that Kuwait is in for a long bout of political uncertainty and accompanying economic pains.

While it is not clear whether the executive and its supporters in the legislature will attend the parliamentary session when the grilling motion is to be discussed, it is doubtful if the National Assembly can continue to function effectively for much longer given the ongoing contentious relations between executive and legislative branches of parliament. Unless some sort of compromise is reached between the two sides, or a permanent solution is found to the recurring circle of 'grillings-resignations-dissolutions-elections', Kuwait could soon become embroiled in political turmoil that

threatens the country and its social and economic future.

Grilling or interpellation is a legislative tool available to lawmakers in democratic parliaments everywhere, but it also comes with the implicit caveat that it needs to be wielded wisely and responsibly by the elected members. Interpellations serve the purpose of helping to discern facts on issues that are being deliberately obscured, or where the government has been less than forthcoming; it needs to be applied to ferret out furtive deals, or erring actions, by the authorities and those in power.

But interpellations are definitely not to be wielded as a 'Damocles Sword' over the heads of ministers on plans, policies and procedures they introduce in parliament, or implement as part of their ministerial duty. Grilling threats should also not be deployed by parliamentarians to further their personal or political concerns, or to settle scores with

members of the executive branch.

The current motion to grill the prime minister is reported to have emerged following the government decision to refer over a dozen parliamentarians and their supporters to court. The lawmakers allegedly held a gathering last week that was attended by around 300 people, in total disregard of precautions issued in the wake of recent upsurge in COVID-19 cases in the country. In addition to the motion tabled to grill the prime minister, Health Minister Sheikh Dr. Basel Al-Sabah has also been threatened with a grilling for his "confusing" decisions that failed to curb the spread of coronavirus infections in Kuwait.

Before filing an interpellation motion, parliamentarians should recognize that their duty as lawmakers is to the entire country, not just to their parochial voter base or to further their political or ideological leanings. They should ask themselves, does the grilling benefit the country and its people, or is it meant to score brownie points with their voters, or pursue their own personal or political interests.

For its part, the government is also not blameless in this seemingly never-ending saga of acrimonious relations between the executive and legislative, and as a result to the continuing paralysis of parliament in recent years, which have prevented lawmakers from fulfilling their duties effectively and thereby failing in their obligations to the people of Kuwait.

In the past, the executive branch has often wielded the power vested in it by the constitution, or resorted to exploiting available parliamentary rules and tools, to circumvent potential no-confidence votes following grilling motions in the National Assembly. When confronted by a no-confidence vote, the government has either shifted the grilled minister from his post and formed a new cabinet; or the cabinet has resigned and recommended dissolution of the duly elected parliament to His Highness the Amir, who then calls for fresh elections.

Rinsing and repeating this 'resignation-dissolution-election' process has stonewalled attempts by opposition lawmakers to have any meaningful oversight on the executive, or to introduce legislation on political issues or on election rules that are opposed by the government. Some political analysts believe that it is this frustration with the government's tactics that prompt lawmakers to repeatedly issue or threaten grilling motions against members of the executive branch.

No doubt parliamentarians have the right to monitor and conduct due oversight on government actions, and to question the government over its plans and decisions, or even call for scrapping what they consider wrong decisions, and to recommend what they consider more efficient and efficacious strategies.

However, lawmakers who resort to grilling motions in an attempt to express their exasperation at attempts to limit their legislative powers, need to stop and do a rethink. While they may consider grilling as their legislative right that is enshrined in the constitution, they also need to contemplate whether repeatedly distorting such parliamentary mechanisms is in

the interests of the wider democratic path that Kuwait has chosen to follow, and to the future of the country.

Meanwhile, even as parliament remains embroiled in its grilling motions and counter measures by the government, Kuwait's economy continues to deteriorate. The rise in oil prices in recent weeks may have given the country's finances a short breath of life, but it is by no means a solution to Kuwait's sustained ailing economy.

Underlining the country's precarious financial situation, the Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment Khalifa Hamadeh was recently quoted in a statement as saying that the current increase in oil revenues does not cover the budget obligations.

In a reference to the debt law that has repeatedly been thwarted by parliamentary objections, the finance minister said that the government remained committed to pushing forward draft laws that aim to provide liquidity to the General Reserve Fund (GRF), which serves as the state treasury.

Nevertheless, Minister Hamadah clarified that the debt law and other solutions, — such as the one suggested by the government to begin dipping into the country's larger Future Generations Fund — are only temporary measures designed to ease the liquidity crunch and were not in lieu of serious economic and financial reforms that the country urgently needs. Noting that temporary steps to improve liquidity in the GRF would at best enable the government to meet its immediate obligations of paying public sector salaries and subsidies, he pointed out that these two expenses on their own account for more than 71 percent of the total expenditure in the budget of the fiscal year 2021-22.

