



**LOCAL**  
Hungary to expand  
business and technology  
links with Kuwait **3**

**6**  
Ban on Article 18 visa  
holders from company  
partnerships rescinded

**9**  
Tajik Independence  
shaped identity and  
destiny of nation



www.timeskuwait.com 250 Fils

# Literacy, Education and Human Capital

*In Kuwait, we are blessed in that over 96 percent of the population are literate. According to the latest data from United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), literacy among those aged 15 and above in Kuwait has grown remarkably from the 1970s when it was around 60 percent to 96.1 percent today.*

## THE TIMES KUWAIT REPORT

International Literacy Day, observed on 8 September every year since 1967, reminds policymakers, practitioners, and the public of the importance in ensuring literacy among all, in order to create a more educated, equitable, peaceful, and sustainable society.

The world has made significant progress in literacy; 57 years ago when the United Nations first celebrated International Literacy Day, nearly one-quarter of global youth lacked basic literacy skills. Today, more than 86 percent of the world's population above 15 years of age know how to read and write. Despite this progress, 765 million adults still lack basic



literacy skills, of whom two-thirds are women, and 250 million children in the 6-18 age group are currently out of school.

In Kuwait, we are blessed in that over 96 percent of the population are literate. According to the latest data from United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), literacy among those aged 15 and above in Kuwait has grown remarkably from the 1970s when it was around 60 percent to 96.1 percent today. This figure is even higher at 99.1 percent for the 15 to 24 year-old youth cohort of the population.

Promotion of literacy by the authorities since the country's independence in 1961 has resulted in the current high literacy rate among the population. Last week, the government once again underlined Kuwait's commitment to exerting maximum efforts to provide an environment that enhances educational attainment, maximizes its effectiveness, and contributes to the creation of an educated generation capable of building and advancing the progress of Kuwait.

The cabinet's emphasis on creating an educated generation is important, as the country's high literacy rate cannot be construed as an indication of a highly educated generation. Although in Kuwait we have an enviable 96.1 percent literacy rate, our educational levels, when measured against regional and international benchmarks, leaves a lot more to be desired.

People generally tend to equate literacy with education, and often use these two terms interchangeably. Although literacy and education may imply similarity, they are not the same. Literacy is the basic ability to read, write, and calculate, which enables people to access information, communicate, interact, and participate with others in society.

Education, which is founded on literacy, is a much broader concept that involves the process of not only acquiring knowledge and skills, but also imbibing values, morals, habits, and beliefs. Education is a lifelong process that can take place in both formal settings, such as schools, as well as in informal settings of family, friends and community.

In a bid to enhance the educational milieu in the country, Kuwait has been working with the World Bank over the decades on a number of projects aimed at reforming education and improving the country's human capital. A nation's human capital is the knowledge, skills, health and other attributes that empower people to achieve their full potential and help drive productivity, earnings and economic growth.

Enhancing human capital is vital to realizing Kuwait's ambitious 2035 vision of transforming the country into a regional commercial, financial and cultural hub. Considering its primacy, one of the seven pillars on which the Vision 2035 is founded, is developing the country's human capital by reforming the education sector. In order to realize Vision 2035 and translate it to actionable programs, a series of five-year 'Kuwait National Development Plans (KNDP) have been outlined.

In a bid to enhance outcomes of the KNDP, the government engaged with the World Bank to design and develop a Country Engagement Framework (CEF) from the current KNDP-3 period of 2021-2025. In its executive summary to the CEF 2021-2025 report, the World Bank notes that investing in human capital is crucial to realizing the CEF goals.

