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Government commitments drive project developments

According to MEED, a leading business intelligence publication in the Middle East, the second half of 2024 is likely to be equally positive for project activities in Kuwait.

By Reaven D'Souza
 Executive Managing Editor

Since taking office in May this year, the government headed by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al Ahmad Al-Sabah has prioritized the implementation of major economic and social development projects, and made good governance a key plank of its work agenda.

In accordance with the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the development schemes being initiated aim to enhance welfare of citizens, improve infrastructure, and create job opportunities for national youth, as well as to diversify the overly oil-reliant economy, encourage involvement of private sector in development projects, and accelerate growth in non-oil sector.



The government has also made transparency and anti-corruption measures a critical component in all its activities, including in the awarding of development projects. Corruption and misappropriation of state funds in the past have been attributed to the lack of transparency and oversight in processes surrounding the awarding of contracts for many large scale projects.

Government's determination to stamp out pervasive corruption in public life, and more specifically in state-funded projects, is winning wide appreciation from people and the market, as well as from local and international stakeholders in public projects. Ensuring complete transparency in the awarding of projects has become all the more salient given that several mega-projects worth billions of dinars have been penciled-in for awarding this year.

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IHL and Its Application to the War in Palestine

Challenges and Practices on the Ground



By Sheikha Suhaila Fahad Al-Sabah
Managing Editor

International humanitarian law (IHL) is a set of rules aimed at limiting the effects of armed conflicts for humanitarian reasons. It protects persons who are not participating in the fighting and those who can no longer fight, and restricts the means and methods used in warfare. IHL has been established mainly through the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977. There are also a range of other agreements and treaties that complement and clarify various aspects of this law. Some key provisions of international humanitarian law include:

- Civilians must be protected and not targeted during armed conflicts. Direct attacks on civilians are considered war crimes.
- Wounded and sick members of the armed forces and other parties to the conflict must be respected and protected, ensuring they receive the necessary medical care.
- Prisoners of war are guaranteed humane treatment, which includes protection from violence, retaliation, and degrading or humiliating treatment.
- The use of weapons and methods that cause unnecessary suffering or superfluous injury, such as chemical and biological weapons, is prohibited.

International and local organizations play a vital role in promoting and protecting human rights. Some of the prominent international organizations include:

The United Nations Human Rights Council and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which monitor human rights violations and make recommendations to member states.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Red Crescent, which focus

on providing humanitarian assistance and protection to those affected by armed conflicts.

Amnesty International, which works on documenting human rights violations and pressuring governments to improve their human rights records.

Local human rights organizations in many countries play a prominent role in monitoring and documenting violations and defending the rights of individuals and marginalized groups. These organizations provide legal support to victims and pressure authorities to take corrective actions. In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, human rights organizations are intervening intensively to monitor and document violations from both sides. For example, Amnesty International has issued reports documenting violations against Palestinian civilians in Gaza and the West Bank and has pressured the international community to take a firmer stance. The ICRC provides humanitarian and medical assistance to those affected by the conflict, including care for the wounded and ensuring the supply of medical necessities. The UN Human Rights Council regularly issues reports on the state of human rights in Palestine and recommends actions to improve the situation.

crucial to ensure the rights and protection of civilians during times of conflict. IHL is a set of rules aimed at limiting the impact of wars on humans and property, heavily reliant on the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. The war in occupied Palestine is intricately linked with political, ethnic, and religious issues, further complicating the effective application of IHL. The interplay of international and regional interests exacerbates the situation, leading to the non-compliance of the aggressor with international laws and legal obligations, resulting in severe human rights violations. These violations include the indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas, the excessive use of force, and the torture of prisoners. Despite the existence of international laws, their implementation faces significant obstacles, such as the weakness of international institutions and enforcement mechanisms to hold violators accountable. Civilian areas in Palestine are frequently bombed and destroyed, causing significant human and material losses, which contradicts the principle of distinction between civilians and combatants, a core tenet of IHL.

The aggressor has imposed blockades on certain areas, leading to severe shortages

respecting international laws during conflicts.

Applying IHL in Palestine remains a significant challenge that requires serious international cooperation and strong political will to ensure civilian rights and achieve justice and peace in the region. Enhancing accountability and international monitoring mechanisms is essential for improving IHL application. The United Nations and other international organizations should intensify efforts to monitor the situation on the ground and document violations accurately and comprehensively. Establishing independent and impartial investigation committees to investigate alleged violations can significantly contribute to holding perpetrators accountable.

UN member states can use their political and diplomatic influence to pressure the aggressor to comply with international laws. Greater cooperation among states to enforce sanctions on entities proven to be involved in severe violations sends a strong message that the international community will not tolerate crimes against humanity.

In this context, civil society plays a vital role in promoting accountability. Non-governmental organizations and local and international human rights groups can provide evidence and testimonies that contribute to bringing offenders to justice. Supporting these organizations and protecting their workers is a crucial step towards achieving lasting justice and peace in Palestine.

Raising awareness and spreading knowledge about the importance and necessity of IHL is essential for achieving full compliance. Education is a powerful tool for promoting respect for human rights and IHL among younger generations. Including IHL principles in curricula and educational programs can build collective awareness about the necessity of respecting human rights, even during conflicts.

Organizing awareness campaigns targeting local communities and combatants alike is vital. NGOs and media can play a key role in spreading this knowledge through workshops, seminars, and educational programs. Continuous awareness of the importance of protecting civilians and respecting IHL can contribute to changing behaviors and reducing violations. These awareness efforts are necessary not only during conflicts but also in times of peace to foster a culture of respect for the law and humanity. By enhancing awareness and education, we can cultivate a new generation of leaders and citizens who understand the importance of IHL and work to respect and apply it in the future.

“Improving the application of IHL in Palestine requires strengthening international efforts to ensure compliance with the laws and bringing violators to justice. The international community must exert pressure to cease hostilities and respect human rights. Humanitarian organizations must work diligently to provide support and assistance to affected civilians and raise awareness about the importance of respecting international laws during conflicts.”

The Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols provide the legal basis for protecting civilians and prisoners of war. Human rights organizations' reports provide detailed documentation of violations and efforts to protect rights. UN resolutions highlight the international community's stance on conflicts and humanitarian crises. Providing such information contributes to forming a comprehensive picture of the legal and institutional frameworks working to protect human rights during armed conflicts, such as the situation in Palestine.

The ongoing war in the occupied Palestinian territories has seen a continuous bloody conflict for decades, making the application of international humanitarian law (IHL)

of food, medicine, and essential services. These practices violate IHL, which mandates the facilitation of humanitarian aid passage. The aggressor has also been condemned for using internationally prohibited weapons, such as cluster bombs and white phosphorus, exacerbating civilian suffering and causing environmental and property destruction.

Improving the application of IHL in Palestine requires strengthening international efforts to ensure compliance with the laws and bringing violators to justice. The international community must exert pressure to cease hostilities and respect human rights. Humanitarian organizations must work diligently to provide support and assistance to affected civilians and raise awareness about the importance of

France, Kuwait are partners in stability and security

France and Kuwait share a lot in common and have much to build together on, said the French ambassador while speaking at celebrations held to mark Bastille Day, the National Day of France on 14 July.



THE TIMES KUWAIT REPORT

Ambassador of France H.E. Claire Le Flécher affirmed that France and Kuwait have a lot in common and hold a shared commitment to pluralism, peace, and international solidarity. She also praised Kuwait's exemplary humanitarian commitment, especially in supporting the civilian populations in Gaza and Sudan.

The ambassador was speaking during celebrations held to mark Bastille Day, the National Day of France on 14 July. The event was attended by Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Al-Jaber, members of the diplomatic corps, and representatives of the French military contingent in Kuwait, as well as by a large gathering of officials, special invitees, and French nationals in Kuwait.

Recollecting the three years she spent in Kuwait representing France, Ambassador Le Flécher noted that the two countries "share a lot and have a lot to build together". She added that during her tenure, the two countries "were able to elevate the French-Kuwaiti strategic dialogue to the level of a ministerial meeting", and to continue

developing the strong bilateral relationship.

Ambassador Le Flécher also highlighted the eagerness of French companies to establish business relations with Kuwait, as well as the interest of Kuwaiti companies in France. In past years, many Kuwaitis attended our 'Vision Golfe' and 'Choose France' business forums. She added that last year, the French-Kuwaiti Friendship Association was launched, headed by Mohammed Al-Saqr and Dominique Ceniquet, with the aim of becoming a major platform to bring together prominent actors in the private sector and civil society in both countries, and to develop meaningful long-term relationships and projects.

The French Ambassador stressed that France and Kuwait are partners in stability and security. The dynamism of our defense cooperation is constant evidence of the ability of our armed forces to fight side by side to defend Kuwait. The 1992 defense agreement is considered the oldest defense agreement signed by France in the Gulf region. Generations of Kuwaiti officers have been trained and educated in France, creating bonds of mutual trust and interoperability. "Training and exercises such as

Pearl of the West 2022, Arabian Breeze 2023 and 2024, and most recently, air superiority exercises involving French and Kuwaiti jet fighters, demonstrate the vitality of our cooperation to achieve operational readiness," said the ambassador.

She added, "The participation of Caracal helicopters during the Kuwaiti National and Liberation Day celebrations and the delivery of the last helicopters create a potential that only a few countries have: Kuwait now has one of the largest Caracal fleets in the world," said the French Ambassador. "I would also like to thank the Airbus and DCI employees for their fantastic efforts and their support for the Caracal program."

Regarding the occasion for the gathering, she said, "I am deeply honored to welcome you on Bastille Day, which this year is very special for France, as our country is about to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games. I welcome the presence of a delegation from the Kuwaiti Olympic Committee among us. Dear President Sheikh Fahd Al-Sabah, we are very honored by your presence, and we wish all the best to the Kuwaiti team."

Indicating her pleasure at the growing support for Francophone and the French language in Kuwait, the ambassador said, "I met many advocates of Francophonie in Kuwait: teachers, graduates, and many French speakers," the Ambassador said.

"The vitality of the French language in Kuwait is the result of those who keep it alive, and I would like to thank His Highness Sheikh Nasser Mohammed Al-Sabah for his unwavering support, and all members of the French Language Council for the promotion of Francophonie. As you know, France will host the Francophone Summit in October. I am convinced that Francophonie represents an authentic space that rejects cultural uniformity and offers a promising dialogue full of energy and generosity."