Revealing that the break-even oil price in the 2021-22 budget is US\$90 per barrel, the finance minister said, "Total oil revenues at the end of the upcoming fiscal year should reflect the rate of \$90 per barrel of crude oil for every day in the next fiscal year before the budget deficit becomes zero." He added that "the rise in oil prices in the past two weeks will not cover the state's obligations, even if it continues at its current level throughout the fiscal year that begins on the first of next April."

Stressing the need for radical economic and financial reforms that contribute to reducing expenditures and increasing non-oil revenues, Minister Hamadeh expressed his confidence that the National Assembly members would cooperate to help overcome obstacles and support the coming reforms. He added, "We will spare no effort in strengthening this cooperation and extending bridges through building a real and effective partnership between the executive and legislative authorities and by concerting and integrating efforts to reach the desired goal."

While we laud the finance minister's confidence of cooperation with lawmakers, and his determination to build "effective partnership between the executive and legislative authorities", we still keep our fingers crossed on what could transpire when parliament reconvenes on 18 March.



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# Kuwait population falls as expatriates leave en masse

Many citizens and several lawmakers who have been crying hoarsely that Kuwait's lopsided demographic structure between citizens and foreigners is to blame for much of the country's social and economic woes, will probably be pleased to know that for the first time in almost three decades, the population of Kuwait experienced a sharp fall in 2020.

Latest available population figures show that the total number of people in the country dipped by 2.2 percent in 2020 to reach 4.68 million, from the 4.8 million in 2019. The main reason attributed to this decline in population numbers is that in 2020, more expatriates left the country than entered it.

According to recent demographic data from the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI), despite the modest increase in Kuwaiti population by 2 percent, the decrease in total population was driven by a sharp decrease in expatriate numbers, which were down by 4 percent. Since the start of the pandemic in early 2020, more than 130,000 expatriates are estimated to

have left the country, and the percentage of expatriates in the total population has fallen to 68.7 percent, the lowest level reached in seven years.

Fall in foreigner numbers is said to be fueled partly by the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic that resulted in a weak and stagnant economic environment that led to many companies retrenching their employees. The decrease in expat numbers also reportedly comes from various proposed changes by the government to the residency laws and the continued Kuwaitization drive, especially in public-sector entities.

Moreover, job losses, higher living costs, and the ongoing pandemic have forced many expatriates to send their dependents back home. Available figures show that the number of expatriate dependents has continued to decline, falling by 0.4 percent year-on-year (y/y) in 2020 after a drop of 0.3 percent in 2019.

In a review of the population structure and future job market in the country, economic analysts at the National Bank of Kuwait say that despite the continued

decline in the number of Kuwaitis under the age of 15 (down to 0.2% y/y in 2020 from the 0.4% a year ago), this cohort of the population of around 493,000 still makes up more than a third of the Kuwaiti population, who will form a major chunk of the job market in a decades time. At the same time, growth in the number of working age nationals above the age of 15 who form the current working population has over the last couple of years remained steady at 2.7 percent.

The current young population and the potential increase in the country's future youth pool, point to an urgent need for the authorities to significantly expand the number of jobs that will be available in the coming years. But that begs the question, jobs from where. The already bloated public sector can no longer absorb more nationals; the number of expatriates in public sector jobs have also been whittled down to a minimum in many government entities; the private sector remains reluctant to employ citizens, finding it more cost- and work-effective to hire workers from abroad.

After a growth of 4.9 percent y/y in 2019,



total employment in 2020 recorded its largest decline in almost 30 years of 4.2 percent. This decline reflects both, a slowdown in hiring among Kuwaiti nationals, as well as a sharp drop in expatriate employment. Expatriate employment reportedly dropped by 5.2 percent in 2020 after an increase of 5.4 percent a year earlier, on the back of a decline in hiring activity especially in private sector, which was down by 5.3 percent. Excluding domestic workers, the drop in expat employment was even higher at 7 percent in the private sector.

## Philippine Ambassador honors Chairperson of board of Kuwait Disabled Gym



Philippine Ambassador to Kuwait H.E. Mohd. Noordin Pendsina N. Lomondot honored Mr. Shafi Al-Hajri, Chairperson of the Board of the Kuwait Disabled Sport Club, on the 2nd March for his unwavering support to the programs of the Philippine Embassy in Kuwait. This includes the ongoing Mobile Passport Service that allowed Filipinos, especially those

with residence visas close to expiring, to renew their passports at a bigger and safer venue.

"Mr. Al-Hajri's unbounded generosity and patience will always be remembered by the tens of thousands of Filipinos in Kuwait who benefited from the Embassy's programs that he has supported," Ambassador Lomondot said in praise of Mr. Al-Hajri.

## Large crowds at Kuwait vaccination center for vaccines

People continue to show up in droves at vaccination sites across Kuwait, all of them with online appointments, to get their anti-COVID-19 shots, sharing the belief that protecting against the infection would help to build community immunity, and was the quickest way to end the pandemic, and the harsh measures including the curfew.

