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Kuwait will always remain in my heart

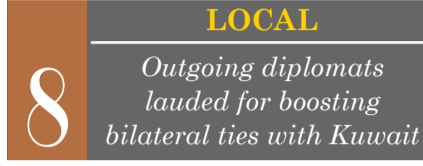
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Geopolitical crises spark price-hikes for basic commodities

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Outgoing diplomats lauded for boosting bilateral ties with Kuwait

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Structural and systemic reforms await urgent redressal

Analysts expect the new government to drive economic diversification measures by promoting and energizing non-oil activities, engaging with the private sector, and improving the business and investment environment to make it more attractive to international investors.

By Reaven D'Souza
Executive Managing Editor

Guided by the sagacious and insightful directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the new government headed by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad A-Sabah, has been instituting several recalibrations aimed at heralding an economic, social, and political renaissance in the country.

Since taking oath of office in May this year, the cabinet has also been assiduously reviewing all aspects of the economy and issuing a spate of decisions focused on taking the country along a track of sustainable development and progress. In addition, the government has initiated a series of policies and processes aimed at strengthening



effective governance, enhancing accountability, and combating corruption in all its dimensions.

With its commitment to development and long-term welfare of citizens the government has also signaled a willingness to undertake several radical structural and systemic reforms and policy changes that previous administrations have tended to side-step. Previous attempts to introduce crucial economic, social and administrative reforms were hindered by various exigencies, including legislative roadblocks and political upheavals.

Political instability over the years has been a major hurdle that has prevented Kuwait from mirroring the developments witnessed in other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. While other GCC states have surged ahead in developing their non-oil sector.

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Kuwait will always remain in my heart

As he bids farewell to Kuwait, Ambassador of Spain H.E. Miguel Moro Aguilar, speaks about his experiences in Kuwait and says that Kuwait will always remain in his heart.

Ambassador of Spain H.E. Miguel Moro Aguilar, in a message ahead of his departure from Kuwait, stated that he was immensely proud of the large network of Kuwaiti and expatriate friends he built during his four-year tenure in Kuwait, and that the memories of Kuwait would forever remain in his heart.

In a recent exclusive interview with local Arabic newspaper, Al-Jarida, Ambassador Aguilar, spoke about his four years in Kuwait noting, "It may have been four years, but it felt like it flew by. It was undeniably a beautiful part of my life. I arrived with my family in July 2020, right in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, coming from Southeast Asia. The airport was still closed at that time. Despite the challenging circumstances, I immediately sensed the eagerness of the Kuwaiti people to meet with me and discuss my country. They were particularly interested in the visa issue, as thousands of them own property in Spain. Over these years, I have had many enriching experiences, largely due to the excellent relationship I developed with the Kuwaiti people.

"In Spain, we have a saying that a person who has a friend has a treasure. I have developed very close relationships with many Kuwaitis and residents here. It has been a beautiful relationship, and I felt its depth recently, with many people wanting to say goodbye or express their gratitude for the friendship we shared in Kuwait. I cannot count the large number of friends I have made."

Asked what he would miss most about Kuwait, the Spanish envoy said: "I think what I will miss most is the people. When I came here, it was not my first time in Kuwait. I visited twice before — once when I was working in Iraq more than 20 years ago, serving as Deputy Head of Mission at the Spanish embassy in Baghdad, and again ten years later for some political consultations. In mid-2020, I came for the third time to take up my first ambassadorial position in my career. I noticed changes, such as the tall towers that were not there during my previous visits.

"Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, people made it easy for me by inviting me to their homes and diwanias, allowing me to get to know them better. I will definitely miss them, and I believe we will stay in touch, especially since many of them visit Spain and own properties there.

"I will also miss the delicious food, although I will be glad to stop eating so much, as it's easy to gain extra weight due to the great cuisine in Kuwait. I really appreciate the Arab style of hospitality in general and the Kuwaiti style in particular. I will miss the diwaniya, where we gather to talk and exchange news — a practice that is becoming rare in this fast-paced age of the Internet and social media. However, you can still attend these diwanias and make new friends.

"The wonderful thing about Kuwaitis is that they maintain their traditions through mutual visits with family and friends on most occasions, something that is also found among the Spanish to this day. Because of this, I never felt like I was in a foreign country.

"I have also felt that Kuwait is one of the best countries for any diplomat to serve. I had a similar



• ***In an exclusive farewell interview on the eve of his return to his home country, His Excellency Miguel Moro Aguilar, the Ambassador of Spain to Kuwait, spoke about his first day in Kuwait with his family amidst the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.***

• ***Ambassador Aguilar noted that he will miss Kuwaiti and expatriate friends after his departure, along with the Kuwaiti food that gave him extra weight, and the diwaniya—a traditional gathering place—where he enjoyed the company of wonderful Kuwaitis who still maintain family traditions similar to those found in Spain.***

experience when I worked in Panama because of the way people treated me and the fact that they spoke Spanish. In Kuwait, I felt very welcome from the beginning. I found many open doors and felt there were numerous opportunities for collaboration. So, I think Kuwait is among the best countries for any diplomat."

Elaborating on his experience serving as an ambassador in Kuwait, the Spanish diplomat said. "This was my first time serving as an ambassador,

which meant greater responsibility compared to my previous roles as deputy ambassador and counselor in different embassies. I believe Kuwait helped me significantly in building relationships and handling new experiences, especially with complex international situations due to the crises in the Middle East. We had to manage these issues with very broad diplomacy. My experience in Kuwait was very enriching, and I think the country has traditionally played

an important role in several regional and international crises.

"Kuwait has been a point of reference in the crises of the Middle East, starting with the Iraqi and Syrian crises, passing through the Yemeni crisis, and reaching the Gulf rift. It also played an important role at the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war and intervened to address this issue in the United Nations General Assembly. I believe you always learn from Kuwait's pivotal roles and diplomatic efforts."

Ambassador Aguilar revealed that his replacement in Kuwait would be Ambassador Manuel Gamayo, whom he described as a very experienced diplomat with a long and distinguished diplomatic career. "I am sure he will do a great job, and he doesn't need much advice from me, especially on consular matters. But if I had to say anything to him, it would be: 'Don't be surprised by the weather when you get to Kuwait'. I think he already knows the region well, as he was the deputy chief of mission in Saudi Arabia.

Expanding on Spain's tourism attractions, the ambassador noted, "Spain is the world's second most popular tourist destination, and we are on track to become number one, especially as we expect to exceed 120 million tourists in the next few years. Last year, Spain had around 86 million tourists, which is an incredible number, especially in the summer. Fortunately, we have one of the top ten infrastructures in the world. Our airports, ports, roads, and high-speed trains are fantastic. We have the second longest high-speed railway network in the world after China, and we are first in Europe in terms of kilometers. So, we have all the necessary services and facilities to host the many people who visit my country.

"However, this can be exhausting for some areas, particularly coastal regions in the summer. We will continue to promote tourism, but we aim for it to be more diverse throughout the year and not just concentrated on the beach. This year, we opened a direct line from Kuwait to Madrid and Barcelona, helping to rediscover and market Spain globally. Spain is the second most mountainous country in Western Europe, offering all kinds of sports, and our cuisine is among the top five cuisines in the world.

"We have worked hard over these years to broaden perceptions of Spain among visitors, and we have succeeded. I think people are now more aware of Spain's diverse offerings. Promoting tourism in a more balanced way was one of the main goals for my team and me in Kuwait."

Asked about any last words ahead of his departure from Kuwait, Ambassador Aguilar stated: "I was very happy to be among you these past years. I think Kuwait is a beautiful country, mainly because the people are so welcoming. I and my colleagues know that in other countries, it is not always easy to communicate with the locals. The Kuwaitis and residents here are very interesting, and I have managed to make wonderful friends. Spain is a very close friend of Kuwait, and I am sure that in the future we will continue to strengthen our relations, which are almost 62 years old. Personally, Kuwait will always remain in my heart as a very important part of my life."

Kuwait Health Ministry warns against violating patients' privacy

The Health Ministry affirmed that any type of photography or video recording that were not within the boundaries of the law was a violation of patients' privacy.

In a press statement Monday, the ministry said that everyone should respect patients' privacy, stressing that protecting medical data is one of its most important priorities.

Referring to Article 21 of Law 70/2020, the



ministry indicated that it was prohibited for third parties to photograph or video patients or practitioners while they were in the health facility unless they obtained prior written approval from the concerned parties or the facility's management. The same article of the Professional Practice Law allowed the professionals to perform any type of recording for the purpose of education, documentation, research and more,

after obtaining written consent from the patient, taking into account not revealing the patient's personal information and identity.

The ministry urged citizens, residents and media professionals to cooperate and adhere to these legislations, stressing the continuation of its efforts to ensure the provision of the best health services in an environment that respects patients' rights.

Ministry to initiate stern action against state property violators

A specialized task-force has been established by the Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Housing Affairs, Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan, to identify encroachments and other violations on state property, and implement necessary measures to rectify the situation, including taking legal action and demolishing the violations in accordance with the law.

The task force, headed by the General

Supervisor of Construction in the Engineering Audit and Follow-up Department, Abdullah Jaber, comprises a dedicated team that groups diverse experts, including the heads of removal teams, a representative from the legal department in the municipality, and additional officials.

The initial mission of the task-force, which will be conducted in accordance with prevailing laws and regulations, is expected



to be completed within a three-month timeframe. If found necessary, the timeframe will be extended by a further three-months in order to ensure the task-force achieves its objectives fully.

To ensure the success of this initiative, Dr. Al-Mashaan has called for support and cooperation from all sectors, organizational units, and branches of the municipality, as well as all relevant entities.

Death rate declines, births increase in Kuwait

Latest data from the Central Statistical Bureau's Census and Population Statistics Department reveal that the number of births in government hospitals in 2023 was 7917, an increase of 11 percent from the 7133 births registered in 2022. During the same period, private maternity hospitals recorded a decrease in birth rates, decreasing from 25,723 births in 2022 to 24,396 births last year.