Ambassador Le Flécher concluded by stating, "As I leave Kuwait, I carry with me countless memories and lasting friendships. I have had the honor of serving as the Ambassador of France to the State of Kuwait for three years, and rest assured that I will always remain an ardent advocate for strengthening French-Kuwaiti friendship, wherever I am."



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Digitalization, innovation and diversification underline Zain's success

Bader N. Al-Kharafi
Vice Chairman & CEO of Zain Group

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The Business Year (TBY) talks to Vice Chairman & CEO of Zain Group, Bader N. Al-Kharafi about the company he leads and the successes it has achieved over the years in providing cutting-edge digital technologies and innovative solutions. The wide-ranging talks also cover Zain's plans to forge ahead by bringing digital lifestyle communications to people and providing meaningful connectivity that empowers societies.

Zain Group reported a 10 percent increase in both revenues and profits in the year ending 2023. What were the key factors driving this growth, and how do you foresee these shaping Zain's strategy in the coming years?

Our ongoing success and progress are rooted in our 4Sight corporate strategy, which embraces digital transformation, innovation,



and diversification by entering new business verticals across our footprint. Our group-wide efforts in monetizing innovative digital services and enterprise solutions on the back of our fiber, 4G, and 5G state-of-the-art networks and technologies, combined with cost optimization initiatives and pioneering passive tower infrastructure sale and leaseback strategy, drove strong operational and financial performance for the year. We will continue to build on these solid grounds as a leading provider of innovative technologies and digital lifestyle communications and deliver meaningful connectivity that creates systemic change and empowers the societies we serve and beyond.

How has the shift toward 5G impacted Zain's business operations, and how do you see it driving innovation and data revenue growth in the fintech and digital content services in the regions where Zain operates?

We are a pioneer in 5G services in the region, having been the first operator to commercialize the technology in Kuwait back in 2019. Since then, we have gone on

to launch 5G in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Jordan, and our leading-edge technology supports the revenue growth and expansion of our enterprise, digital, fintech, and other customer appealing services across these markets. Throughout 2023, Zain invested nearly USD1 billion, representing 16 percent of revenue, in CAPEX, mainly on network rollouts and spectrum license fees that bolstered group wide annual data revenue growth of 8 percent to reach USD2.4 billion and powered enterprise revenue growth of 20 percent. Fintech wise, our customers grew 40 percent and revenues grew 195 percent while digital services group-wide, including the Dizlee API platform, witnessed revenue growth of 9 percent. We will continue to innovate and foster these lucrative areas and focus on enhancing the customer experience.

Can you elaborate on Zain's fintech aspirations in Kuwait and across the region?

We are keen to foster innovations within the fintech space and continue to innovate and expand mobile financial services across our operating markets, providing much needed services to the communities we

serve and driving financial inclusion while contributing to the evolution of the region's digital ecosystem. In 2023, group-wide, we saw total transaction volume tripling to USD 11 billion in fintech. Early in 2024, we launched the Bede fintech brand in Bahrain, which is set to be rolled out across our footprint. Bede stems from the Arabic meaning of 'in my hand'. The operation aims to allow everything to be powered in the palm of one's hand, catering to consumers' lifestyles and emerging demands beyond basic telecom services. The impressive and profitable growth of TAMAM in Saudi Arabia, and ZainCash in Iraq and Jordan has firmly established these fintech entities as market leaders for the unbanked and underbanked in their respective markets. We will continue to foster their growth through innovation.

What partnerships and deals is Zain pursuing, and how do these align with the company's overall growth objectives?

The company has pursued a series of acquisitions to deepen and widen its portfolio of cutting-edge and

comprehensive products and solutions, cementing its position as the regional powerhouse for enterprise digital technology, advisory, and implementation. Three strategic acquisitions were completed during 2023, namely STS, Adfolks and BIOS that are success stories among the region's dynamic ICT sector, as well as entering multiple partnerships that sees Zain offering services including Cloud, Cybersecurity, IoT, AI, Big Data, Smart Cities, Drones, Robotics, and other emerging technologies. Today, ZainTECH and our operations have partnered with an expansive list of the world's leading technology innovators paving the way to becoming the digital transformation partner of choice for governments and enterprises across our markets, especially Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and beyond.

Zain's commitment to ESG has been highlighted in various reports. How does this commitment shape Zain's business decisions and operations, and what are the future goals in this area?

Zain's corporate sustainability strategy is aligned to the basic premise that connectivity is a fundamental human right. It is part of the ethos of the organization that further pushes the company to ensure that its business decisions are just and inclusive. Zain has consistently gone above and beyond the compliance requirements. The business is run with a strong sense of values and ethics, carried out across all business operations.

More specifically, from a human rights perspective we are committed to addressing our salient human rights that include labor and children rights, public safety, customers rights to privacy, and digital inclusion. As a result of our commitment to human rights, our business decisions incorporate relevant human rights risks. The company continues to expand and scale its mechanisms and processes across all markets to address human rights impacts by ensuring its suppliers align to supplier code of conduct and human rights policy statement, complete Zain's training material specifically tailored for suppliers, fulfill Zain's suppliers' self-assessment questionnaire, and complete a physical audit for high-risk suppliers.

In addition, the company continues to make concerted efforts to upskill its suppliers so that they can implement best practices. Zain is also a member of the GSMA Mobile Alliance Against Digital Child Sexual Exploitation, and in 2023 the company also became a member of the UN Global Compact initiative, a voluntary leadership platform for the development, implementation, and disclosure of responsible business practices. Its future goals in the area of human rights is to continue to work on the integration of human rights impact assessments for mergers and acquisitions and further develop the criteria of its human rights practices.

Zain was recently named Best Workplaces for Women in the region by a reputable ranking organization. What is the company doing in regard to gender equality?

Women are an integral part of the Zain



Bader N. Al-Kharafi is the founder and CEO of BNK Holding, his personal holding company headquartered in Kuwait and established in 2016. BNK Holding oversees and manages a portfolio of businesses spanning over multiple industries that include healthcare, technology, telecoms, industrial, securities exchange (through Bursa Kuwait privatization), food & beverage, media, manufacturing, real estate, banking and automotive. He holds many board-level positions, including being chairman of Gulf Bank, the fastest-growing commercial bank in Kuwait and industry-leading financial service provider, vice chairman of Gulf Cables, a manufacturing provider of cables, and Vice Chairman & CEO at Zain Group, a leading mobile voice, data, and digital services operator to over 50.6 million active individual and business customers as of December 31, 2023.

success story. From increasing leadership positions, a revolutionary HR policy and other innovative talent development programs, Zain's focus of integrating women fully into all aspects of the business is proving to be an enormous benefit to the culture and productivity of the company. Zain is proud of the serious stance taken on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion activities, and this award recognizes not only the impact on just women, but the impact on all the talented 8,000 people Zain employs. Our gender diversity women empowerment (WE) pillar was established in 2017, when only 14.5 percent of Zain's leadership comprised of women, and a target was set to increase this percentage of women leadership to 25 percent by 2025. Today, three Zain operations have already achieved the WE leadership targets, Zain Kuwait at 26.9 percent, UAE based ZainTECH at 27.0 percent, and Zain Jordan at 27.3 percent.

MoI, PACI to crackdown on fictitious residence addresses

The initiative led by First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Interior targets individuals using fictitious addresses, coordinating closely with property owners to ensure accurate address registrations.

First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Interior (MoI), Sheikh Fahd Al-Yousef Al-Sabah has directed the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) to conduct a thorough survey of residential areas in all governorates, with the aim of ascertaining whether people registered to addresses mentioned in their Civil ID were actually living at those places.

The minister's directive followed the discovery of many people changing their place of residence without updating this change in the address on their Civil ID, as well as instances of manipulation by people using fictitious addresses. The use of outdated Civil ID addresses came to light after security personnel from MoI visited buildings to apprehend people against whom cases were registered, for committing crimes, or violating residency laws, only to find that the offenders no longer resided in the addresses shown on their Civil ID.

This prompted MoI to request PACI to cancel thousands of addresses of fictitious residents and citizens. Accordingly, and in line with the directives of Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef, and in response to the MoI request, PACI has initiated a comprehensive survey to verify the authenticity of addresses mentioned in the Civil ID of people residing in Kuwait.

The Authority began the survey by visiting Since the Authority lacks the necessary judicial authority and ability to enter homes and verify the residents living within, PACI officials are confined to verifying documents related to residential address transactions, and coordinating with building owners to ascertain those living in their properties. So far the survey of all private, investment, and commercial buildings in densely populated expatriate areas, has led PACI to

cancel the addresses of thousands of fictitious residents. Consequently, the authority sent notifications through the government's 'Sahel' app to the individuals whose addresses were canceled, asking them to immediately update their addresses.

The Authority also warned that failure to comply within two months would result in a fine of KD20 per month, in addition to legal proceedings being initiated against the offenders. Following the notification, the flood of applications to PACI requesting appointments, appears to have overwhelmed the Authority's ability to cope. The result is that many applicants now face significant delays in obtaining an appointment slot to update their addresses.

The PACI survey also revealed issues in the process of updating and identifying residents at registered addresses in their Civil ID card, including complaints from property owners about unauthorized names listed on their properties for years. The Civil Information Authority has reportedly initiated measures to rectify these discrepancies and address concerns of residence address manipulations.

Manipulation of residential addresses are reported to have surged during periods of electoral restrictions preceding National Assembly elections. Many citizen voters would alter their addresses to support a particular candidate, as voting was tied to the residential address on their civil ID cards. However, they often reverted to their original addresses once elections concluded without reflecting this change in their Civil IDs. In addition, some individuals and families move to new locations but retain their old addresses, violating PACI regulations in this regard. There are also cases where heirs sell their deceased father's house but retain the old address, leading to an inflated registration of names exceeding the property's capacity. To curb abnormal increases in resident numbers in homes, and to prevent manipulations in this regard, PACI regulations state that no more than four families can be registered to one address, without approval from the Director of PACI Administration.

Authority regulations also prohibit spouses from having dual addresses; the wife must be registered under the husband's address. Regulations also stipulate that in cases of separation or divorce, the divorced woman's address is updated to reflect her new residence. Children are registered under the father's address, except for those in the custody of the divorced mother, whose addresses are registered based on court rulings.