Health workers and interior ministry personnel are on hand to maintain order at these designated centers, as Kuwaitis and expatriates alike, undeterred by a 12-hour lockdown to rein in spiralling infection rates, rush to get vaccinated.



## Canadian embassy awards Young Ambassador of Canada distinction to deserving student

To mark International Women's day, the Embassy of Canada proudly organised an initiative under the name of "Young Ambassador of Canada which took place on March 10th, 2021. The Embassy partnered with the British School of Kuwait to select a student to become the Young Ambassador for a day. She would accompany HE Louis-Pierre Emond, Ambassador of Canada to the State of Kuwait throughout his official duties for the day. The purpose of this initiative is to encourage young women to consider diplomacy as a career path, to empower young women to learn about leadership roles, underline Canada's efforts in supporting gender equality and to stand up for women's rights around the world.

The Young Ambassador selected Ms. Reem Elassy, is a year 12 student at the British School of Kuwait. Reem has been at the school for the past four years and is currently studying Economics, Mathematics, Further Mathematics and History at AS Level. Reem is also participating in the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) and is undertaking research to assess 'The extent to which unemployment was the main cause of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution'. Whilst she has a keen interest in International Relations, History and Diplomacy, Reem is hoping to study Economics at University with career aspirations in becoming an economist.

During this special day, the Young Ambassador led a number of meetings accompanied by HE Ambassador Emond. She started her day at the Embassy where she met with the staff to learn about their roles and responsibilities, then she had a meeting with Ambassador Emond who gave her an extensive overview of the diplomatic career path as well as the Canadian values in key areas of mutual interest for Canada and Kuwait. She also had a fruitful meeting with HE Hamad Al-Masha'an, Assistant Foreign Minister for Americas Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to underline the key components of the bilateral relations between Canada and Kuwait. The Young Ambassador Reem Alassy visited the UN House where she met with Dr. Tarek El Sheikh, UN Resident Coordinator to learn about the



international organizations and their crucial role in the region. Finally, she had an interesting discussion with Mrs. Aliya Al-Khaled, a local leader, to have a better understanding of the role of women in both the political and business spheres.

Ambassador Emond said on this occasion: "It was a great pleasure to spend the day with our Young Ambassador. Our objective was to mark Women's International Day by allowing a young woman to get to experience what a day in diplomacy is like and to hopefully inspire her and others to consider diplomacy as a career path. Diversity is key to ensuring the success of all life experiences, whether they be professional or personal. We wanted to highlight the importance of having people from every background, every walk of life in any organization. It has been proven that having various perspectives taken into consideration allow for better policy making, decisions and the success of any organization. We encourage young women to continue to follow their dreams and find the path that fits their professional and personal needs. This will ensure we live in a better, more peaceful, more diverse, and fairer world."



# Face Yoga explained and why it works



By Hermoine Macura-Noble  
Special to The Times Kuwait

**A**s the world ventures into another year of the pandemic, many women are choosing to turn away from professional beauty treatments and opt for skin-saving alternatives that are less evasive and can even be done at home.

And while anti-ageing procedures, like fillers and lasers, are the staples of reducing visible signs of ageing, working out your face muscles using simple lymphatic drainage techniques has also proven to yield the same results without the steep costs.

Also known as Face Yoga – the non-toxic, non-invasive massage technique is safe for anyone, takes years off your face and is inexpensive, say the experts. “Women love the results.... It’s a great way to lift your skin. The result is a more sculpted jawline and a

depuffed face that can help with improved firmness, lack of sallowness, and plumpness over time,” explains Zainab Gibrine, Managing Director at Facette Facial Bar.

The other results many people start to see is a brighter complexion due to more blood circulating to the face, and as you begin to strengthen the other major muscles of the face, such as the obicularis oculi (the big muscle around the eye) and the zygomaticus major (the muscle you use to smile) the skin starts to firm up.

A study featured by Northwestern University featured 27 females between 40



and 65 who did 30 minutes of face yoga every day for two months. Dermatologists found the participants looked three years younger, as well as an increase in cheek fullness. Many women also commented on fewer fine lines, wrinkles and crow’s feet, and less puffiness under the eyes over several weeks. “The gentle massage technique targets the lymph nodes and works on your muscles to drains away toxins, encouraging your lymphatic system to deliver fresh nutrients to your cells,” adds Gibrine.

Like all circulation in the body, the lymphatic vessels drain towards gravity, which leads to swelling in the face. Massage upward will help to improve the skin’s radiance over time and, with consistency, create a more toned look to the face. Face Yoga practitioners also report it may help make your face more symmetrical, reduce dark circles’ appearance, generate positive emotions, and make your face less rounded.

Experts say that Face Yoga is not ideal for women in their twenties and thirties as the exercises are designed to increase the size of the facial muscles, which creates a more bulky effect in a younger face that doesn’t require the added volume. However, for the rest of us looking to age gracefully and exude a sense of Zen – Face Yoga may just be the natural and affordable option that can help us look and feel better.