In the meantime, the death rate among the population decreased in 2023 from 8041 in 2022 to 7436, which works out to 2.56 percent deaths per 1,000 population last year compared to 2.94 percent in 2022.

A breakdown of the mortality figures by the major diseases that claimed the lives of people in Kuwait, show that circulatory system diseases, in particular, heart-related conditions, was the leading cause of death in both years. In 2023, diseases of the circulatory system accounted for 94.81 percent of deaths per 100,000 citizens, compared to 55.27 percent for non-citizens.

The percentage of citizens dying from cancer increased by 16.4 percent, rising from 628 in 2022 to 731 in 2023. The total number of deaths



among citizens and residents reached 1,394 in 2023, compared to 1,027 in 2022, marking a 35.47 percent increase.

Deaths from tuberculosis decreased last year compared to the previous year. In 2022, there were 10 deaths among citizens and 17 among non-Kuwaitis, whereas in 2023, the numbers

dropped to 6 deaths among citizens and 9 among non-Kuwaitis.

From 2019 to 2023, no citizens died from malaria, while one non-Kuwaiti death was recorded in 2019.

Regarding the fertility rate of female citizens, there was a decline last year compared to the

previous year, dropping from 83.913 percent in 2022 to 80.610 percent in 2023.

In 2023, there was a decline in the Kuwaiti infant mortality rate, which fell to 6.28 percent from 7.76 percent in 2022. The infant mortality rate among males remained higher than among females, with rates of 6.63 percent and 5.93 percent respectively. In 2022, male mortality was 9.15 percent and female mortality was 6.29 percent.

As the fertility rate declined, the natural increase rate for citizens also decreased. In 2023, it was 18.73 percent, compared to 19.17 percent in 2022. The live birth rate for citizens also dropped in 2023 to 21.30 percent, down from 22.11 percent in 2022. Additionally, the rate of Kuwaiti stillbirths decreased to 4.18 percent in 2023, compared to 5.48 percent in 2022.

The statistics also indicated a decrease in the percentage of deaths from transport accidents among total external causes, falling to 42.4 percent last year from 48 percent in 2022. On the other hand, the percentage of deaths due to suicide among all external causes increased to 13.1 percent last year, up from 11% in 2022.



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Argentinian Ambassador lauds relations with Kuwait

The Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Consular Affairs of the State of Kuwait mentioned at the Argentine Embassy's Independence Day celebration that there are numerous bilateral agreements and ongoing investment activities between the two countries.



THE TIMES KUWAIT REPORT

Ambassador of Argentina H.E. Claudia Alejandra Zampieri, praised the bonds of friendship and cooperation between her country and Kuwait, and expressed gratitude to the leadership, government, and people of Kuwait for their support, hospitality, and cooperation throughout her tenure in Kuwait.

Speaking during celebrations held by the Argentinian embassy to mark the country's Independence Day, Ambassador Zampieri added, "Cooperation and acceptance between our two countries have facilitated meaningful dialogue and strengthened our bilateral ties,

making my diplomatic mission not only possible but also highly rewarding."

The ambassador went on to note, "Through hard work, professionalism, and unity, we have achieved our common goals. The commitment to excellence, creativity, and teamwork from both sides has been crucial to our success, and I am truly proud of everything we have accomplished together."

Kuwait's Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Consular Affairs, Aziz Al-Daihani, who was the chief guest on the occasion, expressed pride in the longstanding relations with Argentina that dated back to 1966. He noted that there are numerous bilateral agreements and ongoing

investment activities between the two countries, including those involving the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development. He added, "The Kuwaiti people do not forget the support of our Argentinian friends during the occupation."

Addressing media outlets on the sidelines of the celebrations, Ambassador Zampieri explained the significance of her country's Independence Day. "We gather today to celebrate Argentina's Independence Day. On 9 July, 1816, more than 200 years ago, a group of visionary leaders gathered in Tucumán to declare Argentina's independence from Spanish colonial rule. This pivotal moment marked the beginning of a new chapter in our nation's history, characterized by

self-determination, freedom, and the pursuit of a brighter future for all."

She concluded on a personal note, by stating: "As my term as Ambassador of Argentina to Kuwait ends after more than five unforgettable years, I am overwhelmed by a deep sense of gratitude that words alone cannot fully convey. I express my deep appreciation to each and every one for their unwavering support throughout this amazing journey.

"As I bid farewell to this chapter of my life, I leave with a heart full of gratitude and a bag full of memories. I deeply appreciate the honor of serving as an ambassador to Kuwait and to my fellow citizens now."

Google Cloud office in Kuwait to accelerate digital transformation

The opening last week of Google Cloud's new office in Kuwait aims to enhance and accelerate the digital transformation process currently underway in Kuwait,

In a statement to media on the occasion,, Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Communication Affairs Omar Al-Omar said, "Under the visionary leadership of His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince, and the guidance of His Highness the Prime Minister, Kuwait has made great strides towards realizing its National Vision 2035."

Middle East, Turkey and Africa Abdulrahman Al-Thehaiban said that opening their offices in Kuwait is "yet another step to meet the demand for our services and expertise to support the Kuwait Vision 2035," which aims to transform the country into a digital society and diversify its economy.

Country Manager of Google Cloud in Kuwait Shaymaa Al-Terkait said that, "we believe that technology, when combined with the coordinated efforts of governments, the private sector, and civil society, can drive economic growth and stability for all communities."

In January 2023, Google Cloud announced a strategic alliance framework agreement with the Kuwaiti government to develop a roadmap for a comprehensive digital transformation program across government entities and key state-owned enterprises.

Google Cloud's operations in Kuwait will be within the framework of this strategic alliance, and in cooperation with the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA), the Communications and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA), and the Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT). The partnership will bring Google Cloud's cutting-edge technology, data expertise, and AI capabilities to government agencies and key state-owned entities, enhancing their operations and cybersecurity.

Since establishing a presence in Kuwait, Google Cloud has been collaborating with CAIT through a program to upskill government employees, entrepreneurs, and recent graduates in digital technologies with their advanced data analytics, machine learning, artificial intelligence and information security solutions.



He added that this progress includes driving digital transformation, accelerating the smart economy, and developing crucial infrastructure. Google Cloud offices in Kuwait will serve as a hub for collaboration and innovation, bringing together experts from across Google Cloud to work closely with IT specialists in government entities. The expansion of activities by Google Cloud reflects the company's continued commitment to supporting and enhancing Kuwait's digital transformation journey, said the minister.

Managing Director of Google Cloud in the



Kuwait leads region in airport development projects

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are witnessing a significant surge in airport expansion projects, driven by the anticipation of a sharp increase in the number of air travelers over the coming years. The ambitious undertakings also reflect a strategic focus on infrastructure development to accommodate future growth in the aviation sector in the six-nation bloc..

According to MEED, the leading business intelligence publication in the Middle East, the current airport expansion projects across the GCC amounts to more than

USD12 billion. Kuwait is positioned at the forefront of this expansion initiative, with over \$6 billion worth of projects currently underway. Other major players include Saudi Arabia (\$4.3 billion), Qatar (\$1.6 billion), and the UAE (\$690 million).

In addition to ongoing expansion projects, MEED reports that projects worth \$6.2 billion across the GCC are in the pre-qualification and tendering stages; a further \$34 billion worth of projects, including the Dubai International Airport's Al Maktoum expansion project, are in the design phase; and \$39 billion worth of projects are in various stages of study.

The projects that are in either pre-qualification

or tendering process include the \$2.7 billion King Khalid Air Base project and the \$2 billion Abha International Airport development project, both situated in Saudi Arabia. Leading the airport projects currently in the study phase are Kuwait's greenfield North Kuwait International Airport, estimated to cost around \$12 billion; the \$10 billion King Fahd International Airport expansion project; and initial plans for a new \$10 billion airport in Bahrain.

Fitch rating agency notes that substantial financial resources will be required to bring these ambitious projects to fruition. Countries in the GCC are expected to seek innovative financing methods to bridge the funding gaps these projects could entail, including public-private partnerships (PPP) and strategically tapping into international debt markets to attract a broader investor base and secure long-term financing solutions.

Public-private partnerships are increasingly seen as a critical tool for financing these large-scale airport expansion projects. Both Saudi Arabia and the UAE boast proven track records of successful PPP ventures across various sectors. Notably, in 2023 alone, Riyadh unveiled a staggering 200 PPP projects across 17 sectors, including major airport expansions.

Geopolitical crises spark price-hikes for basic commodities

The increase also resulted from transportation costs, inflation in commodity prices from producing countries, reduced global production, and the effects of climate change on certain products.

Global geopolitical crises, including armed engagements in the Red Sea, the Ukraine conflict, and escalating Middle East crisis, are posing a significant threat to already unstable global supply chains. These challenges, compounded by climate change repercussions, the lingering effects of the COVID-19 crisis, and supply-chain constraints have fueled a surge in shipping costs and driven up commodity prices and inflation rates worldwide.

Kuwait, which imports most of its basic commodities, has in particular been impacted by these external challenges, with many food prices rising sharply. Wholesalers say the higher prices reflect the increase in shipping and transportation costs that they incur in importing goods, as well as the increase in commodity prices amid a decrease in production in many food exporting countries.

Consumers at the receiving end of these price hikes have voiced their anger at the higher cost of food and other basic necessities. They urged the authorities to implement measures to alleviate these burdens, such as policies to control price increases, and better

support for local farmers to boost agricultural production, as well as improving shipping and transportation infrastructure to reduce costs, and regulating the distribution of support to families with limited income who need it most.

Commenting on the situation, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Consumer Protection Society, Mishaal Al-Manea, highlighted the challenges of accurately determining the number of food commodities experiencing price increases. He noted that Kuwait has seen an uptick in the prices of certain essential goods, but not all commodities, amidst the global situation.

Al-Manea explained that these price hikes stem from various external factors, as well as fluctuations in energy prices and local macroeconomic policies and currency fluctuations that indirectly contribute to price changes. He noted that the percentage increase in prices of essential commodities varies depending on the specific commodity and market conditions. Generally, there has been an increase ranging from 10 to 30 percent in some cases, depending on factors like commodity type, suppliers, and production costs.