In addition, recent procedures of PACI also emphasize strict adherence to regulations for changing residential addresses. This includes rigorous application of conditions and rules set by the Board of Directors, alongside robust internal control systems. Measures include thorough review and audit of entered data, as well as validation of documents supplied by residents, and, since January 2019, the fingerprints of applicants to verify their presence at the stated address.

Also, in January 2020, property owners were required to provide their fingerprints to confirm their awareness of the residents living on their property. If



the applicant is the property owner, they are then required to personally visit PACI's Civil Registry Department and bring along the relevant property documents.

Procedures for registering or changing residential addresses also entail the individual signing a residence declaration. Requests to change addresses are then forwarded to the Review and Follow-up Department, where submitted documents are reviewed for compliance. This process includes verifying the fingerprints of the individual and the property owner.

Only after ensuring the integrity and accuracy of all procedures, the civil card is issued. Any deficiencies in procedures or required documents automatically halts the transaction and prevents issuance. However, despite PACI regulations banning bachelors from residing in model residential areas, and preventing the issuance of Civil IDs registered to these addresses, there are still complaints of bachelors residing in model areas.

The Data Protection Department at PACI also manages and retains historical records of all data inquiries and modifications in the civil information system, including address change transactions, for reference when addressing complaints or reported violations by concerned parties.

The new system being initiated at PACI aims to rectify these discrepancies and enforce continuous updates of residence data for citizens and residents, which is expected to curb address manipulation and eliminate fictitious addresses.

PACI is also collaborating with various other government entities in a bid to rectify the issue and accurately register the people living in a residence, as the accuracy of this data is an important national security concern.

- *The Public Authority for Civil Information received complaints from property owners about individuals and families registered at their homes without their knowledge over many years.*
- *The authority took steps to summon these individuals and clarify the situation regarding the tampered residential addresses. Every property owner or resident would receive a notification via the 'Sahel' application to update their address. Failure to comply within two months would result in a fine of 20 dinars per month, along with legal proceedings.*

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Kuwait, UAE sign double-taxation agreement

- The Kuwait-UAE agreement covers residents of either nation and allows income earned from property in one country to be taxed locally.
- According to the new law, profits derived from operating ships or aircraft in international traffic are taxable only in the contracting state where the effective management center of the enterprise is located.

Kuwait has issued a decree-law that approves the agreement to avoid double-taxation with the United Arab Emirates. The agreement, which aims to enhance economic ties and cooperation on tax matters, will avoid double-taxation on income and capital, between the two countries, as well as prevent tax evasion.

The law, published in the official gazette on 14 July, incorporates provisions from the agreement concluded between the two countries on 11 February in Dubai. It specifies the individuals covered by the agreement, who may be residents of either or both countries, and allows income earned by a resident in one contracting state from immovable property situated in the other contracting state to be taxable in that state.

The agreement, under the new law, applies to taxes on income and capital imposed by a contracting state or its political subdivisions or local authorities, regardless of their method of imposition. It also covers taxes on gains from the sale of movable or immovable property, taxes on total wages and salaries paid by enterprises, and taxes on capital gains.

The law specifies that business profits are taxable only in the contracting state where the activity is carried out, unless the enterprise operates through a permanent establishment in

the other contracting state.

According to the new law, profits derived from operating ships or aircraft in international traffic are taxable only in the contracting state where the effective management center of the enterprise is located.

The law also allows joint projects to be subject to taxation in the other contracting state under certain conditions: when an enterprise of one contracting state directly or indirectly participates in the management, control, or capital of an enterprise of the other contracting state, and when the same individuals are directly or indirectly involved in the management, control, or capital of enterprises in both contracting states.

The law permits taxation on profits realized by a resident of one contracting state in the other contracting state from the sale of immovable property, as well as profits derived from the sale of movable property that forms part of the business assets of a permanent establishment owned by an enterprise of one contracting state in the other contracting state. Additionally, it allows taxation on profits arising from the sale of ships or aircraft engaged in international traffic, among other provisions.

Income from employment, salaries, wages, and similar remuneration received by a resident

of a contracting state is taxable only in that state, unless the employment is performed in the other contracting state.

The law also stipulates that pensions and similar benefits paid to individuals residing in a contracting state for past services are taxable solely in that state.

The law also clarified a special provision regarding other income, stating that income items of a resident of a contracting state, regardless of their source and not covered by previous articles of this agreement, are taxable only in that contracting state. Additionally, it allows for the taxation of capital represented by immovable property owned by a resident of a contracting state and situated in the other contracting state.

The new law specifies that investments made by a contracting state in the other contracting state, income from such investments, and profits from the sale of these investments shall be taxable only in the first-mentioned contracting state.

The explanatory note accompanying the law outlines procedures for eliminating double taxation, stating that individuals holding the nationality of one contracting state shall not be subject in the other contracting state to any tax or related obligations that are more stringent



or different from those applied to individuals holding the nationality of that other contracting state in similar circumstances.

Article 16 of the new tax law states, "Where income arises from personal activities performed by an entertainer or sportsman in their professional capacity, and this income is not received by the entertainer or sportsman but by another party, such income may be taxed in the contracting state where the activities are performed."

The provisions of the preceding paragraphs do not apply to income earned by an artist or sportsman who is a resident of one contracting state from their activities in the other contracting state, if the visit to the other state is primarily funded by public funds from the first-mentioned state. Nor do they apply to income earned by nonprofit organizations from such activities, provided that none of their income is paid to or available for the personal benefit of their owners, founders, or members.

MoInfo launches online platform for commercial advertising

Ministry of Information (MoInfo) announced the launch last week of an online platform on its website for receiving applications for commercial advertising on state media. This move is in line with the government's focus on digitalization of public services so as to enhance efficiency, transparency, and speed in delivery of services to citizens and residents in the country.

Announcing the launch of the new platform on 18 July, Assistant Undersecretary of Media Sector and New Media Services, Saad Al-Azmi, said the initiative will enable entities and individuals to submit requests for broadcasting their commercial advertisements on Kuwaiti State TV and radio.

He added that the process can be easily completed through the platform, where applications are tracked and advertising

content is reviewed for compliance with conditions, regulations, and applicable laws, saving time and effort for all involved parties.

Al-Azmi indicated that this platform is part of the ministry's strategy for the period (2021-2026), and is aligned with directives from the Minister of Information and Culture, Abdul Rahman Al-Mutairi, and under the supervision of the ministry's Undersecretary, Dr. Nasser Muhaisen. The platform aims to implement digital transformation projects to streamline transactions of the ministry.

He also disclosed that the new service will soon be available through the unified government electronic services application 'Sahel', thereby further enhancing communication between the Ministry of Information and the public.

National Fund for SMEs to resume financing entrepreneurial projects

National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprises Development, or the National Fund, as it is more commonly known, is reportedly preparing to resume financing of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) launched by Kuwaiti entrepreneurs.

The resumption of services at The National Fund comes after a hiatus of nearly four and half years, following the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on local and global markets. During the interim period, The National Fund is said to have undergone an internal restructuring process, as well as conducted a thorough review of the effectiveness of its operations since its inception in 2013.

Ahead of resumption of services, The National Fund is said to have held a series of meetings with specialized private and public entities, including the Union of Investment Companies, to discuss the optimal funding methods to effectively support young Kuwaiti SME developers.

Accordingly, the mechanism for funding SMEs in future will witness radical changes from previous funding processes, which involved The National Fund providing the entire funding for SMEs and the entrepreneur repaying the loan amount in installments.

In the new funding process, The National Fund will no longer be the sole fund provider to SMEs, but rather the entrepreneur will be offered multiple financing options. In the new mechanism, The National Fund will serve largely as a market enabler creating business opportunities for young Kuwaiti entrepreneurs, by linking them to financing and investment entities, as well as introducing them to industries in the private sector. The Fund will also facilitate the completion of transactions and paperwork with government entities and regulatory agencies.

Among the new financing options being studied by The National Fund is the establishment of financial portfolios in partnership with banks, investment companies, and others. The financing process will be carried out through specific shares paid by the

entrepreneur along with private investment institutions, and The National Fund.

The Fund is also evaluating other funding ideas, including crowdfunding for small and medium enterprises. This would involve the entrepreneur presenting the project idea through private subscriptions via a platform supported, approved, and licensed by the Capital Markets Authority. Project shares would then be offered after the feasibility study is approved and the capital is determined.

The return of the financing operations at The Fund follows the recent political stability and a reorganization of The Fund's executive management, including the appointment of a



new acting director general and his deputies. Since their appointment, the new management has been exerting great efforts to reorganize The National Fund internally, and to resume its funding operations.

Also, in order for new SME projects to be accepted for funding, their proposed activity will need to be in specific economic activities. The emphasis will be on funding projects that make a difference in the market, add value in their respective sectors, and provide job opportunities for Kuwaiti youth.

It is noteworthy that since its inception, The National Fund has financed around 1,080 SME projects in various commercial activities, and disbursed around 10 percent of its capital, which amounts to approximately KD200 million, as SME loans to Kuwaiti entrepreneurs.

Stringent new laws to curb traffic violations, lower road fatalities

Reports from public surveys indicate that the upcoming new traffic law, set to be adopted by year's end, will hopefully lead to a significant reduction in traffic violations, accidents, injuries, and fatalities. The new laws are in response to the large number of traffic infractions and relatively high rate of accidents and deaths reported on Kuwait's roads every year.

Even media reports of the upcoming strict traffic law, and the heavy penalties that traffic violations could incur, have had an immediate improvement in discipline



among drivers and in traffic flows compared to weeks before the news.

Reports also indicate that instructions have been issued by the Assistant Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior, Major General Yousef Al-Khudah, to the Traffic Operations Affairs Department, directing the

Traffic and Rescue Operations Room and Traffic and Rescue Patrols to focus on violations related to children sitting in front seats. Interior ministry sources confirmed that such violations will result in severe traffic penalties for the vehicle owner, due to the potential danger posed to children.

Municipality approves master-plan for Sulaibikhat Bay development

The project is located within Kuwait Bay, west of Kuwait City, overlooking the coast from the Shuwaikh and Al-Rai commercial services area to the borders of Doha Port, and consists of six development areas.

As part of the government's drive to boost economic development and diversification, as well as enhance living conditions for citizens, the Cabinet has approved opening up several urban areas, as well as new locations, for industrial, commercial and residential development.