The first Australian English speaking News Anchor in the Middle East. She is also the Author of *Faces of the Middle East* and Founder of US-based 501c3 charity – *The House of Rest* which helps to ease the suffering of victims of war. For more from our Contributing Editor, you can follow her on Instagram @hello\_herminoie

## IWG celebrates International Women’s Day

**I**nternational Women’s Group (IWG) Kuwait, celebrated International Women’s Day on 8 March with the participation of four inspiring and distinguished women leaders.

The event, held under the patronage of Sheikha Hanouf Bader Al-Muhamad Al-Sabah, spouse of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr. Ahmed Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah and Honorary President of the International Women’s Group-Kuwait (IWG), was attended by members and Executive Board of the IWG.

The four key speakers at the function were Nabeela Abdulla Al Mulla, retired ambassador of Kuwait; H.E. Ayse Hilal Sayan Koytak, Ambassador of Turkey to Kuwait; H.E. Elena Romanowski, Ambassador of the United States to Kuwait; and, H.E. Anne Claire Legendre Ambassador of France to Kuwait.

Ambreen Mustafa, spouse of the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and president of IWG, delivered the welcome speech and thanked the distinguished speakers for their contributions. Her opening remarks celebrated the successes of women and acknowledged the hardships of disproportionate abuse and violence that women still face worldwide.

Madam Nabeela Al Mulla, Kuwait’s and the GCC’s first woman ambassador, enlightened members with some valuable experiences of her ground-breaking career, taking special care to acknowledge the mentorship of her enlightened

mother in encouraging her to pursue her career as a diplomat.

She also lauded the selfless efforts of all women, especially nurses and lower school teachers who tend to be predominantly women as frontline workers, and proposed that a worldwide campaign should be in place to address their concerns. She concluded her presentation on a positive note about the vaccine and the hope it brings to the world. On the local Kuwaiti scene, she said: “I register with pride the participation of women as doctors, nurses, educators and volunteers in a society like many others, trying to overcome the pandemic.”

For her part, Ambassador Koytak of Turkey spoke of how the pandemic has highlighted both the centrality of women’s contribution as well as the disproportionate burden that women carry. While “today there is more acceptance than ever before that women bring different experiences, perspectives and skills to the table”, there is still much work to be done in acknowledging women’s roles, she said.

Noting that the pursuit of gender equality yields benefits for whole societies she affirmed that Turkey is committed to women’s equality and rights, stating that in the past 19 years the country’s female force participation rate had increased by 10 percent and women now make up 17.5 percent of the Turkish Parliament and over 50 percent of university staff. She also pointed out that as a woman ambassador she feels privileged to work in Kuwait, saying



: “Women in Kuwait are among the most emancipated in our region, women form 46 percent of those employed in the country and are seen in every sector of the economy and play an important role in society and the administrative life of the country.”

As a sign of solidarity with women around the world, the members then enjoyed a song recorded especially for International Women’s Day in 2013 by 25 singers and musicians from over 20 different countries.

Madam Romanowski, the US Ambassador delivered her well wishes and congratulations to all women by saying, “On International Women’s Day we honor the achievement of women throughout history and across the globe. It is

a day that brings us all together regardless of our nationality. It is also a day to renew our commitment to the pursuit of equality for all and to work towards a better future for our girls who will become the leaders of tomorrow.”

She also acknowledged the sacrifices made by so many women healthcare workers on the front line who everyday place others before themselves; she extended her gratitude to these women and pioneering women who, as she said, continue to move the needle forward for us all. She concluded by saying: “I am humbled to see so many change-makers here in Kuwait and can’t wait to see more.”

Madam Legendre, Ambassador of France in her speech reiterated

the importance of working collaboratively towards gender equality. She pointed to an analysis done by the World Economic Forum stating that given existing conditions, gender equality will be achieved only in 150 years. “Obviously, that timeline is untenable. France is committed to gender equality and has made it a priority.

As part of its commitment and drive, France will be hosting the Gender Equality Forum in Paris this summer. We hope to be able to welcome Kuwait to the Forum, which will be a historic and collaborative meeting point to move forward towards substantive and sustainable equality, by tackling the issues and challenges that are still affecting women around the world,” said the French ambassador.

The French Ambassador went on to highlight many important points in the advancement towards gender equality and spoke of some of her own personal experiences, noting that mentorship is a wonderful and necessary tool, and that all women must remain vigilant against self-censorship and always remember to push for the change they want to see.

The proceedings concluded with special thanks to the ambassadors who participated in this special event, and Environmental Engineer Hiba Al Farra who shed light on the importance of sustainability and the role women can play in protecting our environment. Volunteers, online participants, and board members were also appreciated for making this event a great success.