He emphasized that these price hikes are causing increased operational costs for restaurants, potentially prompting them to raise meal prices or reduce portion sizes to mitigate these impacts. He also suggested encouraging citizens to seek more affordable local alternatives, including supporting cooperatives and initiatives aimed at providing goods at reasonable prices.

For his part, Fahad Al-Arbash, head of the Union of Restaurants, Cafes, and Food Equipment, highlighted significant food price increases in Kuwait during the first half of this year, reaching up to 30 percent for certain goods. He attributed these increases to global

food inflation, rising shipping costs, and export restrictions imposed by some countries to stabilize local prices.

He pointed out that the sharp increase in sourcing food items locally and from abroad has burdened restaurant owners, who are caught between rising product prices and strict supervision by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, which prohibits any meal price increases.

He explained that restaurants are only allowed to adjust their prices according to a price list submitted to the ministry, and any changes must be approved by the relevant ministry officials. He noted that violations may often lead to being charged with commercial fraud by Commercial Prosecution.

Al-Arbash stressed that the best way to combat any commercial fraud in restaurants, is to reassess meal prices, especially since some prices have remained unchanged since the 1980s, which then inevitably impacts product quality. He also pointed out that restaurant prices in Kuwait are the lowest compared to other Gulf countries that have adopted price liberalization policies.

DDI launches Summer Internship Program



Dasman Diabetes Institute (DDI), recently launched its annual Summer Internship Program for students and recent graduates who are eager to step into the world of research. The program provides interns with the skills and experiences needed for a successful research career in the

future. Enrollment for this year's program has already crossed 35 students all of whom hold relevant majors and interests.

Through the program, interns get the chance to work in diabetes research projects and initiatives, ranging from type 1 and 2 diabetes and their complications, such as childhood and adolescent obesity, and to attend seminars, lectures, and journal club meetings. In addition, hands-on-experience in learning core research principles and practicing them is one of the key objectives of this program, along with enhancing writing skills and scientific-field communication.

The internship program highlights the Institute's outreach efforts through such initiatives with the emphasis being on benefiting the Kuwaiti community in alignment with DDI's strategy and vision, as well as that of the founding organization, the Kuwait Foundation for Advancement of Sciences (KFAS).

Civil Service nominates over 2000 citizens for government positions

The Civil Service Commission has progressed in its new recruitment plan by nominating a fresh batch of citizens for government positions. This latest batch includes 2,093 citizens, bringing the total number of nominated individuals to 6,900. The nominations encompass graduates, diploma holders, and high school graduates from various specializations.

The Commission emphasizes that this batch fulfills a crucial part of the new recruitment plan's

implementation. The nominees include individuals registered in the central recruitment system before the most recent registration period, along with those who registered earlier but hadn't been nominated yet (87 citizens). The latest batch reflects the Commission's commitment to filling diverse government positions. Nominees possess university qualifications and diplomas across various specializations, alongside those holding General Secondary Certificates and Middle School Certificates.

The Commission assures citizens that more nominations will be issued in the coming period. These upcoming batches will target new engineering specializations, technical diplomas of all kinds, teachers, individuals with political science qualifications, and holders of secondary school certificates.



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Strategic development projects aim to boost economy

Since 'Kuwait Vision 2035' began nearly fourteen years ago, spending on salaries and subsidies has decreased slightly from 80 percent. Non-oil revenues now constitute 12 percent of total state revenues, up from 9 percent. Global oil prices remain pivotal, making up 88 percent of the local economy's revenues.

A recent report by the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council of Planning and Development (GSSCPD) is said to have added urgency to the government's push to revive and revitalize the economy.

The report titled 'Development of Key Indicators for the Kuwaiti Economy During the Period 2010-2024', highlights the need to implement a series of strategic development projects that will drive the country's 'Vision 2035 - New Kuwait' sustainable development plan forward.

The projects outlined by the GSSCPD prioritizes, among others, the diversification of the overwhelmingly oil-reliant economy, empowering the private sector to take up a more significant role in driving the local market, and providing employment opportunities to the national cadre. When implemented, the projects are expected to bring about transformational change to the economic landscape of Kuwait.

Included among the projects to be prioritized are development of several economic zones, expansion of power generation capacity through new phases of the Al-Zour North and Al-Khiran power plants, launch of the first phase of salmon and sea bass aquaculture, and the implementation of advanced fish and shrimp production facilities.

The report also underscores the critical need to expedite the empowerment of the private sector, which will entail a transition of the government away from its current operational role towards a more regulatory and supervisory one. This change in function, which aligns with the role of government in the 'New Kuwait' plan, will allow the authorities to effectively focus on overseeing and implementing public policies.

The report's assessment of the 2010-2024 plan period highlights several crucial economic indicators and shortcomings observed in

Kuwait over the past 14 years. Some of the important economic aspects underlined by the report include:

Capital expenditure: Also known as investment expenditure, this spending plays a vital role in bolstering production capacity and driving economic growth. The report highlights the government's draft budget bill for fiscal year 2024/2025, which prioritizes streamlining current expenditures while allocating a significantly higher proportion (7.7% increase) to capital expenditures compared to the previous year's budget. This shift, which now constitutes 9.3 percent of total public expenditures in FY 24-25, reflects a commitment to long-term growth through strategic investments.

However, the report reveals a troubling trend in actual capital expenditures in the past couple of general budgets. For FY 23-24, actual project spending was only KD 1.8 billion, representing 74 percent of the KD 2.2 billion allocated in the budget. A similar shortfall in budgeted expenditure was also witnessed in FY 22-23 when actual project expenditures amounted to just 56.4 percent of the planned budget.

The shortfall in spending on projects from the amounts allocated in the budget is an indication that many of the projects faced implementation delays from their planned timelines.

Kuwait's labor market: The report showed that the Kuwaiti labor market faces ongoing challenges despite serious government efforts to implement economic reforms. Data reveals a persistent trend where Kuwaiti citizens find the government sector significantly more attractive than the private sector. During the ten-year development plan period, the proportion of Kuwaiti workers in the government sector rose from 74 percent to 80 percent of the workforce in the sector. The trend revealed the continued



preference among citizens for government jobs, which jeopardizes the overall sustainable growth of the economy. The government's 'Kuwaitization Plan', which calls for replacing foreign workers with Kuwaiti citizens, has been successful in reducing the percentage of foreign workers in the government sector from 26 percent to 20 percent during the development plan period.

Another key concern for the Kuwaiti labor market is the weakness in overall worker productivity, which refers to the economic output generated by each worker in the country. The current figures suggest a need for improvement in this area to achieve sustainable economic growth.

Kuwait's Inflation: Despite the implementation of various government policies in recent years with the aim of controlling inflation, the inflation rate has grown steadily since 2019. In 2019, the inflation rate was 1.1 percent, this figure climbed to 2.1 percent in 2020, followed by a more significant increase to 3.4 percent in 2021, and 4.0 percent in 2022. Although there was a slight slowdown in the inflation rate in 2023, with the figure dropping to around 3.6 percent, the positive development was largely due to the global slowdown in inflation rates.

Oil in the Gross Domestic Product: Kuwait's economy is heavily reliant on oil income with revenue from oil constituting 88 percent of state's income. As such, any sharp and prolonged drop in global oil prices has a profound negative impact on economic activities in the country. Although the government has implemented significant investment programs aimed at diversifying the economy, maximizing non-oil revenue by empowering the private sector, and reducing dependence on oil, these initiatives have failed to achieve the desired outcomes and realize its targeted goals.

Private Sector: Despite the private sector having a crucial role in a nation's economic growth and diversification, its contribution to the GDP has been a cause for concern. An analysis of the private sector's performance over the past 14 years using the Kuwaiti national economy's macroeconomic model reveals that the private sector's contribution to the local economy has ranged between 23 percent and 38 percent during the first, second, and third medium-term development plans.

This wide range suggests a lack of consistency and stability in the private sector's involvement in the economy. During periods when the local economy faced significant deficits due to declining global oil prices, the private sector could have played a more prominent role in diversifying the Kuwaiti economy and introducing substantial added value. But in reality its contribution to the economy fell far short of expectations and there were no corresponding improvements in productivity rates.

Demographic disparity; Kuwaiti citizens make up only 30 percent of the population, with foreigners constituting the remaining 70 percent. This imbalance creates social, fiscal, and economic strains that impact sustainable development of the country.

'LuLu Proudly South Africa 2024' fest a resounding success



LuLu Hypermarket hosted a spirited celebration of the diversity of South African food, culture, and community with their 'LuLu Proudly South Africa' promotion, held from 10 - 16 July, across all outlets of the hypermarket in Kuwait.

The official launch of the promotion took place on 10 July at the LuLu Hypermarket Al Qurain outlet. The event was inaugurated by

the Ambassador of South Africa H.E. Manelisi Genge, in the presence of LuLu Kuwait's top management.

Stepping into any Lulu Hypermarket during the promotion was akin to setting out on a safari to South Africa. Eye-catching displays featuring iconic landmarks and beautiful decorations transported shoppers to the heart of the Rainbow Nation.

However, the true heart of the 'LuLu Proudly South Africa' promotion lay in the incredible offers and discounts available on a wide range of South African food brands. Customers enjoyed significant savings on popular products like Blue Diamond almonds, Heartland's food range, Bokomo's breakfast cereals, Bakers' biscuits, Wellington's sauces, Ceres' fruit juices, The Harvest Table's healthy

options, and Robertson's spices.

Delectable aromas of authentic South African foods wafted from the street-food stalls, and food sampling kiosks set up along the aisles of the hypermarket. While the food-stalls tempted customers with offers on flavorsome South African dishes, the free food sampling kiosks allowed for an adventurous exploration of South Africa's myriad delicacies.