In line with the Cabinet approval, last week, Deputy Director General of the Urban Planning Sector in the Municipality, Eng. Manal Al-Asfour, approved the Master Plan, including regulations on land use and building ratios and specification for the Sulaibikhat Bay Development Project. The project is divided into six areas that will be developed in accordance with the Master Plan.

The Sulaibikhat Bay Project is located to the west of Kuwait City in proximity to an extension of the Sulaibikhat urban area. The area overlooks the Kuwait coast from the borders of Service sector No. 16 in the Shuwaikh and Al-Rai Commercial Area to the borders of Doha Port. The six development areas of the project, along with connections between them, are: Innovation Zone, Sulaibikhat Coast Area, Sulaibikhat Sports Area, Ras Ashirj Area, Shairj Residential Area, and the Shairj Islands Area.

These areas, along with coastal reclamation, constitute approximately 35 percent of the project site. In addition, the proposed islands and vacant land that can be developed in the current situation makes up 29 percent of the site area. The total length of the project's seafront is 38 kilometers. The six areas and their development plans, as well the ratio of buildings to land and height of buildings are as follows:

Innovation zone: With an area of 609,311 square meters and a total built-up area of 133,900 square meters, which comprises 32 percent for commercial use, 2 percent for government facilities, 42 percent for open spaces and central suburban parks, and 35 percent for roads,

parking lots, and infrastructure.

Sulaibikhat Coast: With an area of 1,611,879 square meters and a total built-up area of 1,315,600 square meters, this area comprises 17 percent set aside for private residential use, 8 percent investment housing use, 8 percent commercial use, 9 percent for government facilities, and 4 percent for recreational use. In addition, 25 percent of the area is designated as open spaces and central and local parks, while roads, parking lots, and infrastructure account for 29 percent.

Sulaibikhat Sports Area: With an area covering 1,707,314 square meters and a built-up area of 110,000 square meters, the Sports area allocates 2 percent of land to investment housing use, 14 percent for government facilities; 42 percent for recreational use; 22 percent for open spaces, and central and local parks; as well as 20 percent for roads, parking lots, and infrastructure.

Ras Ashirj region: The area spans 2,725,980 square meters with a total built-up area of 1,395,500 square meters. It includes 6 percent for commercial use, 7 percent for government facilities, and 23 percent for recreational use. Hotel apartments are limited to a maximum height of four floors, including the mezzanine, while coastal resorts have a maximum height of three floors. Additionally, it allocates 7 percent for nature reserves, 34 percent for open spaces and central and local parks, and 23 percent for roads, parking lots, and infrastructure.

Ashirj residential area: Covering an area of 600,995 square meters and a total built-up area of 467,700 square meters, this mainly residential area includes 9 percent of total land set aside for private residential use, 19 percent for investment housing, 2 percent for commercial use, 4 percent for government facilities, 26 percent for open spaces, and 40 percent for roads, parking lots, and infrastructure.



Ashirj Islands: Spanning an area of 896,413 square meters with a total built-up area of 292,200 square meters, the islands include 11 percent commercial use area, 3 percent government facilities, 32 percent recreational use, 38 percent central and local parks, and 16 percent for roads and parking lots.

The Master Plan stipulates several conditions that those wishing to participate in tenders for developing Sulaibikhat Bay will need to undertake. These include:

Environmental and social impact studies must be submitted separately to the Environment Public Authority for each development project proposed.

Projects may be proposed in stages, as per established procedures and systems, and in coordination with relevant ministries and authorities.

The Municipality's Master Plan Department will be tasked with approving detailed design plans for project areas and road networks, ensuring their integration with surrounding roads, and for coordinating traffic studies in collaboration with relevant ministries.

The Master Plan Department will classify and approve commercial activities and uses (government facilities, residential, entertainment, parks, and open spaces). The Master Plan department is also authorized to relocate and adjust project shapes and areas as necessary, ensuring compliance with relevant ministries and regulatory requirements.

Special ratios and building heights have been specified for different parts of the project, with priority given to these specifications over any conflicting building systems stipulated for project uses.

Tender documents for the project will determine the number of residential units 'private and investment', commercial plots, hotel rooms, and any specific development requirements



ATS made mandatory for all marine vessels

Ministry of Interior has mandated that all marine vessels, regardless of their type or whether they are stationary or in motion, must install an Automatic Identification System (AIS).

The device, which identifies ships by their call sign, location, and speed, will ensure safety and security of marine vessels sailing. It can be purchased from entities approved by the General Authority for Communications.

The ministry explained in a statement that sea-goers must install the device by registering and obtaining a permit from the General Authority for Communications through its official website, following these steps:

The user must create an account on the website of the General Authority for Communications and Information Technology and submit all required documents.

After approval by the authority, the user

will receive a transaction number via phone to track the procedures on the website.

After completing the procedures and receiving final approval, the user must pay the fees on the website of the General Authority for Communications (Al Hamra Tower).

The license to purchase the self-identification device will be issued within two business days after payment, on the website of the General Authority for Communications' website (Liberation Tower).

The General Directorate of Coast Guard has instructed users to keep the device turned on while sailing. If the device is turned off for any reason, the user will be subject to a fine of 500 dinars.

The device is currently used in all Gulf Cooperation Council countries and aims primarily to maintain the security and safety of sea-goers. They noted that it was made mandatory for fishing vessels since last year, and now it has become mandatory for marine vessels such as pleasure boats and yachts, but not for jet skis because they do not travel long distances.

The number of marine vessels covered by the decision is estimated at about 3,000. This device provides information about the exact location of marine vessels in real time, and allows the Coast Guard to monitor and intervene if the vessel is subject to piracy, used in smuggling or infiltration operations, or crosses territorial waters.

The device costs around KD600, with an annual subscription cost of KD50, or KD100 for three years. The new procedure is part of the second phase of Kuwait's radar system.

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Kuwait, UNODC sign protocol to combat human trafficking

Kuwait and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) for the GCC region, signed last week a protocol of cooperation on exchanging technical and advisory opinions, and consulting on international experiences related to combating the crime of trafficking in persons.

Undersecretary of the Ministry of Justice, Tariq Al-Asfour, who is also the Deputy-Chairman of the National Committee for Prevention of Trafficking in Persons, signed the protocol in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In a statement after the signing ceremony, Al-Asfour emphasized that Kuwait spares no effort in combating trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants through various

mechanisms. He explained that the cooperation with UNODC is part of Kuwait's vision to strengthen cooperation frameworks and build partnerships with international and regional organizations.

Al-Asfour added that the focus of the cooperation was to promote their common goals and objectives regarding the prevention, suppression, and punishment of trafficking in persons, as well as enhancing the protection of victims in accordance with international treaties, standards, norms, and best practices.

It is noteworthy that the National Committee for the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants was established by a decision of the Council of Ministers on 5 February 2018. It is chaired by the Minister of



Justice and the Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, Dr. Mohammed Al-Wasmi, and includes membership from all relevant authorities. The committee's vision is to achieve a Kuwait free from human trafficking and smuggling

of migrants, with a society fully aware of the dangers of these phenomena and committed to their elimination.

The committee's objectives include identifying victims and those affected by trafficking crimes, providing them with protection and support, training and enhancing the skills of relevant authorities to combat human trafficking, and raising awareness across society, including employers and employees, based on religious and ethical values. It also aims to strengthen regional and international cooperation frameworks in combating trafficking in persons. The committee urges citizens and residents to report human trafficking crimes via the hotline (25589696) and email (ath@moi.gov.kw).

Government commitments drive project developments

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The first half of the year has already witnessed the awarding of a number of major projects. Although project awardings in the first-quarter of 2024 were lackluster, it gained pace in the second-quarter, growing from KD98 million in the first three months of the year to over KD688 million in the second quarter. Some of the main projects awarded during this period included constructions in Al-Mutlaa and South Sabah Al-Ahmad residential cities, and affordable housing in the Al-Nayeem area.

According to MEED, a leading business intelligence publication in the Middle East, the second half of 2024 is likely to be equally positive for project activities in Kuwait. More than KD6.3 billion worth of housing and power-related projects are expected to be awarded this year, including the KD1.2 billion Al-Zour Independent Water and Power Plant (IWPP) phases 2 and 3, and the KD800 million Al-Khairan IWPP, as well as the KD100 million

Al-Shagaya Renewable Energy Complex.

Other infrastructure developments include projects to revamp the waterfront promenade in Kuwait City, as well as plans for waterfront developments along Kuwait Bay. This includes a 38 km stretch along Sulaibikhat Bay at an estimated cost of KD1.5 billion, and a 7.3km waterfront project along Al-Jahra Corniche valued at KD500 million. The projects will offer recreational, commercial and hospitality spaces, as well as all facilities and amenities for visitors.

Development projects have also been announced in the transportation sector, including work on completing the KD1.3 billion Terminal 2 project at Kuwait Airport, and studies on the 650km high-speed railway project between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Scheduled for completion by 2028, the rail project aims to enhance trade and passenger movement between the two countries, with future expansion plans set to link the project to the pan-Gulf rail network, and extend it to Iraq in the north.

Kuwait, despite pledges to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote renewable sources of energy, is also investing heavily in boosting its oil and gas sector as they form the backbone of the country's economy. Kuwait Oil Company, the main upstream hydrocarbon subsidiary of the state's Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), is reportedly preparing to tender several upstream oil and gas projects valued at over a billion dinars in this financial year.

In addition, the government has outlined a four-year plan for the 2024-28 period, which envisions several major project developments aimed at economic diversification and creating new revenue streams in the non-oil sector. These include developing the Mubarak Al Kabeer Port and establishing Kuwait's largest economic zone in North Kuwait, as well as plans by the Public Authority for Housing Welfare to develop greenfield residential cities and housing projects for citizens.

Construction industry analysts note that the projects market in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states is currently seeing significant growth, driven by a combination of economic diversification plans, increased public and private investments, and construction of a spew of urban development projects across the six-nation bloc. They estimate that the pipeline of projects across the region has now grown to around USD3.1 trillion.

Kuwait's commitment to development projects adheres closely to the country's 'Vision 2035' New Kuwait plan, which envisages bringing about transformational changes to the economic and social landscape of the country. However, the keenness to prioritize implementation of major projects is regrettably not mirrored in the draft budget for fiscal year 2024-25 (FY 24-25). But, in all fairness, the budget was tabled in January by the previous government.