# Vaccination Opportunity for Global Health



**ERIK BERGLÖF**  
Chief Economist at the Asian  
Infrastructure Investment Bank.

**E**volutionary pressures accompanying the spread of the coronavirus have driven the COVID-19 pandemic into a phase in which new variants are starting to pop up everywhere. In response, governments around the world are racing to vaccinate enough people to achieve herd immunity before the virus acquires a mutation that nullifies existing vaccines' effectiveness. Sadly, in many emerging and developing economies, this race is being lost, leaving everyone vulnerable to new strains. But it does not have to be this way.

The global deployment of COVID-19 vaccines has so far been an ugly free-for-all, with rich and large countries winning out. At this point, many emerging and developing economies probably will not achieve meaningful levels of vaccination until the end of this year, at the earliest. And many of these countries may never get vaccines that have already been pre-purchased, because manufacturers have massively overpromised what they can deliver. Worse, there is now a distinct possibility that the vaccines, even if they do arrive, will no longer be effective, owing to the proliferation of new variants.

But these delays and global-governance failures could yet be made into an opportunity. Because the situation calls for mass-vaccination drives on a global scale, such efforts could serve as a platform for ambitious international initiatives to improve health-system resilience, prepare for future pandemics, and work toward universal health coverage. The recent start of deliveries under the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) mechanism for vaccine finance and deployment is very encouraging.

The stars are aligned for precisely such a global strategy. For once, health is atop the global agenda, with world leaders and finance ministers eager to listen. US President Joe Biden's administration has brought hope of global leadership and proper funding for efforts to reach poorer countries. Biden's reversal of Donald Trump's decision to withdraw the United States from the World Health Organization will provide much-needed authority and resources to that indispensable body. We must not squander this opportunity.



Vaccine deployment, with an emphasis on primary care for delivery, requires mobilizing a broad range of capacities, including transportation, storage, and logistics infrastructure. Moreover, most immunization systems are currently focused on delivering childhood vaccines and will need to be adapted to reach adult populations.

Governments are already drawing up national plans to deal with difficult questions such as which vaccine recipients to prioritize. Health officials are updating information and monitoring systems, identifying vaccination sites, targeting hard-to-reach populations, and preparing communication tools to address vaccine hesitancy and other challenges.

“ India is already an important drug and vaccine producer, but the world will need even more regional production and logistics hubs, particularly if the COVID-19 virus becomes endemic, as many epidemiologists fear. ”

As a first step in establishing a more robust framework, the COVID-19 vaccination infrastructure should be retained to deliver vaccines against other diseases. Many vaccination programs and health interventions have been postponed or put on hold as a result of the pandemic. We should now be looking for opportunities to reactivate them. At a minimum, it is critical that health workers around the world be vaccinated against other illnesses such as hepatitis B and influenza.

Administering COVID-19 vaccines calls

for upgrades to, or the creation of, delivery infrastructure, particularly for the vaccines that require cold storage chains. But to retain this infrastructure after the pandemic, it will have to be made sustainable. Introducing solar power into vaccine logistics chains and basic health units in remote areas could provide huge long-term benefits in poor countries with unstable power supplies or unreliable electricity grids.

Expanding immunization to adult populations also will require extra training. Here, we should be considering how digital platforms and artificial intelligence might be used to train health workers, volunteers, and non-medical personnel around the world. The same technologies could also be used to disseminate critical public health

information – possibly using blockchain technology to protect privacy – and then used to improve delivery of care, or to enhance disease surveillance and other preventive measures.

Finally, and perhaps most crucially, the COVID-19 vaccination effort could lead to more pharmaceutical production and even research in the emerging and developing world. India is already an important drug and vaccine producer, but the world will need even more regional production and logistics hubs, particularly if the COVID-19 virus becomes endemic, as many epidemiologists fear. Existing governance structures to prevent counterfeits and black-market activity will need to be reinforced. Though this implies some up-front costs, it will yield long-term benefits for health infrastructure in these countries.

Making the most of the COVID-19 vaccination effort will require leadership at the highest level. As the current occupant of the G20's rotating presidency, Italy – now with Prime Minister Mario Draghi's experienced hand on the tiller – could work with the United Kingdom, the current G7 chair, and the newly empowered WHO to seize the opportunities on offer. Now is the time to leverage the skills and financing capacities of multilateral development banks, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector.

The unprecedented speed with which COVID-19 vaccines were developed represents a signal achievement for humanity. With just a little foresight, we can leverage that success into equally impressive improvement in global health, longevity, and life satisfaction.



EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

# Unleashing the Climate Market



## NANCY BIRDSALL AND BRIAN WEBSTER

Nancy Birdsall is President Emeritus and a senior fellow at the Center for Global Development.

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Progress against climate change has long crept at a snail's pace, and the costs of inaction are increasingly clear to see. Hardly a week goes by without a natural disaster or an extreme weather event that destroys the lives and livelihoods of vulnerable populations in the developing world. Among the latest horrors is a devastating flood in India, owing to glacial melt, and the wave of Category 4 hurricanes that struck Honduras in November.