Kuwait cuts prices of over 200 medicines in private sector

Dr. Ahmed Al-Awadi, the Minister of Health, has issued a ministerial decision approving a list of price reductions for 209 medicines and pharmaceutical preparations in the private health sector, as part of the regular review of their prices. This decision, which includes reducing prices for medications treating blood pressure, diabetes, antibiotics, cholesterol-lowering drugs, blood thinners, anticonvulsants, and other vital medications, is based on

a report by the Drug Pricing Committee. The committee conducted a comprehensive review of drug prices to ensure a balance between providing medications at reasonable prices and supporting the national pharmaceutical industry. The price reductions for some medications exceed 60% compared to previous prices. The decision aims to alleviate the financial burden on patients and ensure they have access to necessary medications at reasonable prices.

This decision is scheduled to take effect three months after its publication in the Official Gazette, providing the



private health sector with ample time to prepare and implement the required reductions. The decision also mandates the addition of the medicines and preparations listed to Ministerial Resolution No. 74 of 2023, ensuring comprehensive and integrated efforts in this regard. The Drug Pricing Committee plays a pivotal role in reviewing and updating prices periodically, reflecting the Ministry of Health's ongoing commitment to improving the healthcare system, meeting citizens' needs for medicines at reasonable prices, and reducing medical costs for patients.



Kenya, Tanzania embassies mark International Swahili Language Day

A joint statement issued by both embassies highlighted that Swahili is an indigenous African language and ranks among the top ten most widely spoken languages globally.

THE TIMES KUWAIT REPORT

The Embassy of the United Republic of Tanzania, in collaboration with the Embassy of the Republic of Kenya in Kuwait, commemorated International Swahili Language Day. The event drew a large audience interested in languages and their cultural heritage.

A joint statement issued by both embassies highlighted that Swahili is an indigenous African language and ranks among the top ten most widely spoken languages globally. It is spoken across many African nations and has evolved from interactions between East African coastal communities and Arab and Middle Eastern traders. Swahili has gained recognition as the official

language in East African societies and the Southern African Development Community, as well as being used within the African Union.

He added that recognizing the language's significance, UNESCO declared July 7 of each year as International Swahili Language Day during its forty-first session in 2021. The opening ceremony for the celebration took place in 2022, and on July 1, 2024, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution (A/78/L.83), designating July 7 as World Swahili Day. The theme for the 2024 celebration is "Teaching a Culture of Peace in the Swahili Language," emphasizing the role of Swahili in education, fostering relationships, and promoting peace. The language facilitates communication among diverse ethnic

communities, fosters harmony, and brings people together.

He pointed out that the Swahili language is spoken by different ethnic groups either as a mother tongue or as a lingua franca to bridge communication gaps, with over 200 million speakers worldwide. Its popularity extends beyond Africa to America, Europe, and the Far East, where it is taught in universities and used in advertising and publishing. He stressed that the success of the Swahili language is a strong example that gives us every reason to be proud of the international recognition of our mother tongue.

H.E. Halima Abdille Mohmoud, the Ambassador of Kenya to the country, noted that approximately 35 percent of Swahili vocabulary originates from

the Arabic language. Swahili is also among the ten most widely spoken languages globally, with over 230 million speakers. It is widely spoken across Africa and is experiencing rapid growth.

"I can bet that in the not too distant future, Swahili will become the de facto language of Africa," she added. She continued, "Therefore, Swahili will play a crucial role in the upcoming years, as many worldwide are beginning to recognize. It will serve as a vital bridge connecting peoples globally to Africa, the next frontier of growth, fostering relationships, business, and all aspects of human interaction." She highlighted that Swahili is easy to learn and is currently taught in numerous educational institutions worldwide.

MoH to initiate comprehensive national health survey



To better understand the health status of citizens and residents, as well as evaluate the overall healthcare system in Kuwait, and formulate future health policies, the government is launching a national health survey that will be spearheaded by the Ministry of Health under the guidance of the Supreme Council for Planning.

Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers, Saleh Al-Mulla is reported to have initiated communication regarding the national health survey project through letters addressed to the relevant authorities. The letter indicated that the Cabinet had reviewed the recommendations from the Educational, Health, and Youth Committee meeting held on 30 May, which focused on a letter from the Minister of Health concerning the proposed national health survey project.

The letter added that the proposed survey will focus on collecting, structuring, and providing reliable data on the national health landscape. This data will be instrumental in evaluating the current healthcare system and formulating future health policies of the State based on the specific needs of the population. The survey will encompass both Kuwaiti citizens and non-Kuwaiti residents who have resided in Kuwait for at least six months.

Health ministry sources revealed that the health survey aims to achieve several critical objectives, including measuring the overall health of the population, disease prevalence in the country to facilitate appropriate interventions and resource allocations. The survey will also evaluate the effectiveness

of existing public health programs, so as to enable health authorities to make necessary adjustments in order to optimize their impact.

In addition, the survey will gather data on key health indicators required by both national and international health organizations, and meticulously structure the results in order for it to serve as the foundation for future healthcare planning.

The collected data will be used by IT specialists at the MoH to develop a secure and efficient health database for the country, as well as establish a comprehensive management and coding protocol for the collected information.

The Cabinet communique also stated that the survey will identify performance indicators aligned with the World Health Organization's standards, which will allow for international benchmarking and facilitate comparisons with other countries. The project will culminate in a comprehensive report detailing the health status of the Kuwaiti population.

The Cabinet's secretary-general also noted that the success of the national health survey would hinge on collaboration across various government entities, including besides MoH, the ministries of interior, information, education, and social affairs, as well as public institutions such as the Central Statistical Bureau, Kuwait Foundation for Applied Sciences, and the Dasman Institute. Collaboration among all concerned entities will be vital for achieving the survey's goals and for empowering informed decision-making that ultimately leads to improving the health and well-being of people in Kuwait.

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Outgoing diplomats lauded for boosting bilateral ties with Kuwait

H. E. Dr. Zubaydullo Zubaydov, the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and Ambassador of Tajikistan to the country, emphasized the cultural and economic initiatives led by the outgoing ambassadors during their tenure, which contributed to enhancing cooperation between their respective countries and Kuwait, as well as strengthening political and defense relations.



H.E. Miguel José Moro Aguilar
Ambassador of the Kingdom of Spain



H.E. Abdullahi Mohammed Odowa
Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Somalia



H.E. Claudia Alejandra Zampieri
Ambassador of the Argentine Republic

Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and Ambassador of Tajikistan H.E. Dr. Zubaydullo Zubaydov, held a farewell reception in honor of ambassadors who were leaving Kuwait at the end of their tenure in the country. The event, which was held on 11 July at the St. Regis Hotel witnessed the attendance of outgoing ambassadors of Spain, Poland, France, Argentina, Austria, Somalia, Lesotho, and Pakistan, as well as a senior representative from the Protocol Department of Kuwait's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In his address to the outgoing envoys, Ambassador Zubaydov highlighted their contributions to enhancing bilateral relations with Kuwait and emphasized the cultural

H. E. Dr. Zubaydullo Zubaydov, the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and Ambassador of Tajikistan to the country, held a farewell ceremony for eight ambassadors representing Europe, Asia, and Africa, highlighting the significant presence of heads and members of accredited diplomatic missions in Kuwait.

and economic initiatives led by them, which contributed to enhancing cooperation between their respective countries and Kuwait, as well as strengthening bilateral political and defense relations.

The Dean noted in his speech that "Kuwait is an exceptional country in its relationships with nations worldwide, enjoying good and

balanced relations. There is special attention and care for the diplomatic community accredited to Kuwait by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya, Deputy Minister Sheikh Jarrah Al-Jaber, and

all ministry officials."

He added, "We feel like one family here. There is understanding, respect, and cooperation among the ambassadors accredited to Kuwait, thanks to the welcoming atmosphere the country provides for its guests."

He highlighted that His Highness the Amir possesses insightful vision and great wisdom, earning profound respect from global leaders for Kuwait's humanitarian aid efforts, balanced policies, and support for all just causes.

He also praised the wisdom of His Highness the Crown Prince, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, whom he described as a capable and humble diplomat with a vision that has strengthened Kuwait's relations with



H.E. Marian Wrba
Ambassador of the Republic of Austria



H.E. Claire Le Flécher
Ambassador of the Republic of France



H.E. Jaroslav Siro
Ambassador of the Czech Republic



friendly and brotherly countries.

He further explained that Kuwait stands out in the region for its lack of specific agendas, instead prioritizing reconciliation, regional stability, and security. Its goal is to promote security, uphold international peace, and adhere to international conventions and laws.

He stated, "This time we are holding a special celebration as we bid farewell to eight friends. They will depart for their countries to take on new roles, and perhaps we will meet again in other places." The Tajik envoy added, "We wish them success in their new careers and want them to know that Kuwait brought us together in friendship; they will always remain dear to us."

Ambassador Zubaydov, in his speech, highlighted the significant milestones and events organized by the departing ambassadors in Kuwait, and also presented them with commemorative shields.

Speaking on the occasion, Ambassador of France, H.E. Claire Le Flécher said, "Kuwait will always hold a special place in my heart. I have many mixed feelings as I bid farewell to a country that we loved and where we were received as part of our extended family. It is indeed a challenging moment for us, but Kuwait will always hold a special place in my heart. I cherish beautiful memories that I will never forget, and the friendships I have formed here will endure over time, remaining firmly rooted in my life. This is what matters most to me."

She expressed her gratitude to all Kuwaitis, both officials and the friendly Kuwaiti people,

for the distinguished and warm reception she received during her three-year stay in Kuwait. She also thanked the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and all her fellow ambassadors accredited to the country for their cooperation and camaraderie, wishing them success in their future missions.

Ambassador of Spain H.E. Miguel Moro Aguilar, expressed his gratitude to the representatives of the Kuwaiti media for their strong support throughout the embassy's activities during his four-year tenure in the country. He also acknowledged the numerous friendships he had forged with the Kuwaiti people and his fellow heads of diplomatic missions.

He emphasized that his efforts aimed to build bridges between diplomacy and enduring friendships, noting that he would be returning to Madrid after a decade of service abroad.