The draft budget for the year shows an overall cut in expenditure from the FY 23-24 budget, with spending on capital expenditure down 7.7 percent from a year earlier. The allocation of just KD2.3 billion for capex not only pales in comparison to spending by regional peers, but is also among the lowest in terms of its ratio to GDP. The current government will need to significantly raise capex if it is to successfully realize the ambitious development projects planned.

One option for the government to boost capex funding would be to encourage greater private sector investments through public-private partnerships. Another funding

alternative is to revive the 'Ciyada Fund' — a new sovereign fund planned by the previous government to boost investments in the local economy, spearhead mega projects, and attract foreign investment.

It needs to be added that, over the past many years, budget allocations for capital expenditures have displayed a troubling trend of under-spending. Statistics show a significant and consistent decline in spending on development projects from that allocated in the annual budgets. For instance, out of KD2.5 billion allocated for capital expenditure in the budget for FY 23-24, only KD1.8 billion was spent for this purpose.

Although the lower spending trend has helped bring down the overall deficit in recent budgets, it is nevertheless a damning indicator of the inability of public entities to adhere to planned project disbursements, and to complete projects in a timely manner. This also reflects poorly on the supervisory and monitoring capabilities of concerned government agencies.

A study commissioned by the government in 2022, which monitored the main indicators of progress in development projects, found that frequent changes in project-scope documentation, administrative and bureaucratic hurdles in issuance of necessary licenses and utility connections, shortage of labor, and the contractor's lack of requisite technical capabilities, were among the main obstacles to implementing development projects as scheduled.

Among the several recommendations made by the study for timely completion of projects were, enhancing the supervisory capabilities of concerned government entities, increasing administrative efficiency, streamlining the tendering process by reducing and restructuring project documentary cycles so as to make them more fit for purpose, and improving the degree of coordination between the various government agencies related to project developments.

Despite the shortfall in spending on capital expenditure in the past and its repercussions on the economy, the incumbent government's resolute commitment to implement development projects could well be the catalyst that project pipelines have lacked in the past. Government's staunch support for stimulating development projects, creating an investment-enabling environment, and driving sustainable economic growth will hopefully ensure the continued prosperity of Kuwait and the welfare of its citizens in the years ahead.

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Reconnaissance Research welcomes Spanish State Secretary for Foreign and Global Affairs

Reconnaissance Research, a leading non-governmental think-tank in Kuwait, received State Secretary for Foreign and Global Affairs of Spain, Diego Martinez Belio, along with the Spanish Ambassador H.E. Miguel Moro Aguilar, in the presence of a distinguished group of academics and intellectuals, for a Chatham House-style discussion.



The event provided a platform for a comprehensive and fruitful exchange of ideas on several issues of bilateral, regional and international affairs, both from the Kuwaiti and the Spanish perspective, including the critical situation in Gaza, as well as in other conflict-torn areas of the Middle East.

The conversation also delved into the shifting dynamics in Europe and the evolving relationships between Spain and its strategic partners, highlighting the importance and the opportunity of fostering stronger diplomatic and economic

ties between Europe and the Gulf Region.

Reconnaissance Research Founder and CEO Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri remarked, "Beyond our inherent respect for Spain and its people, their firm stance in support of Palestine made this visit

more meaningful and heartwarming for us.

"This visit underscores Reconnaissance belief in the importance of academic and diplomatic engagements in shaping informed policy decisions."



Dr. Ali Altarrah & Manaf Alhajri



Qais Aljouan & Yousef Alghusain with members of the Spanish embassy

GCC-wide digital link to combat certificate forgeries

The Ministry of Education's initiative will be implemented in two stages to combat negative phenomena, manipulation, and forgery processes.

Ministry of Education is establishing a joint electronic link with the other five Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states to enhance the security of study certificates and to combat the negative phenomena of manipulations and forgeries in educational certificates. This move is also part of larger efforts to increase cooperation and integration among GCC countries in e-government,

common e-services among GCC countries that contribute to achieving the vision of member states, enhancing the role of secure e-government in sustainable development, and improving the efficiency of the public sector while fostering Gulf integration.

The Agency announced that it welcomes electronic services proposed by ministries and local government agencies for inclusion in common services, provided they demonstrate technical readiness and consider their potential impact on GCC citizens, along with feasibility of implementation.

In its response to CAIT, the Ministry of Education proposed that the services be initiated in two stages: The first stage involves printing study certificates and academic sequences for those who have previously studied in Kuwait. Additionally, a certificate of study can be issued upon request, stating that the person did not study in Kuwait. These services will be provided through cultural offices in the GCC countries.

The ministry explained that the purpose of these services through the cultural attachés is legal, as "certificates must be approved by the State of Kuwait, and certificates require fees. Additionally, this will help reduce criminal activities related to forged certificates."

The second phase, conducted through the ministries of education in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, involves the transfer of students between countries, the recruitment and transfer of teachers as needed, and the registration of new students.



As part of this move, Kuwait's Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT), is understood to have held several meetings recently to discuss the proposal for a list of important common electronic services to be implemented among GCC countries. The CAIT team aims to identify

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Rush at residency departments as family visa eligibility relaxed

The government has made amendments to the eligibility rules for expatriates to apply for a family visa. In a statement last week the Ministry of Interior announced that First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense and Interior Sheikh Fahad Al Yousuf Al Sabah has issued a directive to amend family visa regulations.

The new amendment now allows expatriates without a university degree, working in Kuwait, to sponsor their wives, and children under the age of 14, for residency under the family visa category. Previously, this benefit was exclusively available to expatriates with a university degree.

However, the announcement made clear that other eligibility criteria will remain unchanged, including the stipulation that the visa applicant should have a minimum monthly salary or income of KD800.

The announcement relaxing education criteria for visa applicants was welcomed by the expatriate community, with Residency Affairs Departments across Kuwait,



particularly in Farwaniya, Ahmadi, and Hawalli, witnessing a significant surge in applicants.

Reports indicated that on the first day of visa liberalization, the Residency Department computer system received a total of 540 applications for family visas. Of the total applications, 320 were approved and visas issued,

while the remaining applications were put on hold due to incomplete documentation.

Ministry sources revealed that a frequent cause for putting an application on hold was the absence of properly authenticated birth certificates. For a seamless application process, applicants must ensure their birth certificates are authenticated by the Kuwaiti embassy abroad, the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry, and the applicant's embassy in Kuwait.

Applicants must also ensure they possess all required documents including a passport with validity exceeding one year, sponsor's new work permit and sponsor's recent salary certificate.

In recognition of the initial surge in applications, the Ministry of Interior has taken proactive measures to expedite the processing of complete applications. Officials anticipate the application volume to stabilize within a few days as users become more familiar with the new liberalized visa scheme.



PAM partners with KSHR to protect expat workers rights

Public Authority of Manpower (PAM), in partnership with the Kuwait Society for Human Rights (KSHR) launched on 15 July, a new national project, 'Together 4', to protect the rights of expatriate workers in Kuwait.

Acting Deputy Director General of the Labor Protection Sector at PAM, Dr. Fahad Al-Murad, affirmed that the Authority will conduct a thorough review of all procedures related to expatriate workers in order to ensure that the rights of workers in Kuwait are fully protected.

He added that as part of the review process, the Authority will evaluate all aspects of labor employment, starting from the recruitment stage, through the employment phase, until the eventual return of workers to their home countries.

Al-Murad also noted that the Together 4 project comes within the framework of the Authority's efforts aimed at strengthening and institutionalizing cooperation with civil society institutions and public benefit associations, and developing a special mechanism through the establishment of a permanent committee to work on linking and coordinating between them.

For his part, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Society for Human Rights, Khaled Al-Humaidi, said that Together 4 consists of several activities, including social, psychological and legal support for expat workers to guarantee their rights, as well as providing consultations to workers, in six different languages through a dedicated hotline set up for this purpose.

Diplomatic reshuffle seeks to invigorate foreign policy

In what is considered a major shake-up of Kuwait's foreign policy landscape, Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya announced last week plans to reassign assistant ministers and top diplomats in the diplomatic corps. The announcement comes ahead of the retirement of several top foreign ministry officials over the coming months. The reshuffle is also part of the foreign ministry's periodic rotation of heads of missions abroad, and is expected to be finalized in August.

Elaborating on the reassignment of over 30 ambassadors and consuls general in the ministry, Minister Al-Yahya said that the diplomats being reassigned are experienced professionals who have served abroad extensively, and will now take on important administrative roles within the ministry. He also stressed that ambassadors in major capitals, including Moscow, Washington, and Beijing, will remain in their posts, while new heads of missions will be appointed in key European cities such as London, Paris, Madrid, and Bucharest.

Asserting that Kuwait has a sufficient number of qualified diplomats to fill all ambassadorial vacancies, Al-Yahya said that the strategic plan to reshuffle diplomats also aims to provide young diplomats the opportunity to represent Kuwait on the global stage. He added that there are also plans to appoint deputy ambassadors in strategically important capitals and major Kuwaiti missions abroad.

Disclosing that there are also plans to close four diplomatic missions abroad, Minister Al-Yahya said that these closures, which await approval from the political leadership, are intended to optimize the ministry's resources, and based on the necessity and operational effectiveness of these embassies. Although the specific locations facing closure were not revealed, the minister nevertheless explained that the diplomatic activities and services provided by these embassies would be taken

over by Kuwaiti missions in nearby countries.

The minister also announced plans to open new Kuwaiti embassies in several capitals. While specific details regarding locations and timelines of the opening of new embassies were not announced, the initiative indicates Kuwait's commitment to expanding its diplomatic footprint on the world stage.



Minister Al-Yahya also revealed the establishment of a dedicated office to oversee the performance of new ambassadors. This Inspection and Embassy Performance Monitoring Office, previously focused solely on inspections, will now also monitor the effectiveness of embassies. The office will be staffed by assistant ministers and experienced personnel.

He also indicated that the ministry was introducing a significant shift in the selection process for ambassadors. Inspired by Singapore's approach, Kuwait will now appoint ambassadors directly from within the country, rather than picking from those stationed abroad. The minister concluded the announcement by outlining a comprehensive plan for new ambassadors that focuses on fostering stronger cooperation with friendly and sisterly nations in key areas like food security, economic collaboration, and military cooperation.