Despite the importance of human capital, the Bank pointed out that the prevailing social contract, which assures full employment for all Kuwaiti nationals, is detrimental to human capital development, as it has significant implications for public sector effectiveness, fiscal sustainability, and private sector

growth. The social contract not only hinders development of a vibrant non-oil private sector, it also deters citizens from pursuing academic achievements due to a sense of entitlement to public sector jobs, irrespective of their education level or abilities.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

PARLE PLATINA

# HIDE & SEEK

MADE WITH THE WORLD'S Finest Chocolates

PARLE PLATINA HIDE & SEEK

WORLD'S BEST WOULD-BE: Chocolate Chip Cookies

## Chocolate Chip Cookies

50+ years of Continued Excellence

Sole distributor in Kuwait  
Al-Othman & Al-Bisher Trd. Co. W.L.L.  
P.O. Box: 22984 Safat 13090 Kuwait  
Tel: 22284335 | 22284336 | 22284337  
22284338 | 22284339  
Email: sales@obtckwt.com  
www.obtckwt.com  
@obtckwt

# Kuwait, UK announce new funding to UNICEF to assist Gaza, Yemen

**K**uwait and the United Kingdom announced new funding to help UNICEF deliver lifesaving aid to almost 2.5 million people in Gaza and Yemen. The new funding will contribute to UNICEF's ongoing efforts to restore water supply and sanitation systems in Gaza and sustain primary healthcare services in Yemen. Kuwait and the UK will each provide USD3 million in support of UNICEF, whose work is expected to benefit approximately 1,000,000 people in Gaza and 1,450,000 in Yemen.

Two memorandum of understanding (MoU) setting out details of the funding were signed on 4 September on the sidelines of the 21st UK-Kuwait Joint Steering Group (JSG) meeting in London. The 21st JSG was co-chaired by Kuwait's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and the UK Minister for Middle East Hamish Falconer. During the meeting, the two ministers discussed key pillars of bilateral cooperation. They also took part in Kuwait Culture Week, which celebrates 125 years of official diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Speaking on the occasion Minister Falconer said, "Conflict has aggravated the



humanitarian crises in Gaza and Yemen and the UK is committed to pushing for more lifesaving aid to reach those in desperate need." He pointed out that the new joint funding by the UK and Kuwait demonstrates "our shared commitment to tackle some of the worst humanitarian crises in the world." He added, "I am proud of the UK and Kuwait's close ties, which have now endured for more than 125 years and continue to go from strength to strength."



For his part, Sheikh Jarrah Al-Sabah said: "This year marks an important milestone for both the State of Kuwait and the UK as we jointly commemorate 125 years of partnership. Kuwait is proud of its deep-rooted and historic ties with the UK and is committed to deepening our cooperation in all its aspects."

"This week in London, we were happy to witness the commencement of the Kuwait cultural week in the UK and the successful

convening of the 21st session of the JSG. The Action Plan signed during the JSG paves the way for further collaboration in several fields."

He added, "We are pleased to cooperate with the UK to support the essential work of UNICEF in both Palestine and Yemen. As pioneers in the field of international development, both our countries will continue to explore avenues of cooperation to provide development and humanitarian assistance to populations affected by conflicts and natural disasters."

Commenting on the new funding, UNICEF's Representative to the Gulf Area, Eltayeb Adam, said: "UNICEF deeply appreciates the generous contributions from both the UK and Kuwait, which will have a transformative impact on the lives of children and families in Gaza and Yemen."

"This funding is not just a financial commitment; it is a beacon of hope for communities struggling with the devastating consequences of conflict. Together, we can ensure that essential services such as water, sanitation, and healthcare reach those who need them most, restoring dignity and a sense of normalcy to countless lives."

## Gold sold in Kuwait of highest quality and integrity

**M**inistry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) confirmed that all commercial activities related to gold, jewelry and precious metals in Kuwait are subject to strict supervisory procedures in accordance with the applicable regulations and legislations. Continuous inspection tours in the gold market are held to apply the highest standards of quality and integrity.

In a media statement issued on 2 September, official spokesman for the MoCI, Abdullah Al-Harez, denied news



being circulated on social media platforms about the seizure of large quantities of gold carrying forged stamps. The statement explained that the seizure reported on social media was with reference to an incident that took place in 2021, and that the necessary corrective measures were taken at the time.

Al-Harez added that the joint team between the Commercial Control Department and the Precious Metals Department is continuously conducting inspection tours in the gold market to apply the highest standards of quality in product and integrity in service, as well as to ensure that the accuracy of the balances used to weigh gold and other precious metals were in full compliance with the requirements required in the sales and purchase processes for consumers.