For his part, Austrian Ambassador H.E. Marian Alexander Wrba, expressed that this is his second farewell during the eight years he spent in the country, serving as his country's ambassador twice. He expressed sadness at leaving a country he loved dearly and its hospitable people who he will miss very much.

He said, "It has been an honor for me to serve as Austria's ambassador here on two occasions, first from 2008 to 2012 and again from 2020 to 2024. I have cherished every moment of these eight years and Kuwait has truly become my second home."

He added, "Austria and Kuwait enjoy a long-standing friendship, and I am pleased with the positive momentum our bilateral relations have

experienced in recent years. Our political and economic ties hold significant potential for enhanced cooperation."

"He concluded his speech by saying, 'As my time in Kuwait comes to an end, I leave feeling very grateful for the rich experiences and priceless friendships I have formed, and these will always be cherished memories.'"

Ambassador of Somalia H.E. Dr. Abdullahi M. Odawa stated: "With the end of my duties as Ambassador of Somalia, I reflect on the amazing privilege I have had to represent my country in the sister State of Kuwait. When I arrived in Kuwait in January 2019 to serve as ambassador, I identified several priorities; however, three of them stand out, the first being... My main priority was to significantly transform the Somali Embassy in Kuwait, both in appearance and in its operational systems, to enhance service delivery. After five years of dedicated teamwork, I am extremely proud to announce that the embassy now stands as a shining example of a public institution that provides excellent services to its community and other visitors.

"Another priority was to contribute to improving the historical relationship between the State of Kuwait and Somalia. During my tenure, significant progress was made in this regard with several high-level delegations from Somalia visiting Kuwait and laying the groundwork for a more cooperative future."

"We also hosted a high-level delegation from Somalia, led by our former Prime Minister Mohamed Hussein Roble, who visited Kuwait in October 2020 to offer condolences to

the government and people of Kuwait on the passing of the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad. Another delegation, led by our President Dr. Hassan Sheikh Mahmoud, visited in December 2023 for the same purpose. These gestures underscore Somalia's deep appreciation for its long standing relationship with Kuwait and the positive role Kuwait has played in assisting Somalia in recovering from the effects of its prolonged civil war.

"One of the most significant events during my tenure was the renegotiation and signing of the debt relief agreement between Somalia and the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development on April 26, 2022."

He continued, "On a personal note, two of our children, Sumaya and Yasser, were born in Kuwait. Their birth certificates and other important personal documents will forever bear the name of Kuwait, making it an indelible part of our family history. It will be challenging to forget our experiences as a family in this beautiful and charming country."

"I express my deep gratitude to the sister State of Kuwait, to the wonderful people of Kuwait, to the dedicated staff at the embassy, and to the Somali community in Kuwait. Kuwait holds a special place in my heart, and my experience here will forever shape my future professional career," he said.

The ambassador concluded by saying, "I leave with a heart full of gratitude and hope, praying to God to bless Kuwait with more progress, prosperity, security, and safety, and for the continued strength and durability of Kuwaiti-Somali relations."



H.E. Malik Muhammad Farooq
Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan



H.E. Boomo Frank Sofonia
Ambassador of the Kingdom of Lesotho (Right)



Kuwait's Abu Arjeeb wins WIPO award

Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity announced Friday that Kuwait's Sara Abu Arjeeb won an award of World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). Abu Arjeeb's invention is related to the early detection of tumors and cerebral hemorrhage by the use of alternating light

technology integrated into artificial intelligence, the center, affiliated with Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences, said in a press release.

More than 600 investors from over 100 countries all over the world competed for the prize, it said.

The competition included participants from South Korea, Kenya, China, Argentine, Thailand, Turkiye, Switzerland and Singapore, along with Kuwait. WIPO is the UN agency that serves the world's innovators and creators to ensure that their ideas travel safely to the market and improve lives everywhere.



Structural and systemic reforms await urgent redressal

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Kuwait's economy still remains deeply anchored on oil income, which currently accounts for approximately 90 percent of exports and government revenues, as well as around 50 percent of the gross domestic product.

Diversification of revenue sources and promotion of a vibrant non-oil sector are essential if Kuwait is to escape the economic stranglehold that global oil price fluctuations wield on the country. But this is no easy task; the government's attempts to prioritize economic and energy

diversification face several underlying structural and socio-economic challenges.

Among these tribulations is the long-simmering issue of naturalization that has remained unresolved for decades. Other structural imbalances include a skewed demography, where two-in-three of the population is a foreigner; a gender disparity brought on by structural marginalization of women in politics and in the labor market; as well as a lack of transparency and persistent corruption in public life that corrodes trust and hampers good governance.

Additionally, an educational system that has struggled to catch up with the rapidly changing world of teaching and learning, a housing crisis that despite the country's wealth has denied a roof of their own to many citizens, and more recently, a power grid that cannot cope with rising demand, are structural issues that have persistently stymied Kuwait's attempts to promote the non-oil sector, as well as impeded the country's sustainable development and equitable social progress.

Adding to Kuwait's economic woes, more than three-quarters of the Kuwaiti working population are employed in public-sector entities, irrespective of their qualifications, skills, or the need for additional employees. Nearly 80 percent of the budget expenditure is currently outlayed as payroll for public sector employees, including for their salaries, benefits, public transfer payments and pensions. Additionally, the budget expends funds to subsidize basic utilities and support free healthcare, education, and housing initiatives for citizens.

Subsidies and other welfare measures over the years have spawned a sense of entitlement among many citizens, and also led to an unsustainable consumption and lifestyle pattern. Unbridled consumption has strained the state's ability to continue providing power and water supplies to meet the needs of people, as well as cater to demands of a rising population base and increasing industrial growth.

Despite the structural and systemic challenges facing Kuwait, the country's potential revival under the current government has been acknowledged by local analysts and international agencies. In the first week of June, international rating agency, Standard & Poor's, confirmed Kuwait's sovereign credit rating at A+ with a stable future outlook. Explaining its latest rating, the agency said it expected Kuwait's real GDP to grow by 2.4 percent on average during the years 2025-2027, despite a contraction of 2.3 percent in 2024.

The agency also highlighted the country's large financial and external balances, which are expected to remain strong in the 2024-2027 period. Moreover, external financial assets in its sovereign wealth fund, estimated at about 418 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2024, and expected to reach 447 percent of GDP during the 2024-27 period, could mitigate Kuwait's economic risks associated with its heavy dependence on oil and potential fluctuations on global oil markets.

However, Standard & Poor's pointed out that with an economy overly dependent on the oil sector and impacted by price fluctuations in the oil market, Kuwait has registered deficit budgets in 8 out of the past 10 annual budgets. Unless addressed as a priority, the humongous budgetary allocations for the wage and salary bill will lead to the budget continuing to face deficits for fiscal years 2023/24 - 2027/28.

The agency cautioned that without economic diversification measures, Kuwait's credit ratings could be negatively impacted, especially if prolonged dip in oil prices lead to a significant increase in financial imbalances. Other factors that could result in a downward rating include a continued reluctance to introduce deep structural and financial reforms, and in the absence of comprehensive financing arrangements, such as a debt bill to meet deficits in the general budget.

In a further endorsement of the new government, Focus-Economics (FE), a leading global provider of macroeconomic intelligence,

noted that the absence of a parliament could expedite long pending legislation in various areas. It added that while the government's immediate focus will likely be to approve the budget for fiscal year 2024-25, the cabinet is also expected to expedite the approval of a public debt law this year.

The public debt bill, which has been held up in parliament since October 2017, when the previous debt bill expired, would allow the government to issue more public debt instruments to borrow from international debt markets. In the past, vehement opposition to the bill from lawmakers had led to the state treasury nearly running dry during occasions of extended low oil prices. A debt law would provide the funds to finance investment and to support economic activity in periods of financial crises.

The analysis by FE also expects the new government to drive economic diversification measures by promoting and energizing non-oil activities, engaging with the private sector, and improving the business and investment environment to make it more attractive to international investors. Kuwait's non-oil growth is currently relatively muted, with the sector expected to grow by 2.3 percent in 2024. Meanwhile, in neighboring countries such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE it is expected to be around 4.8 percent and 5.1 percent respectively in 2024.



LuLu Exchange expands with 36th Customer Engagement Center at Kuwait International Airport

The opening of the centre aligns with the company's expansion strategy in Kuwait, as the country progresses towards achieving financial inclusion.

LuLu Exchange Kuwait - one of the nation's most trusted names in cross-border payments and foreign currency exchange - inaugurates its 36th customer engagement center at Kuwait International Airport Terminal 1 on Thursday.

The opening aligns with the company's expansion strategy in Kuwait, as the country progresses towards achieving financial inclusion.

The engagement center was inaugurated by Mr. Narayan Pradhan, COO of LuLu Exchange, in the presence of Rajesh Rangray, GM of LuLu Exchange Kuwait, and other senior management from the country's operations.

Speaking at the event, Mr. Narayan Pradhan said, "This new customer engagement center marks a significant step in enhancing accessibility and convenience for our customers. This strategic location underscores our commitment to seamless service delivery and innovation in digital payments. Kuwait remains a key market for our operations, and we are thankful to our



valued customers and partners for their continued support in our growth."

Established in 2011, LuLu Exchange Kuwait is one of the country's leading financial services providers, pioneering digital transformation through several industry-first initiatives to better serve retail and corporate customers. As one of Kuwait's most forward-thinking payment companies, LuLu Exchange delivers financial services promptly, transparently, and reliably through its network of customer engagement centers and mobile payments app - LuLu Money.



“ Adding to Kuwait's economic woes, more than three-quarters of the Kuwaiti working population are employed in public-sector entities, irrespective of their qualifications, skills, or the need for additional employees. ”

The political stability and economic revival being witnessed in Kuwait, has also been warmly welcomed and broadly supported by different sections of Kuwaiti society. The renaissance has rekindled hopes among many that the country has finally shed its label as a laggard and outlier in the region, and is headed to regain its once potent prowess in initiating progressive reforms, social welfare schemes and development projects.