Al-Muzaini Exchange opens new branch in Sulaibikhat

Al-Muzaini Exchange Company, a premier money exchange company in Kuwait, announced the grand opening of its latest branch in North West Sulaibikhat Co-op. This strategic expansion marks a significant milestone for the company, bringing the total number of Al Muzaini branches across Kuwait to over 138.

The inauguration ceremony, held on July 11, was attended by General Manager of Al Muzaini Exchange Company, Hugh Fernandes, alongside various department managers and senior personnel. Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Fernandes expressed his enthusiasm on the opening of the new branch and stated, "We are delighted to strengthen our leading position in the market and reaffirm our commitment to delivering unparalleled financial services to our valued customers. Our mission is to always be within reach of our customers and enhance their convenience."

With a relentless focus on customer satisfaction, Al Muzaini Exchange Company offers a comprehensive range of financial services, including money transfers, foreign currency exchange, and bill payments. The new branch in North West Sulaibikhat Co-



op underscores the company's dedication to providing convenient, comfortable, and secure services at competitive prices, seven days a week.

In addition to its extensive network of branches, Al Muzaini offers a user-friendly mobile application that empowers customers with simple and secure financial solutions. Furthermore, customers can avail themselves of self-service kiosks strategically located for seamless transactions.

For over 80 years, Al Muzaini Exchange Company has remained committed to its mission of being 'always near you', ensuring that customers receive exceptional financial services whenever and wherever they need them.

CBK sets April 2025 deadline for exchanging old banknotes



Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced last week that 18 April 2025, will be the final date for exchanging the fifth issue banknotes with the new sixth issue notes.

In a statement on its official X (formerly Twitter) account, CBK noted that holders of the fifth issue banknotes will not be able to exchange them after the above mentioned date, and only notes from the new sixth issue will be considered as legal tender.

ICJ's Advisory Opinion against Israel's settlements will not be easy to ignore



By Tareq Yousuf AlShumaimry

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations (UN). It was established in June 1945 by the Charter of the United Nations and began work in April 1946.

The seat of the Court is at the Peace Palace in The Hague (Netherlands). Of the six principal organs of the United Nations, it is the only one not located in New York in the United States of America.

The Court's role is to settle, in accordance with international law, legal disputes submitted to it by States and to give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by authorized United Nations organs and specialized agencies.

The Court is composed of 15 judges, who are elected for terms of office of nine years by the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council.

Only the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council may request advisory opinions on 'any legal question'. Countries cannot directly ask advisory opinions. Other United Nations organs and specialized agencies which have been authorized to seek advisory opinions can also do so with respect to 'legal questions arising within the scope of their activities'.

This procedure is available to five United Nations organs, fifteen specialized agencies and five related organizations.

The specialized agencies include: The FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, ICAO: International Civil Aviation Organization, IFAD: International Fund for Agricultural Development, ILO: International Labour Organization, IMF: International Monetary Fund, IMO: International Maritime Organization, ITU: International Telecommunication Union, UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNIDO: United Nations Industrial Development Organization, UN Tourism: World Tourism Organization, UPU: Universal Postal Union, WHO: World Health Organization, WIPO: World Intellectual Property Organization, WMO: World Meteorological Organization, World Bank Group.

While the five related organizations include the General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council, Trusteeship Council, International Court of Justice and the Secretariat

The court's opinion on the Israel-Palestine issue was sought in a 2022 request from the United Nations General Assembly

Despite having no binding force, the Court's advisory opinions nevertheless carry great legal weight and moral authority. They are often an instrument of preventive diplomacy and help to keep the peace. In their own way, advisory opinions also contribute to the clarification and development of international law and thereby to the strengthening of peaceful relations between States.

In a landmark advisory opinion the International Court of Justice (ICJ) voted on



Friday by 11 votes to 4 to oblige Israel to end its illegal recognition of the Palestinian territories (1967 borders) as soon as possible.

Thorough, detailed and all encompassing, the ICJ's advisory ruling on the illegality of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and settlement building represents a stark refutation of Israel's claims, and will have a profound impact for years to come.

Israel captured the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem — areas of historic Palestine that the Palestinians want for a state — in a 1967 war. It has since built settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and steadily expanded them. It also had settlements in Gaza before a 2005 withdrawal.

The ICJ declared Israel's long-term occupation of Palestinian territory "unlawful" and said it amounted to de facto annexation. The court called for Israel to rapidly quit the occupied territories and ruled Palestinians were due reparations for the harm of 57 years of an occupation that systematically discriminates against them.

And in its many parts, the advisory opinion represents a devastating defeat for Israel in the world court. This might eventually lead to complete withdrawal from occupied territories and paying compensation to all people who suffered harm resulting from occupation among other claims.

While numerous UN reports and resolutions in the general assembly have made the same point, the ICJ ruling, by virtue of being made in reference to treaty and individual laws, will be hard to ignore.

Though the ruling is non-binding it also stood as a rebuke to Israel's argument that the ICJ had no standing to consider the issue on the grounds that UN resolutions, as well as bilateral Israeli-Palestinian agreements, had established that the correct framework for resolving the conflict should be political, not legal.

Effectively rejecting that argument, the court asserted that international law applies regardless of the decades of failed political efforts to reach a lasting peace agreement, not least as Israel has continued with its settlement-building.

Taking half an hour to read, the ruling gathered together multiple strands of international law from the Geneva conventions to the Hague convention to make a case that has been obvious to Palestinians and to critics of Israeli policy in the

international community for years.

In summary it said that years of Israel's own official and self-described ambitions to build and settle in the occupied territories amounted to an intent to effectively annex territory against international law; that those policies were designed to benefit settlers and Israel, not the Palestinians living under military administration.

Perhaps the most significant section was that "the transfer by Israel of settlers to the West Bank and Jerusalem as well as Israel's maintenance of their presence, is contrary to article 49 of the 4th Geneva convention".

While the individual paragraphs applying to each breach of international law, and each inconsistency, were not surprising, taken in its entirety the advisory offers a profound challenge to governments, including the UK and US, that had for years soft-pedaled on Israel's occupation policies, criticizing settlement building but until recently doing little practical about it.

If that has changed in recent months, with a raft of US, UK and European sanctions targeting violent settlers, both individually and the groups that support them, the advisory poses a far more serious question: whether, given the severity of the breaches of international law, sanctions should also be applied to Israeli ministers and institutions supporting the settlement enterprise.

While non-binding, the advisory will provide ample ammunition for government lawyers already actively examining future sanctions against those linked to Israeli settlement.

Significant in the ruling was that the court had noted the recent and continuing transfer of powers from the military to civilian officials overseeing the occupied territories, which critics had warned further exposed Israel activities to the court.

The timing, too, is significant. With Israel isolated over its conduct of the Gaza war, and under investigation at the ICJ and the international criminal court for alleged war crimes, the stark assessment of the long-term illegality of Israel's occupation will only reinforce that isolation.

The bottom line is that what is currently happening in Palestine in terms of war, violations, and massacres, is that the recently issued rulings, decisions, advisory opinions, orders for arrest warrants, the joining of a larger number of countries to South Africa's lawsuit against

Israel, and the recognition of Palestine by more countries is a noticeable progress on the side of the Palestinians that we have not seen or known about before for a period of up to seventy years ago.

It is obvious that the legal and political status of the occupying entity following the issuance of the advisory will become more critical, fragile and weak. It is sufficient to mention in this context that the number of advisory opinions that the International Court of Justice previously issued regarding South Africa in the last century contributed effectively to the dismantling of that racist entity because it has become clear that it is an entity that lacks legitimacy and legality in international law.

It seems that the occupying entity is on its way to meeting the same fate, and is getting closer and closer to the moment that the apartheid regime in South Africa faced. There is no doubt that the advisory opinions of the International Court of Justice will provide supportive legal tools and foundations to dismantle it as a colonial, substitutionary and racist entity.

Farhan Haq, Deputy Spokesman for the UN Secretary-General, said that Secretary-General António Guterres will immediately transmit the advisory opinion of the ICJ — on procedures relating to legal consequences arising from Israel's policies and practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem — to the General Assembly of the United Nations, which has 193 members, and it is up to the General Assembly to decide how to proceed with the matter.

Despite having no binding force, the Court's advisory opinions nevertheless carry great legal weight and moral authority. They are often an instrument of preventive diplomacy and help to keep the peace.

Tareq Yusef AlShumaimry, served as Chairman of the Finance Committee and Chairman of the General Budget Committee of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague (PCA) and an observer in the Administrative Council of the Court and the Consular at International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the Embassy of the State of Kuwait in the Netherlands during this period from 2013 to 2020. Email: tareq@alshumaimry.com

More Than Just a Smile

Importance of Dental Health



By Hermoine Macura-Noble
Special to The Times Kuwait

Our minds often drift to heart health, nutrition, or physical fitness when we think about health. However, one crucial aspect that is sometimes overlooked is dental health. Our oral health is a gateway to our overall well-being, significantly impacting our quality of life.