He called for the consumer to obtain an invoice for the purchase of gold from the shop showing the weight, carat and value in detail, and then one can go to the Precious Metals Department at the MoCI to reconfirm the gold to make sure of what is in the bill.

For Booking & Sponsorship  
+965 6906 7409

SAAZE EVENTS

Get Starstruck

**PAWANDEEP RAJAN**

IT'S GOING TO BE AN EPIC NIGHT YOU WON'T WANT TO MISS

Artwork : sfgraphics18



## More than 200 employers found violating outdoor work ban

**P**ublic Authority of Manpower (PAM) has announced the conclusion of its "Their Safety is Our Priority" campaign, which aimed to enforce the ban on outdoor work during the hottest hours of the day. The three-month campaign, which ran from 1 June to 31 August, had prohibited outdoor work between 11am and 4pm.

In a media statement issued last week, PAM's acting Director-General, Marzouq Al-Otaibi, confirmed that the campaign included both awareness-raising initiatives and inspections to ensure compliance with Administrative Decision No. 535 of 2015, which prohibits the employment of workers in outdoor jobs during harsh weather conditions.

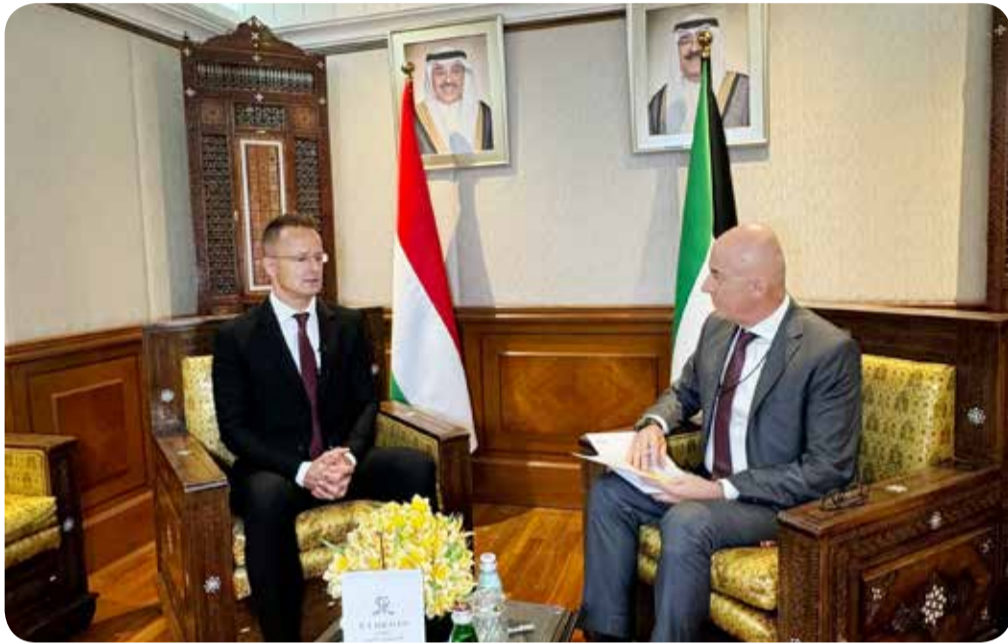
Al-Otaibi noted that the campaign resulted in inspection of 205 violating sites, where a total of 213 workers were found working during the prohibited hours.

In addition, 58 complaints were received from the public about sites flouting the ban; 129 sites were found violating the ban for the first time; 119 compliant sites were reinspected; and 7 sites were found to be in violation upon reinspection.

The authority emphasized that the implementation of Administrative Decision No. 535 of 2015 is aimed at regulating working hours without reducing them and ensuring that ongoing projects are not delayed. The decision aligns with Kuwait's commitment to international labor standards and prioritizes the well-being of workers.