Considering the convergence of these positive factors, analysts believe the government now has a window of opportunity to drive through necessary reforms and policy changes that have eluded implementation for far too long. Prevailing positivity also provides a slot to implement a comprehensive structural reform package; introduce meaningful economic diversification measures; encourage greater private sector involvement in the economy; and enhance skill sets and productivity of the national workforce, so as to drive Kuwait towards a brighter sustainable future.

EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Rich Countries Must Meet Their Biodiversity Financing Pledges



Mary Robinson

A former president of Ireland and former UN high commissioner for human rights, is Chair of The Elders and a member of the Global Steering Committee at Campaign for Nature.

This summer of record-breaking heat waves and contentious elections around the world offers a valuable opportunity to reflect on the role individuals can play in driving positive change. By building coalitions and amplifying the voices of those most affected by crises, we can muster the courage and political will needed to overcome seemingly insurmountable global challenges.

Climate change and biodiversity loss are prime examples. As a longtime environmental-justice advocate, I have seen firsthand the profound impact of both on frontline communities and indigenous peoples. These populations have been hit the hardest by these interlinked crises, which jeopardize their livelihoods, health, and cultural heritage.

The diverse land and marine environments that sustain indigenous communities also underpin life and society as we know it. We depend on healthy ecosystems for food, shelter, water, medical advances, and disease prevention. More than 50 percent of the world's GDP, estimated at \$44 trillion, depends on

“ More than 50 percent of the world's GDP, or around \$44 trillion, depends on nature. Crucially, thriving ecosystems act as natural carbon sinks, absorbing up to 50 percent of the greenhouse gases produced by human activities. ”

nature. Crucially, thriving ecosystems act as natural carbon sinks, absorbing up to 50 percent of the greenhouse gases produced by human activities.

By threatening critical carbon sinks like rainforests and oceans, biodiversity loss exacerbates climate change, which in turn accelerates environmental degradation, leaving millions of people, as well as countless plant and animal species, increasingly vulnerable. The good news is that we can reverse this: by fostering resilient and diverse ecosystems, we can mitigate the effects of climate change and create a virtuous circle that protects frontline



communities.

Amid the largest mass extinction in more than 65 million years, protecting biodiversity is more urgent than ever. Studies show that nearly half of the world's animal species are currently experiencing rapid population declines, with Latin America and Africa facing the most severe loss of biodiversity.

While these developments paint a bleak picture, there has been some progress in addressing the biodiversity crisis. In 2022, at the United Nations summit on biodiversity in Montreal (COP15), the parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity approved the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). This landmark agreement, which required years of coalition building and advocacy campaigns, outlined a strategy to stop and reverse nature loss, including the ambitious target of preserving at least 30 percent of the world's land and seas by 2030.

Under the GBF, developed countries pledged to provide the Global South, where most of the world's remaining biodiversity is located, with at least \$20 billion annually by 2025 and \$30 billion annually by 2030. If fulfilled, these commitments would enable developing countries to implement ambitious national biodiversity action plans, thereby safeguarding the world's most climate-vulnerable populations.

Unfortunately, the world is currently far from achieving these goals. A new report by the London-based think tank ODI reveals that, of the 28 countries it assessed, 23 have failed to fulfill their biodiversity financing commitments as of 2021 (the latest year for which data are available). To meet their 2025 targets, these countries would need to double their contributions.

The gulf between climate pledges and action appears even more troubling when one considers that \$20 billion per year represents only 1.1 percent of the \$1.8 trillion that countries around the world spend annually on environmentally harmful subsidies. These resources, equivalent to 2 percent of global GDP, support sectors like fossil fuels and industrial agriculture, which account for most greenhouse-gas emissions and drive biodiversity loss.

To protect the planet's natural assets, governments must align their spending with their stated values. The European Union's new Nature Restoration Law, which aims to restore at least 20 percent of the EU's land and seas by 2030, and all degraded ecosystems by 2050, represents an important step in this direction.

To be sure, there is much more to be done. Ahead of October's UN biodiversity conference in Colombia (COP16), policymakers and climate advocates must continue to build global coalitions to close the biodiversity financing

gap. They must also ensure that when it comes to conservation and restoration projects, the communities most affected by environmental degradation, especially indigenous peoples, are included in the decision-making process.

Protecting and restoring biodiversity is

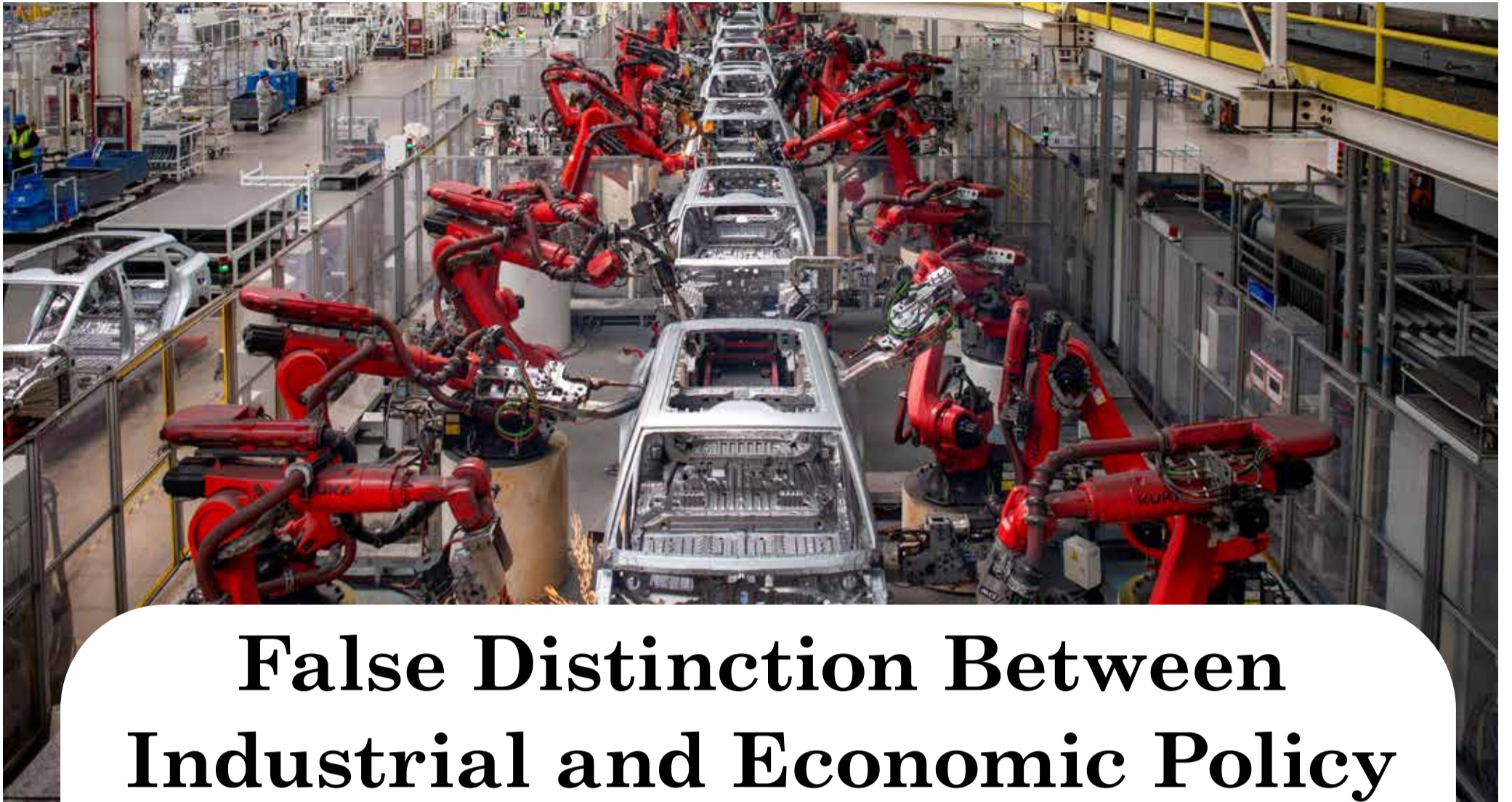
crucial to supporting the recovery of our planet's natural ecosystems and mitigating the worst effects of climate change. At COP16, global leaders will have the chance to create a virtuous circle of change. Ensuring a sustainable future requires that they seize this opportunity.

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False Distinction Between Industrial and Economic Policy



Célestin Monga

A former managing director at the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, he is the former vice president and chief economist at the African Development Bank, and a former senior economic adviser at the World Bank, and teaches public policy and economics at Harvard Kennedy School.

After being disparaged and disdained for decades, industrial policy is back on the global economic agenda. Perhaps the strongest evidence of industrial policy's rehabilitation is a recent international conference on rethinking structural transformation, cosponsored by the International Monetary Fund and attended by some of the world's most influential economists.

Industrial policy is back in vogue for many reasons, including fears of deglobalization, the emergence of a multipolar world, supply-chain disruptions, the return of economic nationalism, and trade tensions (most notably between the United States and China, but also among Western countries). Governments in the United Kingdom, the United States, France, Vietnam, Brazil, and South Africa have all issued industrial-policy blueprints.

But despite renewed global interest in industrial policy, intellectual and policy elites remain confused about its precise meaning, its specific instruments, and how it differs from other economic policies. This is true of economists who advocate it, as well as those who disparage it.

In a famous 1791 report, the first US secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton, framed industrial policy as government measures to

boost manufacturing and so-called 'productive' sectors. That definition has evolved and expanded over the past two centuries to reflect economic transformations and the need to think beyond manufacturing.

The term now encompasses all government interventions — from subsidies and tax incentives to public procurement and the design of intellectual-property protection — that explicitly target the transformation of the structure of economic activity in pursuit of some public goal. By that measure, industrial policies are those that are designated as selective and intentional. But these labels remain random, and the focus on policymakers' stated intentions is risky: would anyone use public proclamations by politicians to measure democratic governments' policies?