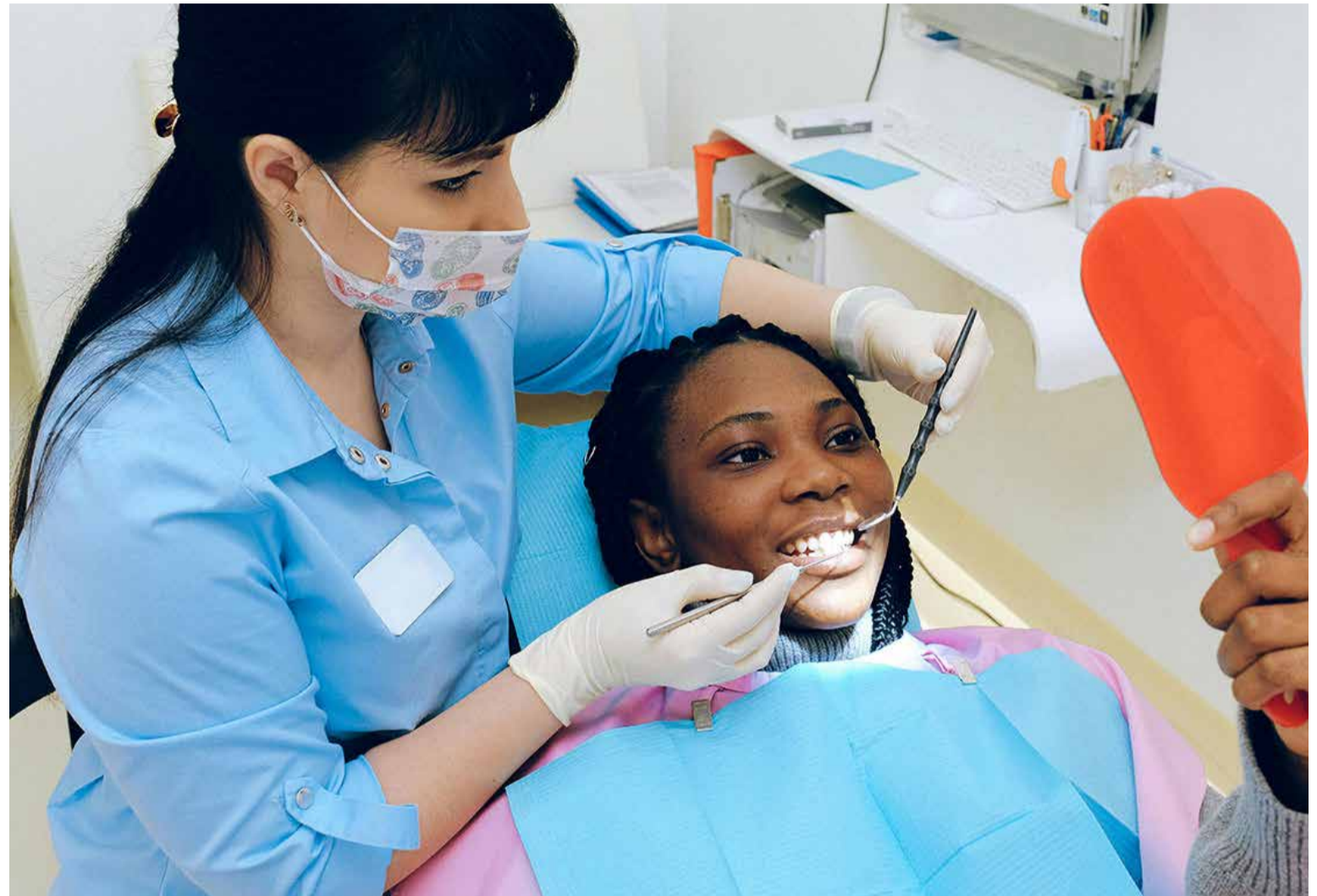
Proper dental hygiene and regular dental care helps prevent oral diseases such as tooth decay, gum disease, and bad breath. Tooth decay, for instance, is caused by the build-up of plaque — a sticky film of bacteria that forms on our teeth. If not removed through regular brushing and flossing, plaque can cause cavities and lead to more severe infections.



Dubai-based Dentist Dr Holly McDonald explains, "Flossing between the teeth will help to remove plaque build-up, while brushing can be more effective in clearing the teeth and gums. Interdental brushes or a water flosser recommended by a dental professional can also be used. Visiting the dentist routinely every six months for a check-up and professional cleaning and quitting smoking can also help."

Gum disease, or periodontal disease, is another critical issue in dental health. It begins as gingivitis, characterized by red, swollen, and bleeding gums. If untreated, it can progress to periodontitis, which can destroy the gums and bone that support teeth. Research has shown that gum disease is linked to systemic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. The inflammation associated with gum disease can exacerbate these conditions, making oral health a crucial factor in managing overall health.

"With increasing age, bone and gum recession is a much higher risk, so regular



appointments for cleaning and examination to monitor this are important, as early interventions can make all the difference. There is also the potential for increased use of medication for chronic illnesses in older adults, a lot of which can have negative impacts on the oral cavity. I recommend informing your dentist of any medications and discussing any extra appropriate measures your dentist may suggest to protect your teeth and gums," explains Dr. McDonald.

A healthy smile can significantly boost self-esteem and confidence. People who maintain good dental health are often more willing to engage socially and professionally. They can laugh, speak, and eat without discomfort or embarrassment, enhancing their quality of life. Healthy teeth are also essential for proper chewing, which is the first step in the digestive process. Poor dental health can lead to difficulty chewing and swallowing food, affecting nutrition. Your teeth also play a vital role in your speech and articulation. Misaligned, broken, or missing teeth can affect pronunciation and clarity of speech. This can impact communication abilities, particularly in children still developing their language skills.

Experts say dental hygiene is vital to overall health and that brushing twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and flossing daily are fundamental practices for maintaining dental health.

"First thing in the morning, before you eat or drink anything, start by cleaning your teeth! I recommend first cleaning between your teeth with floss or interdental brushes and then brushing your teeth using fluoride toothpaste and an electric toothbrush for at least two minutes. After brushing, spit out the excess toothpaste in your mouth but do not rinse with water or a mouth rinse; even try to avoid drinking anything for about 30 minutes. And don't forget to clean your tongue and the roof of your mouth. I also recommend using an oral mouth rinse containing fluoride throughout the day, such as after lunch and dinner, to

remove food particles from sitting on the tooth surface, increasing the risk for enamel decay and gum irritation. Then before bed, or at least one hour after eating your last meal, repeat the same cleaning process carried out first thing in the morning," explains Dr. McDonald.

Most dentists recommend an electric toothbrush over a manual one, preferably one with a round brush head and a pressure sensor. When using a manual toothbrush, we are inclined to scrub harder than necessary, and this causes our gums to recede and the tooth surface to wear away, causing sensitivity. With an electric toothbrush, the pressure sensor will indicate when this is occurring and help you avoid this trauma. Dr. McDonald also recommends looking for a toothpaste that contains fluoride with a concentration of between 1000 and 1500 ppm; this will always be included on the ingredients list on the packaging.

"You should always look for a fluoride-

containing toothpaste but also ingredients such as pyrophosphates, zinc citrate, and sodium hexametaphosphate as these help to prevent tartar build-up on the tooth surface," adds Dr. McDonald.

Dental health is an integral part of our overall well-being. Maintaining good oral hygiene, eating a balanced diet, and visiting the dentist regularly can prevent oral diseases and their associated complications. So, the next time you think about your health, do not forget to include your dental health — it truly is more than just a smile.

Hermoine Macura-Noble

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



EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Fighting Climate Change Requires a Different Mindset



Sonia Guajajara
Brazil's Minister of Indigenous Peoples.

The climate disasters unfolding around the world, including unprecedented floods in Brazil, Africa, and China, heat waves in Asia and the Middle East, and persistent droughts in Europe and Latin America, show that the planet is at a critical juncture. Fortunately, we can still seize the opportunity to redefine our paradigms of economic and social development. Alongside preserving and restoring our forests, we must end our dependence on fossil fuels and embrace renewables.

With our ancestral knowledge and respect for nature, indigenous peoples are an invaluable asset in confronting this challenge. Despite comprising only 5 percent of the global population, our lands preserve more than 80 percent of the world's biodiversity. We know that when humans try to dominate nature, nature always responds. Today's climate tragedies reflect this dynamic. They show why we must transcend our individual experiences to reach a higher state of consciousness vis-à-vis nature.

To that end, we in Brazil are committed to combating deforestation and advancing the demarcation, protection, and environmental management of indigenous territories. Such measures are essential to preserve biodiversity, limit carbon-dioxide emissions, and avoid the

point of no return for essential biomes like the Amazon. Brazil is also focusing on the energy we produce and consume, a challenge that involves complex debates and compels stark choices.

But climate change is a global crisis. Unsustainable economic models built on fossil-fuel energy disproportionately affect the most vulnerable populations. By abandoning outdated development models based on the destruction of nature, we can embark on a path that is not only more sustainable, but also more just.

Despite the clear dangers presented by fossil fuels, significant investments in these energy sources continue to go unchallenged. A common justification is that burning fossil fuels

unprecedented drought that left thousands without water and food in the Amazon, home to the planet's largest watershed; or the fires in the Pantanal, the largest wetland in the world. While billions of taxpayer dollars are spent supporting recovery from these kinds of disasters, billions more are still going to subsidize the fossil-fuel industry and its shareholders.

What will it take for governments to prioritize investments in climate-change mitigation and adaptation over these destructive subsidies? The G7 and other advanced economies have a responsibility to demonstrate more leadership on this issue. The effects of climate change are tangible threats that undermine growth and security everywhere. As heads of state and government, especially those from the G7 and

option — as we must — we will need to secure the free, prior, and informed consent of all communities involved in any new projects, not only to protect rights but also to ensure more effective results.

The technology and knowledge for a just transition already exists. Many countries have already made significant advances in this direction, proving that a sustainable future is possible and economically viable. The tragedies unfolding around us ought to be a wake-up call for all countries to end fossil-fuel exploration, reduce usage as much as possible, and invest in renewable energy, the bioeconomy, and resilient infrastructure.

One big, outstanding issue is that financial flows still need to be brought into line with the targets set under the Paris climate agreement. Not only should annual investments in climate action increase substantially, but northern countries must take responsibility for mobilizing climate financing to the Global South this decade. Only then can we ensure a just and accelerated energy transition and truly protect nature, allowing it to play its indispensable role in stabilizing the planetary systems on which human life and prosperity depends.

The climate crisis is an opportunity to re-evaluate our choices and priorities. Nature has already given us many warnings, and it also offers us solutions. But mitigating climate change, eliminating fossil fuels, preserving and restoring forests, and protecting indigenous territories will not happen automatically. Each requires funding, concrete policies, and global cooperation. We will hear plenty of lofty, ambitious speeches in the months ahead, but if these are not backed by comprehensive implementation plans, they will amount to hot air. We already have more of that than we want.

“ As heads of state and government, especially those from the G7 and G20, prepare for upcoming climate meetings in Azerbaijan and Brazil, they should ask themselves how many more climate disasters they want to preside over. ”

yields economic benefits, but the oil industry is highly income-concentrating, yielding substantial gains only for a few, and negative externalities — not least pollution, corruption, and displacement — for the many.

Yet the human, financial, and environmental costs of our fossil-fuel fixation are increasingly clear. Consider the recent catastrophic floods in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, which killed hundreds of people and displaced many more; or the

G20, prepare for upcoming climate meetings in Azerbaijan and Brazil, they should ask themselves how many more climate disasters they want to preside over.

We have the right to decide what kind of world we want to build. Do we continue on the path marked out by an exploitative logic that is increasingly turning against us, or do we seize this moment, change course, and start valuing ancestral knowledge? If we choose the latter



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Thought “ for the week

Attitude is
a little thing that
makes a big difference

- Winston Churchill

Yes, We Can Lose Weight on Holidays

Ask Mira : Eating Right to Live Happy & Healthy



We all travel, and we all worry about what to eat when we are on a holiday.