With a per capita carbon footprint that is 4-5 times larger than the average low- or middle-income country, the United States is deeply implicated in these tragedies. Fortunately, 2021 is shaping up to be a year when meaningful US climate action finally takes off, owing to a groundswell in the global financial industry. That's right: Big Finance has started to go green as major institutional investors seek out safe, long-run returns in global markets.

Among many other positive developments, ExxonMobil, under pressure from Blackrock, the world's largest asset manager, recently wrote down some \$20 billion of its fossil-fuel assets. The New York State Common Retirement fund, with more than \$200 billion under management, has announced that it will divest from fossil-fuel firms. And, as The Economist recently noted, energy firms' share of the S&P 500 has fallen from 10 percent in 2011 to 3 percent today, reflecting not just the effects of the pandemic but also investor 'gripes beyond COVID-19'.

Insurance markets are abandoning fossil fuels. Already in 2019, insurers accounting for 37 percent of the industry's global assets were pulling out of coal investments, having deemed the industry increasingly 'uninsurable'. And this past December, Lloyd's, the world's biggest insurance market, announced that it will stop issuing new coverage for coal and other dirty energy projects within a year.

Finally, in the auto industry, electric vehicles (EVs) are gaining momentum. For

example, BMW recently announced that it will build 250,000 more EVs over the next two years than it had originally planned. And GM (which has committed to being carbon neutral by 2040) and Ford will both release their new EV models this year, as will several start-ups.

Although there are still plenty of divides between industry leaders and regulators, the historic resistance to stronger climate standards is melting, and many in the private sector are expressing a willingness to work with US President Joe Biden's administration.

Where did this wave of financial greening originate? Some of the credit should

Michigan, George Washington University, Cornell University, and the University of Cambridge joined the growing ranks of academic institutions agreeing to limit their investments in emissions-intensive energy sources. And over half of all universities in the United Kingdom have already made such commitments.

Where McKibben has been building up the grassroots, former Bank of England Governor Mark Carney has emerged as a key thinker on the policy front. In 2015, when he was still at the BOE, he pressed financial regulators to encourage firms to publish data on the carbon intensity of their

and fuel-efficiency standards). And public policies, in turn, should reflect public attitudes. It is therefore simplistic to say that the financial industry is going green on its own. According to YouGov, climate change is now a top issue for US voters (just behind health care and the economy), after ranking low on the priority list just five years ago.

The question for the Biden administration is how to harness this momentum. For starters, Brian Deese, the new director of the White House National Economic Council (who formerly oversaw sustainable investing at Blackrock) should sit down with Gary Gensler, the incoming head of the Securities and Exchange Commission. The moment has come for the US to follow the UK and the EU in requiring publicly traded companies to publish standardized information on their climate exposure. Gensler has a reputation as an assertive regulator. Once he is confirmed, he will be empowered to take action with a Democratic majority among the SEC commissioners.

Moreover, mandatory disclosure of climate risks would likely find broad support within the financial industry, which prefers a level playing field for all competitors. Just last month, 11 industry groups issued a joint policy agenda that includes standardizing climate disclosures. Rarely in the US has there been such a large open window for enacting climate policies.

The stars are aligning for 2021 to be a year of significant action on climate change. A comprehensive push by the SEC would bend the curve even more profoundly toward a more sustainable future.

“ Financial industry is not going green on its own; it ultimately responds to expected prices and returns, which are significantly influenced by public policies, such as green-energy subsidies and fuel-efficiency standards, and public attitudes. ”

certainly go to the journalist and climate activist Bill McKibben, the co-founder of 350.org. McKibben got the ball rolling years ago by calling on university students to push their schools' endowment funds to divest from fossil fuels. This approach took time, but as the costs of producing clean energy fell, and as the ESG (environment, social, and governance) investment movement gained steam, it became easier for university boards to reconcile student demands with respectable market returns.

Just in the last year, the University of

assets, arguing that such information would generate demand for even more disclosures and ultimately build resilience into the market. Now, the UK and the European Union are both implementing their own climate-reporting requirements for firms. And in the US, Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen is considering a series of climate-risk stress tests for major financial institutions.

Of course, financial markets ultimately respond to expected prices and returns, which are significantly influenced by public policies (such as green-energy subsidies

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# Importance of screening for preventing chronic kidney disease

Chronic kidney disease is a growing global health concern with over 1.1 million deaths reported worldwide from the disease. On this year's World Kidney Day on 11 March, we look at the implications of chronic kidney disease on patients and their families.

People with chronic kidney disease usually may not feel sick or notice symptoms indicative of the disease. This World Kidney Day is an opportunity to bring awareness to this condition. Awareness is all the more important with the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic, as people with chronic kidney disease who are infected with COVID-19 are at higher risk of serious illness.