Recent IMF research has gone a step further, distinguishing between 'vertical' industrial policy favoring specific sectors — putatively a source of market distortions, state capture, and

government intervention may be politically attractive, but does not hold water either conceptually or in practice.

Almost all items in a national budget could be classified as industrial policy because they implicitly or explicitly favor particular places, sectors, or businesses. The decision to build any type of productive infrastructure in a specific location always provides (unfair) advantages to certain regions or firms.

Moreover, the macro-financial policies often presented as the antithesis of industrial policy are, in fact, not wholly neutral. For example, exchange-rate measures favor some sectors and industries more than others. Likewise, financial-sector regulation, often portrayed as the most 'neutral' and 'horizontal' government policy, shapes an economy's sectoral allocation.

The benefits that accrue to some industries and firms are not always obvious. The US banking sector is a case in point: the Federal Reserve (a branch of the government) lends

incidence analyses often capture important distributional issues regarding who benefits from this type of spending.

On a more fundamental level, policies always have indirect effects. For example, in countries with limited fiscal space, well-meaning social programs presented as neutral cross-cutting projects — not intended to favor particular industries or regions — can still change the economy's structure if they cause public-debt levels to rise and pose risks to financial stability, which would disproportionately harm certain sectors and groups.

Given this, it is delusional to think that the effects of 'vertical' industrial policy can be detached from those of broad macroeconomic or regulatory policies and studied in isolation. Both types of policies always have economy-wide repercussions, whether direct and observable effects on other sectors or industries, or indirect opportunity costs for various economic agents.

Attempts to disentangle these outcomes will almost always result in noise, not signal. Empirical studies using tariffs and quotas to assess the effectiveness of industrial policy in any given country often fail to consider that such measures help generate additional fiscal revenue and achieve terms-of-trade gains, in addition to protecting non-competitive or infant domestic industries.

Almost all economic policy aims to improve the economy's structure or to achieve a social goal, and requires the use of instruments that will directly or indirectly favor some industries, sectors, or firms. The controversy over industrial policy is largely a matter of semantics: governments implement these banal strategies of economic transformation on a daily basis.

Just as Monsieur Jourdain in Molière's *The Bourgeois Gentleman* discovers that he has been speaking prose all his life without realizing it, economists should finally acknowledge that almost all economic policy is, in fact, industrial policy. The question, then, is not whether to use it, but rather how to do so transparently and well.

“ Social safety nets to mitigate poverty and progressive income taxes to reduce inequality also affect the economic structure, because they imply winners and losers, often in specific geographic areas or social groups. ”

rent-seeking opportunities — and 'horizontal' economic policy focused on improving the business environment for all industries and firms. The horizontal approach is deemed fair, and even desirable.

But this new conventional wisdom reflects a misleading consensus on the proper scope of government intervention. Perhaps more importantly, the distinction between industrial and economic policy is fundamentally false. Drawing a line between 'good' ('horizontal' and 'neutral') and 'bad' ('vertical' and 'targeted')

money to banks at an interest rate of 1 percent, which the banks then use to buy Treasury bills (from the same government) yielding roughly 4 percent. This represents about \$30 billion in subsidies per year, more than any developing country would ever grant to one industry.

Social safety nets to mitigate poverty and progressive income taxes to reduce inequality also affect the economic structure, because they imply winners and losers, often in specific geographic areas or social groups. The World Bank's public-expenditure reviews and benefit-



EXCLUSIVE TO THE TIMES KUWAIT

The Non-Proliferation Problem



Joseph S. Nye

A former dean of the Harvard Kennedy School, is the author, most recently, of A Life in the American Century



Avril Haines, the US Director of National Intelligence, recently warned that “Russia’s need for support in the context of Ukraine has forced it to grant some long-sought concessions to China, North Korea, and Iran with the potential to undermine, among other things, long-held non-proliferation norms.”

How much does this matter? Some theorists have long been skeptical about efforts to limit the spread of nuclear weapons, even arguing that proliferation can be a stabilizing force. If the horrors associated with nuclear weapons are one reason why there have been no wars between great powers since 1945, they argue, perhaps the same effect can be replicated at the regional level. India and Pakistan developed a nuclear balance in the 1990s, and there have been no disastrous consequences so far. But would prudence still prevail in a world of “nuclear-armed porcupines?” US President John F. Kennedy did not think so. As he put it during a March 1963 press conference,

“With all of the history of war, and the human race’s history, unfortunately has been a good deal more war than peace, with nuclear weapons distributed all through the world, and available, and the strong reluctance of any people to accept defeat, I see the possibility in the 1970’s of the President of the United States having to face a world in which 15 or 20 or 25 nations may have these weapons. I regard that as the greatest possible danger and hazard.”

Later that year, Kennedy signed a treaty banning atmospheric nuclear testing, setting the stage for the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which now has 191 members. The treaty’s five

Already, Saudi Arabia has threatened to develop nuclear weapons if Iran does. If there are regional cascades of new nuclear-armed states, the probability of accidents and miscalculations would increase substantially.

Haines explicitly mentioned Iran and North Korea. Both had been under United Nations sanctions in which China, Russia, and the West cooperated. Until recently, Russia had a long history of supporting non-proliferation. Not only did it sign the NPT, but it also adopted the 1978 Nuclear Suppliers Group Guidelines, under which vendors of civil nuclear equipment agreed to exercise prudence in their export policies. Now that Vladimir Putin is becoming dependent on North Korean military supplies to sustain his war in Ukraine, however, he has ended Russia’s cooperation on non-proliferation.

While Iran has long had a nuclear-weapons program based on enriched uranium, it has gone through fits and starts in response to external pressures. The regime has been careful to keep its production of highly enriched uranium below the threshold needed to produce a nuclear arsenal. But with Russia relying on Iranian drones, China relying on Iranian oil, and Donald Trump having foolishly scrapped the Iran nuclear deal in 2018, international cooperation on non-proliferation has broken down here, too.

Moreover, some believe (probably mistakenly) that Russia would not have invaded Ukraine if the Ukrainians had kept the nuclear weapons that they inherited when the Soviet Union collapsed. If this assumption gains traction, the prospects for non-proliferation will worsen.

I am reminded of a similar situation in the past (which I recollect in my memoir, *A Life in the American Century*). Following the oil crisis of 1973, the conventional wisdom was that the world would need to turn to nuclear energy. But because many believed (incorrectly) that the world was running out of uranium, everyone set their sights on reprocessed plutonium – a by-product of burning uranium in nuclear reactors. Forecasts at the time suggested that some 46 countries would be reprocessing plutonium by 1990. If so, the world would be awash in weapons-grade material, and the risk of nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism would increase catastrophically. In 1974, India became the first state beyond the five listed in the NPT to launch what it euphemistically termed a “peaceful nuclear explosion.”

Soon thereafter, France agreed to sell a plutonium-reprocessing plant to Pakistan, where Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had vowed that his country would eat grass before letting India develop a nuclear monopoly in South Asia. In Latin America, Germany was selling a uranium-enrichment plant to Brazil, and Argentina was

looking at plutonium. As many other countries quietly explored their options, it appeared as if a nuclear-arms race was underway.

Fortunately, it never materialized. US President Jimmy Carter pursued a non-proliferation policy that succeeded in slowing the momentum. Only two additional countries have developed the bomb since the 1970s, rather than the 25 that Kennedy feared. While everyone assumed that not much could be done about proliferation, Carter thought otherwise. Thanks to his

administration’s efforts, the French-Pakistani and German-Brazilian deals were scuttled. The US created an international commission to study the nuclear fuel cycle, and this reduced momentum toward reprocessing plutonium and the use of “breeder reactors.”

Those harboring doubts about the viability of non-proliferation ought to consider this lesson from history. Even if proliferation cannot be stopped, it can be slowed, and that can make all the difference.

“

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recognized nuclear-weapons states – the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain, France, and China – pledged not to spread nuclear weapons, and its 186 other members pledged not to develop them. Israel, India, and Pakistan refused to sign the NPT and did develop nuclear weapons; North Korea signed the treaty but then withdrew to develop its nuclear program.

That brings the total of nuclear-armed states to nine, which is far from perfect, but much better than Kennedy predicted. Defenders of this imperfect regime argue that the rate of spread is as important as the number of states possessing the bomb, because greater predictability improves the prospect of maintaining stability.

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Thought for the week

“ Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.

- Viktor Frankl
Austrian neurologist

Antioxidants Boomers

Ask Mira : Eating Right to Live Happy & Healthy



I always mention the word antioxidant in my articles, and a lot of people have since asked me to explain more about what are antioxidants.

So here you go:

Oxidative reaction: First we need to understand what an oxidative reaction is. High levels of blood cholesterol, high levels of blood sugar, high blood pressure, smoking, the surrounding pollution, and different types of radiation create in your body what is known as 'an oxidative reaction'.

Under the effects of this oxidative reaction, free radicals are generated in your body, which in turn will generate several harmful chemical reactions that lead to severe diseases like heart disease, arthritis, different types of cancer and even more elevated blood sugar and cholesterol levels.

Antioxidants: As everything in our body is balanced, here comes the role of antioxidants. In reality, the antioxidants are some body substances, which completely cut the chain of further oxidation of these free radicals.

An eating plan containing plenty of fruits and vegetables, whole grains and nuts can supply all the antioxidants your body needs. The major antioxidants include Vitamin C, various kinds of berries, dark chocolate, green tea, olive oil, red wine and many more.

Antioxidants are a booming market today with a wide variety of antioxidants available for everything from enhancing memory, immunity and athletic performance, as well as to treat various diseases. The list of such products is too long to reproduce here fully, but below is a list of the most popular antioxidants and their benefits.

Alpha lipoic acid: Found in broccoli, spinach, beef steak, liver, yeast.

Provides protection against neuropathy (disorder of the nerves that are connected to muscles, skin and internal organs), improves glucose blood level in diabetes, protects against heart diseases and cataracts (blurred vision)

Berries: Including, but not limited to, blueberries, cranberries, blackberries, raspberries, strawberries. Beneficial for Heart health, cancer protection, antiaging, diabetes prevention and urinary tract protection.