Some people gain all the weight they lost before going on holidays, while others can still be aware about the quality and quantity of food they eat on a vacation.

For me, being on vacation means relaxing, changing the environment, and getting out of the routine. While getting out of the routine, it is hard for me to maintain a diet or a healthy way of eating. Also, it is hard to stick to regular food timings while on holidays. Nevertheless, I try as much as I can to follow the tips below; and trust me, it is not as hard as it seems to lose weight while traveling.

- Engage in touristic activities that involve walking which helps burn calories and most importantly it is fun at the same time.
- Drink plenty of water and cut down on other drinks like soft drinks and juices which contain lots of sugar and calories that you do not need.
- Use sweeteners instead of white sugar for your coffees and teas
- One teaspoon of white sugar has 20 calories, while a teaspoon of sweetener has less than 1 calorie.
- Select a variety of vegetable salads and focus on mustard and lemon dressings, instead of mayonnaise and Italian dressings.
- Reduce the intake of junk food and sweets that contain high amounts of fat, sodium, butter and sugar. But you can still indulge yourself once in a while.
- Replace junk foods with healthier options such as mushroom steak with baked potato, grilled chicken breast with steamed rice, tomato sauce pastas, sorbets, fruit salads, jelly, frozen yogurt ice creams...
- Skip any of the three main meals: Follow the intermittent fasting when traveling, it is the best

way to reduce your calories without starving yourself. I usually skip breakfast and enjoy the rest of my day.

- Avoid adding salt to your dishes. Taste the food first. If it needs more salt, you can add a little, but you have to taste it first. Salt does not have calories but it retains water in the body and will increase your weight and make you feel bloated, and we do not need to experience that during our holidays.

For people who like to have breakfast, all hotels and even restaurants have a variety of diet food items. Always choose skim milk, white cheeses, boiled eggs, (an omelet without bread can work but not every day), low fat yogurt, muesli or bran flakes for cereals. If you need something sweet after your breakfast, go for a fresh fruit

Controlling what you eat during your vacation does not mean you cannot taste the traditional foods of the country you are visiting... But do it smartly

A small change in our mindset is all that is needed.



Create healthy habits, not restrictions

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



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

RECIPE

MINI BAKLAVA CUPS



Total time: 30 minutes
Yield: 12 to 15

Baklava, a popular dessert in the Middle East and Central Asia is said to have originated in Ottoman Turkey. Made from multiple layers of unleavened filo dough, filled with chopped nuts and sweetened with syrup or honey, this delicious and attractive pastry can be enjoyed any time of the day and on any celebratory occasion.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 box phyllo sheets
- 1 cup mix nuts (almonds, walnuts, pistachios) roughly chopped.
- 5-6 tbsp honey
- 1 tbsp brown sugar
- 1 t sp Orange Zest
- 4-5 Dry apricots
- 1 tsp cinnamon powder
- 1/2 cup pistachio powder
- 200 gm. butter (melted)

*FOR GARNISHING:

- Rose petal (dry)
- Chocolate (melted)

INSTRUCTIONS:

*For filling:

- First, in a bowl mix nuts and finely chopped dry apricots.
- Then add brown sugar, cinnamon powder, orange zest and 1 tsp butter and mix well.
- Now on 1 phyllo sheet apply melted butter evenly.
- Sprinkle pistachio powder and put phyllo sheet on it again. Apply butter again and sprinkle pistachio powder and put 1 phyllo sheet again. (3 layers)
- 3. Now cut it into small square pieces with scissors and arrange the 2/3 layers on top of each other oddly place the layers in a small muffi



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

Fatal Medications – prescription drugs that could kill

Among the medications that increase health risks during days of excessively high temperature are some of the common drugs prescribed to treat conditions such as high blood pressure, heart conditions, allergies, and mental health disorders. Recent studies have identified four important categories of medications that can increase sensitivity to heat.

Genetic cause of obesity could guide future treatment

Cutting-edge collaborative research by scientists from several universities and institutes in Europe have discovered that people who lack a gene that encodes for a specific blood group are genetically predisposed to be overweight or obese.

The study found that people with a genetic variant that disables the Small Integral Membrane Protein 1 (SMIM1) gene tend to have higher body weight as their body expends less energy when at rest. The SMIM1 gene, which was only identified 10 years ago, whilst searching for the gene that encodes for a specific blood group, known as Vel.

One in 5,000 people are found to lack both copies of the gene, making them Vel-negative and also more susceptible to becoming overweight. The study also found that people without both copies of the gene have other measures linked to obesity including high levels of fat in the blood, signs of fat tissue dysfunction, increased liver enzymes, as well as lower levels of thyroid hormones.

With obesity rates nearly tripling in the past 50 years, and projections showing that over a billion people could be obese by 2030, there is increasing fear that this health condition along with associated diseases and complications could overwhelm health facilities in many countries and



create significant economic burden on healthcare systems.

Obesity is mainly due to an imbalance between energy intake and expenditure, often a complex interplay of lifestyle, environmental, and other actors. In a small minority of people, obesity is caused by genetic variants. When this is the case, new treatments need to be found to benefit these people.

Researchers behind the new discovery hope their findings could one day lead to new treatments for obesity and related ailments. The team now hopes to test whether a cheaply and widely available drug for thyroid dysfunction may be effective in treating obesity in people who lack both copies of SMIM1. The new findings also highlight the need to further investigate the genetic cause of obesity, so as to select the most appropriate and effective treatment.

To make the discovery, the team analyzed the genetics of nearly 500,000 participants in the UK Biobank cohort, identifying 104 people, over half of whom were women, with the variant that leads to loss of function in the SMIM1 gene. The team also used the NIHR National BioResource to obtain fresh blood samples from both Vel negative and positive individuals.

Extrapolating the frequencies identified in these cohorts would mean the SMIM1 variant could be a significant factor contributing to obesity for around 300,000 people across the world. The team extrapolated the effects they found, in four additional cohorts of people with the SMIM1 gene variant. They found that having the variant had an impact on weight, equating to an average extra 4.6kg in females and 2.4kg in males.



Everyone from climate scientists and meteorologists to the general public agree that over the last many years summers have been growing hotter and longer with each passing year. Higher summer temperatures can cause heat exhaustion or in some cases a heat stroke that could lead to permanent disability or even prove fatal unless immediate medical attention is delivered.

In response to the higher temperatures, policy-makers and health authorities in many countries, including Kuwait, have implemented regulations to ban outdoor work during the hottest hours of the day in summer. The authorities have also urged the public— especially the most vulnerable sections of society such as the very young, the elderly, and others affected by chronic ailments — to remain indoors as much as possible during this period.

While these public safety warnings and regulations are indeed welcome, there is another danger from higher summer temperatures that has gone under the radar of many healthcare professionals and the public. New studies show that certain medications can increase health risks, or in some cases prove fatal, during a heatwave which occurs when high temperatures are experienced over several continuous days.

Among the medications that increase health risks during days of excessively high temperature are some of the common drugs prescribed to treat conditions such as high blood pressure, heart conditions, allergies, and mental health disorders. Recent studies have identified four important categories of medications that can increase sensitivity to heat.

The first of these are diuretics, which increases the frequency of urination and are often prescribed to help patients eliminate fluid retention in the body.

Diuretics are also often used to treat high blood pressure and other cardiovascular conditions since they can reduce the amount of fluid in the blood vessels which in turn decreases pressure on the walls of these vessels. Some common examples of diuretics are furosemide and hydrochlorothiazide.

Another type of medication that can make you more sensitive to heat is beta-blockers. Since they help the heart beat more slowly and with less force, these medications are most often used to treat irregular heartbeat and high blood pressure, but they have a range of other applications, including the treatment of anxiety disorders. Some common examples of beta-blockers include metoprolol and propranolol.

A third type of medication that raises sensitivity to higher temperatures are anticholinergics. These drugs work by blocking the action of acetylcholine, making them useful in treating conditions like overactive bladder, incontinence, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Some examples of anticholinergics include oxybutynin and benztropine.

A fourth important type of medication that can exacerbate health conditions during periods of high temperature are

antipsychotics. These medications are used to treat schizophrenia and other mental health conditions since they are capable of targeting certain neurotransmitters in the brain. Examples of antipsychotics are risperidone and olanzapine.

Some of the reasons why these medications raise health risks during hot weather conditions, boil down to essentially three factors — either they impact the body's ability to regulate temperature, or they affect the body's capacity to sweat, or in some cases they can exacerbate dehydration.

If diuretics are taken during extremely hot days when people could also be sweating excessively, they could suffer from extreme dehydration due to removing more sodium along with the more water being drained from the body. This can lead to complications including low blood pressure and even loss of conscience.

In the case of beta-blockers, they reduce the heart's ability to pump blood, which impairs the body's natural ability to dissipate heat and cool itself. Similarly, anticholinergics affect the body's ability to sweat, and this could lead to an increase in the body's core temperatures during periods of excessive heat. People using antipsychotics during excessively hot days are at risk, as these drugs often interfere with the body's natural ability to regulate its own temperature.

By understanding the interplay between medications and hot weather, healthcare personnel can guide patients to better manage their health, and to minimize risks associated with extreme heat. Everyone, in particular patients taking one or more of the four categories of medication mentioned above, can follow the steps outlined below to maintain their health conditions during excessive outside temperatures.

- Stay hydrated. Drink plenty of fluids, especially water. If you are taking medication, talk with a healthcare professional for an individualized fluid intake recommendation. Avoid alcohol and caffeine as they can further dehydrate the body.
- Wear lightweight, loose-fitting clothing. This will allow air to reach the body and help to evaporate sweat, which allows the body to cool down
- Stay in cool, shaded, or air-conditioned areas as much as possible. If an air conditioner unit is not available at home, check with the nearest primary care center to ascertain if there are public shelters, malls, or public libraries that permit people to remain indoors during periods of high summer temperature.
- Monitor for signs of heat-related illness, such as excessive sweating, confusion, dizziness, or headaches. If you or someone you know experiences such symptoms or witnesses someone displaying these signs, immediately seek medical attention for the affected person.
- Consult with your doctor about adjusting your medication or timing the medication intake differently to reduce risks.



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