Kidneys play an important role in the body, they filter wastes and excess fluids from the body, which are then excreted through urine. Chronic kidney disease describes the gradual loss of kidney function. When the disease reaches an advanced stage, dangerous levels of fluids, electrolytes and wastes can build up in your body.

The prevalence of chronic kidney disease in Arab countries is limited, but those countries have a high prevalence of risk factors for the condition. Among the risk factors that increase the chances of being afflicted with chronic kidney disease are diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity, all of which have a high incidence in the region.

According to Dr. Naim Issa, a transplant nephrologist at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, in the United States, diabetes, diabetes and hypertension are the two main causes of chronic kidney disease worldwide and in most Arab

countries. Other risk factors include smoking, heart disease, a family history of the disease, older age and abnormal kidney structure. Smoking can damage the kidneys and worsen kidney damage.

Screening for the chronic conditions is essential, as is screening for chronic kidney disease in people with diabetes and high blood pressure, says Dr. Issa. Managing the chronic conditions can lower the risk of developing chronic kidney disease. Quitting smoking and losing weight also can help prevent kidney disease.

Dr. Issa adds, "In the Middle East and other hot weather areas, it is also important to drink enough water to help prevent kidney problems. Adults should aim for 2 to 3 liters of water a day to keep their kidneys healthy. It is important to foster a culture of good hydration among adults and children."

Early stages of chronic kidney disease can have few symptoms. Later, symptoms can include nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, fatigue, sleep problems and changes in urine output. Sometimes people experience shortness of breath, swelling of the feet and ankles, muscle twitches and cramps, persistent itching and chest pain.

Treatment for chronic kidney disease focuses on slowing the progression of kidney damage.



Some people with chronic kidney disease eventually need dialysis and preferably a kidney transplant.

Elaborating on recent transplant research, Dr. Issa says that it includes:

Living donor kidney transplant: A living-donor transplant is a surgical procedure to remove an

organ or portion of an organ from a living person, and place it in another person whose organ is no longer working properly. Living-kidney donation is the most common transplant of this type.

Paired kidney donation: For paired kidney donation, donors and their recipients are not compatible for a transplant. However, the donor of each pair is compatible with the recipient of the other pair.

**Markers in donor kidneys:** Mayo Clinic researchers have found microstructural features that can indicate some long-term susceptibility for chronic kidney disease in otherwise healthy adults.

**Features of living-donor kidneys:** Mayo Clinic researchers have also discovered that subtle structural features in kidneys from living donors features that can only be seen with a microscope can predict the risk of transplant failure in recipients.



## Sniffing device to better diagnose diseases

Specially trained dogs have been shown to detect many kinds of disease simply through their smell. Numerous studies have reiterated that these dogs could smell a wide range of diseases, including lung, breast, ovarian, bladder, and prostate cancers, and possibly Covid-19. For example, the dogs had a 99 percent success rate in detecting prostate cancer simply by sniffing urine samples of patients.

For more than 15 years, dogs have proven to be accurate disease detectors. Moreover, when trained to respond to samples from patients with one type of cancer, some dogs have then identified several other types of cancer — even when humans could not detect any differences between the samples.

Even using powerful analytical tools available to humans, including gas chromatography mass spectrometry (GCMS) and microbial profiling, it is not possible to detect any similarities when analyzing samples, for example, of skin cancer, bladder cancer, breast cancer and lung cancer. But the dogs could discern and detect the differences. Scientists have been hunting for ways of

automating the amazing olfactory capabilities of the canine nose and brain, in a compact device. Now, a team of researchers at MIT and other institutions has come up with a system that can detect the chemical and microbial content of an air sample with even greater sensitivity than a dog's nose. They coupled this to a machine-learning process that can identify the distinctive characteristics of the disease-bearing samples.

Over the last few years, the researchers have been developing and improving on a miniaturized detector system that incorporates mammalian olfactory receptors stabilized to act as sensors, whose data streams can be handled in real-time by a typical smartphone's capabilities.

In their latest tests, the team tested 50 samples of urine from confirmed cases of prostate cancer and controls known to be free of the disease, using both trained dogs and the miniaturized detection system. They then applied a machine-learning program to tease out any similarities and differences between the samples that could help the sensor-based system to identify the disease. In testing the same samples, the artificial system was able to match the success rates of the dogs, with both methods scoring more than 70 percent.

The miniaturized detection system is 200 times more sensitive than a dog's nose in terms of being able to detect and identify tiny traces of different molecules, as confirmed through controlled tests. But in terms of interpreting those molecules, the machine was found to be 100 percent dumber. So the team used machine learning to find the elusive patterns that dogs can infer from the scent, but humans have not been able to grasp from a chemical analysis. The researchers say that their study provides a solid framework for further research to develop the technology to a level suitable for clinical use. They hope that their miniature system could someday lead to an automated odor-detection system small enough to be incorporated into a smartphone, and that such a system would become as ubiquitous as the camera phones currently in use.