Citrus fruits and vegetables: Treats diseases of blood vessels and lymphatic system (which contains immune cells that protect the body against virus and bacteria).

Dark chocolate that contains cocoa flavonoids: Protects against hypertension, heart diseases and skin damage. Lowers stress and anxiety.

Olive oil (polyphenols): good for heart health, cancer protection, antimicrobial activity, lowers cholesterol and LDL levels.

Pomegranate: Recommended for heart and circulatory health, prevents cancer and hypertension

Grape and grape seed extracts, including red wine, because of the antioxidant 'resveratrol', which provides protection against cardiovascular diseases, against cancer and improve athletic performance.

Soy: Soy beans, soy milk, soy proteins and other soy products have been found helpful in treating menopausal symptoms, are good for bone health and protects against breast cancer.

Tea: Helps in the treatment of liver diseases, improves immunity function and weight loss.

Vitamin A: Found in carrot, tomato, spinach, sweet potato, mango, dried apricot, milk, egg yolk. Provides protection against heart diseases, against vision loss and promotes skin health.

Vitamin C: Found in orange, kiwi, pineapple, broccoli, pepper, parsley, cauliflower

Boosts immune system, improves skin health, and helps in iron absorption

Vitamin E: Abundant in nuts, almonds, peanut butter, walnuts, avocados, sunflower oil, egg yolks. Good for improving heart health, diabetes prevention, decreases LDL levels and increases HDL, and recommended for enhancing athletic performance.

These 12 antioxidants are crucial for your health. Start to include them daily in your eating habits, and keep away diseases and stress.

There is nothing better than having a good health and great performance.

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Create healthy habits, not restrictions

To subscribe to my diet programs,
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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

RECIPE

Coconut-Jaggery Semolina Halwa



Jaggery Halwa, a traditional Indian dessert, is popular in many places in India. This recipe is for a traditional semolina halwa, which is very healthy. It is a perfect recipe if you are on a Keto diet and craving some good vegan food.
Total time: 30 min.

Ingredients

- 1 cup semolina
- 1/4 cup virgin coconut oil
- 3/4 cup chopped jaggery or Jaggery powder
- 1 cup coconut milk
- 1 cup water
- 1/4 cup grated fresh coconut
- 4-5 chopped dry apricots
- 1 tsp cardamom powder
- 1 tbsp dry ginger powder

For garnishing

- Chopped almonds and pistachios
- Dry coconut shreds.

Directions

- In a deep pan, mix together jaggery, cardamom powder, dry ginger powder and water.
- Heat until the jaggery dissolves. Set aside.
- Heat coconut oil in a heavy bottom kadai or nonstick pan.
- Add in suji and grated coconut. Roast on a low flame until it attains a brownish color.
- Add in the jaggery water and coconut milk.
- Cook till all the milk and water has dried and the mixture starts to leave the sides of the pan.
- Turn off the flame.
- Garnish with chopped almonds-pistachio and dry coconut shreds.
- Serve hot or warm.



Chef Chhaya Thakker



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

High social media use, poor sleep, raises risk of mental health

The study findings showed a significant correlation between greater social media usage and sleep of shorter duration. Analysis of brain activity using fMRI scans also showed that higher social media use was associated with lower activation in the inferior and middle frontal gyrus regions of the brain, which are mainly involved in executive control and reward processing.



Studies over the years have established that adequate sleep is essential for proper brain development and emotion regulation, especially in children during their early formative years. However, in today's 24x7 digital world, excessive screen use is increasingly replacing quality sleep time, and lowering brain activities that better enhance cognitive abilities in people, in particular among adolescents.

Previous studies on the pervasive influence of social media platforms show that in many countries nearly half of the teens are online almost constantly. Because neural emotion and reward networks in the brain mature earlier than inhibitory control and executive function networks, adolescents are at a particularly high risk of developing mental health and sleep problems.

A new study, by researchers at the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) in the United States, has provided fresh insight into how two significant aspects of modern adolescent life — excessive social media usage and sleep of short duration — impact brain-behavior interactions in adolescents.

The researchers analyzed data on 1982 adolescents, ages 10-14 years, half of whom were girls, from the Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development (ABCD) study conducted by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the US. Sleep duration and recreational social media usage among teens were assessed using responses to standardized lifestyle questionnaires and surveys. Brain activities were analyzed from functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) scans that targeted regions of the brain associated with reward processing and executive functions. The study findings showed a significant correlation between greater social media usage and sleep of shorter duration. Analysis of brain activity using fMRI scans also showed that higher social media use was associated with lower activation in the inferior and middle frontal gyrus regions of the brain, which are mainly involved in executive control and reward processing.

The results suggest that responses of adolescents to rewards may be influenced by their sleep habits and social media use. A better understanding of the specific brain regions involved in these interactions can help identify potential risks and benefits associated with digital engagement and sleep habits. This is especially important as it could guide the development of more precise, evidence-based interventions aimed at promoting healthier habits.

Social scientists and activists point out that most social media businesses use various digital techniques such as the ubiquitous 'infinite scrolling' feature to keep people glued to their platforms for the longest possible time. Warning of the dangers of excessive screen-time, several activists have urged the government to introduce regulations that prohibit the use of such 'black-hat' tactics, especially when these sites target children.

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) recommends that teenagers 13 to 18 years of age should sleep 8 to 10 hours on a regular basis, and encourages adolescents to disconnect from all electronic devices at least 30 minutes to an hour before bedtime. Teens who spend more than three hours a day using social media have double the risk of mental health problems, including depression and anxiety.

In a recent survey, nearly half of the adolescent respondents said that social media made them feel worse about their bodies, while 32 percent said social media negatively affected their grades in school. A Gallup poll conducted in 2023, showed that American teens spend an average of 4.8 hours a day on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube.

The new study and other research on the harmful impact of excessive social media usage on the health and well-being of people, recently prompted the United States Surgeon General to call on Congress to legislate a law making it mandatory for social media platforms to carry a warning label on the harm they pose to the mental health of children and teens.

A warning label, if legislated by US Congress would serve to regularly remind parents and adolescents that social media has not been proven safe. Similar labels, which appear on tobacco and alcohol products have been found effective in increasing people's awareness on the harms of smoking and drinking, and helping them change behavior, said the Surgeon-General in a New York Times op-ed published in June this year.

In this regard it is noteworthy that in 1965, the US Congress voted to require that cigarette packages distributed in the United States carry a warning that said that cigarette smoking "may be hazardous to your health." Smoking rates have dropped since then; in 1954, around 45 percent of Americans were smokers; however, by 2023, the rate had dropped to less than 12 percent.

Social scientists point out that the decrease in tobacco use since 1954 was not just due to the warning label, as the introduction of a warning label was also accompanied by a huge public health campaign and other significant efforts to get people to reduce or quit smoking tobacco. While a warning label on its own would not make social media safe for young people, it is certainly a step in the right direction, which could be further enhanced through effective media campaigns.

While the study on the impact of social media usage, sleep patterns, and brain activation in adolescents, as well as the US Surgeon-General's call for warning labels on social media sites, pertains to the United States, the study's findings are equally applicable everywhere. Public health activists and healthcare practitioners in many countries have supported the US Surgeon-General's call to compel social media sites to display warning labels against excessive use of such platforms.

Policymakers and technology companies need to take steps to protect the safety and health of children and teens everywhere. Telecommunication regulators can begin by banning the sending of 'suggested post' notifications to minors between midnight and 6am without consent from their parents. Tech companies were also asked to share their data on the health effects of social media platforms with the public and researchers, as well as to allow independent audits of their platform.

To protect children's sleep and encourage in-person social connections, parents and teachers should also do their part. Parents can support healthy social media use by creating phone-free zones around meals, bedtime, and social gatherings, while schools should work to create a phone-free educational environment.

Micro-robot packed pill to treat IBD

Engineers at the University of California San Diego in the United States have developed a new pill that releases microscopic robots, or microrobots, into the colon to treat inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). The experimental treatment, given orally, has shown success in mice, as it significantly reduced IBD symptoms and promoted the healing of damaged colon tissue without causing toxic side effects.

Millions of people worldwide are affected by IBD, an autoimmune disorder characterized by chronic inflammation of the gut, which causes severe abdominal pain, rectal bleeding, diarrhea and weight loss. It occurs when immune cells known as macrophages become overly activated, producing excessive levels of inflammation-causing proteins called pro-inflammatory cytokines. These cytokines, in turn, bind to receptors on macrophages, triggering them to produce more cytokines, and thereby perpetuating a cycle of inflammation that leads to the debilitating symptoms of IBD.



The new pill was shown to successfully keep these cytokine levels in check. The scientists behind the pill engineered microrobots composed of inflammation-fighting nanoparticles chemically attached to green algae cells. While the green algae use their natural swimming abilities to efficiently distribute the nanoparticles throughout the colon, which accelerates cytokine removal and helps heal inflamed tissue.

Effectiveness of the nanoparticles is due to the principles of engineering, chemistry and biology that are employed in the design and synthesis of the pill. Made up of biodegradable polymer nanoparticles coated with macrophage cell membranes, the pills are able to act as macrophage decoys that naturally bind pro-inflammatory cytokines, thereby breaking the inflammatory cycle.

Researchers behind the pill emphasized that their biohybrid microrobots meet rigorous safety standards. The nanoparticles are made of biocompatible materials, and the green algae cells used in this study are recognized as safe for consumption by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the United States.

The microrobots are packed inside a liquid capsule with a pH-responsive coating. This coating remains intact in the acidic environment of the stomach acid, but dissolves upon reaching the neutral pH of the colon. This ensures that the microrobots are selectively released where they are needed most thereby minimizing toxicity.

The treatment administered orally to mice reduced fecal bleeding, improved stool consistency, reversed IBD-induced weight loss and reduced inflammation in the colon, all without apparent side effects. The research team is now reported to be focusing on translating their microrobot treatment into clinical studies in order to eventually make the pills available to patients with IBD.



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