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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

# Struggle for Technology Sovereignty in Europe



**HERMANN HAUSER**  
Director of Amadeus Capital Partners.

Back when states regularly used armed forces to compel others into compliance or dependence, sovereignty was primarily a geographic and military concept. But the term has more recently taken on an added dimension.

The COVID-19 pandemic, for example, revealed the West's dependence on China for supplies of face masks and personal protective equipment. And former US President Donald Trump weaponized American technology and payment systems in an effort to advance US interests. Technology sovereignty, or the lack of it, is fast becoming a central strategic issue, not least for Europe.

Imagine, for example, that Vice Admiral Eugene H. Black III, the commander of the US Sixth Fleet, suddenly requested something unpalatable from UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, noting that his fleet was stationed in the English Channel. The government and most people in the United Kingdom would regard this as a very strange manifestation of the bilateral 'special relationship', and object strenuously.

Yet, there was no public outcry last year when Mike Pompeo, Trump's secretary of state, leaned heavily on Johnson to exclude Chinese technology firm Huawei from the UK's 5G network, implying that the United States otherwise would stop sharing intelligence with the UK. Pompeo also referred to the fact that the US controls the City of London's payment infrastructure, and that all electronic chips used in the UK require

US electronic design tool software.

The public silence in response to Pompeo's tactics came despite a thorough analysis by GCHQ, the UK's high-tech intelligence and security agency, which had concluded that Huawei products were safe to use in non-critical parts of the country's 5G infrastructure. Pompeo's coercion was no less blatant than that in the hypothetical example above, but technological might is less visible to the public than a US aircraft carrier in the Thames Estuary.

The UK long overlooked its technological dependence on other countries, because it believed that supply chains were secure and regarded America as a reliable ally. Both of these assumptions are now in question.

From now on, every country or group of countries must ask itself three questions. First, do we produce the technologies we need? If not, do we have access to them from a number of sources? And if still not, do we have guaranteed, unfettered, long-term (more than five years) access to them from monopoly or oligopoly suppliers from a single country, typically the US or China?

A country that answers no to all three questions is vulnerable to technological coercion that is no less severe than the military coercion of yesteryear.

Does the UK have all the critical technologies it needs for its economy and government to function properly? To take just 5G, payment systems, and semiconductors as examples, the answer is clearly no.

Nor is it likely that the UK, acting alone, can secure guaranteed, unfettered, long-term access to these technologies, given that the outcome of international trade negotiations is determined by the relative heft of the participants. The UK accounts for about 1 percent of the world's population and 2 percent of global GDP (in purchasing-power-parity terms), and has almost no

globally dominant technologies.

Despite Brexit, therefore, the UK's only rational option for achieving technology sovereignty is to collaborate with the world's third economic superpower, the European Union. Whereas the chimera of national sovereignty has hypnotized the English, in particular, the EU understands the real threats to sovereignty in the hyper-technological twenty-first century and has been developing policies to protect itself.

Specifically, Europe recognizes that it risks becoming collateral damage in the current US-China trade war. Trump's aggressive overreach in using America's semiconductor dominance to cripple Huawei served as an alarming 'Sputnik moment' for the Chinese government, prompting it to launch a massive state-funded national effort to make the country independent in semiconductor production.

China can and is outspending the US in semiconductor development, and is deploying many times the number of highly trained engineers, leaving no doubt that the country will rapidly end its dependence on America in this sector. If China comes to dominate the global semiconductor industry, as it may very well do, the relationship may be reversed — battle won, war lost.

The rational alternative to Trump-style strategic myopia is to help China develop its semiconductor industry based on the principle of reciprocity. For example, in exchange for intellectual property (IP) and technical support, China could be given permission to build semiconductor factories in Europe to serve European markets, and share the jointly developed IP. This strategy previously worked well with the Japanese car industry.

Technology sovereignty is a particularly salient issue today in the UK, where the government must soon decide whether



to allow US technology giant Nvidia's planned takeover of Cambridge-based chip designer Arm. Nvidia's purchase of the firm — whose microprocessors are in most cars and information-technology infrastructure equipment, as well as in 95 percent of the world's mobile phones — would create yet another giant US technology monopoly, this time in mobile computing. It would also invariably enhance US powers of coercion vis-à-vis the UK, and deprive Britain of a valuable bargaining chip in the struggle for technology sovereignty.

Beyond maintaining Arm's independence, the UK and the EU should together establish a €100 billion (\$120 billion) Technology Sovereignty Fund to counter the \$100 billion that the US is spending on its technology sovereignty and the even larger amounts China is mobilizing. Europe needs to build alternatives to Chinese technology manufacturing monopolies and to US-based IP, digital, and payment monopolies.

The only stable and equitable solution to the global technology sovereignty problem is to apply the reciprocity principle to establish independent sovereignties for the US, China, and Europe. Achieving that might even lead to a world order in which Vice Admiral Black and the Sixth Fleet spend more time at home.



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