# Hungary to expand business and technology links with Kuwait

*The two sides sealed multiple agreements for enhanced cooperation, discussed their strong relations, and explored ways to further strengthen ties across various sectors.*



By Rabih Kallas  
Special to The Times Kuwait

Kuwait's Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya and Hungary's Foreign and Commercial Affairs Minister Péter Szijjártó, who visited Kuwait last week, signed several cooperation agreements aimed at enhancing trade and technology links between the two countries.

During the bilateral meeting held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 5 September, the two sides discussed the strong relations between the two friendly nations and explored ways to enhance ties in various sectors. They also addressed current regional and international developments.

Following the meeting, Kuwait and Hungary signed several accords and memoranda, reflecting their commitment to strengthening mutual cooperation in vital areas. Among the memorandum signed on the occasion was one that focused on cybersecurity cooperation,

while another outlined an executive program for cultural cooperation covering the years 2024 to 2027. Additionally, an agreement on further cooperation in diplomatic fields was signed between the Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah Diplomatic Institute in Kuwait and the Hungarian Diplomatic Academy.

In a media interview on the sidelines of his visit to Kuwait, Minister Szijjártó highlighted his dual role as Hungary's Foreign Minister and representative of the EU's rotating presidency. He emphasized the EU's goal to strengthen ties with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, particularly ahead of their upcoming summit in Brussels.

He also underlined the EU's interest in closer collaboration with the GCC to boost economic growth and proposed resuming talks on an EU/GCC free-trade agreement and visa-free regime. He also mentioned plans to deepen bilateral relations between Hungary and Kuwait, with a joint economic commission and business forum scheduled for October in Budapest.

The visiting Hungarian minister also emphasized the shared values of sovereignty and freedom between Hungary and Kuwait, and underscored the importance of enhancing economic ties. He noted that among initiatives aimed at enhancing trade ties were promoting Kuwaiti investments in Hungary, collaboration on technology between oil companies, and potential Hungarian food industry exports to Kuwait. Additionally, a Hungarian security printing company may print Kuwaiti driver's licenses, and a leading Hungarian cyber security firm will start operations in Kuwait next year.

He also pointed to his country's unique stability in a rapidly changing European political landscape. While many European governments face frequent changes, Hungary's government has been in power for 15 years, fostering a steady and growing economy.

With significant job creation, a strong export sector, and leading positions in electric battery production, Hungary offers attractive investment opportunities. The stable political

environment ensures that promises made to investors are more likely to be fulfilled, making Hungary a reliable choice for investment in Europe.

Minister Szijjártó reflected on 60 years of diplomatic relations between Hungary and Kuwait, noting a deep sympathy due to shared histories of struggle for freedom. He emphasized the importance of translating this goodwill into practical outcomes, highlighting the upcoming joint economic commission and business forum as key milestones. Hungary is eager to support its companies in entering the Kuwaiti market, added the minister.

Hungary's foreign minister also underlined the importance of direct flights, noting that they elevate relations significantly. He revealed that negotiations with both private and state-owned airline companies are underway, with private companies showing more interest. He added that a notable point in this regard was that the Hungarian government had recently repurchased Budapest's international airport.

## New deadline for ministries on government work plan

Close on the heels of the first deadline, from July 25 to August 8, given to ministries to identify government work initiatives and submit them to the committee preparing the draft government work plan, the Council of Ministers set a second deadline, from August 19 to September 19, for all ministries to identify initiatives and projects required to be included in the government work plan over the next four years.



The Minister of Finance was designated to coordinate with various ministries and their affiliated bodies for the above task. The decision stipulated that the Minister of Finance

"shall provide the committee with updates, identifying the challenges and obstacles it faces, and the parties that do not cooperate," within a month ending on September 19. As per the Cabinet's decision in its session on July 2, the committee preparing the draft government action plan must provide it with results of its work within 3 months, by October 2.



## Boom in India-Kuwait trade as exports set to hit record levels

India's exports to Kuwait saw a remarkable surge of 34.78 percent in the fiscal year 2023-24, reaching an impressive USD2.1 billion, compared to \$1.56 billion in the previous year, according to reports by the Indian Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

This notable increase underscores the strengthening economic ties between the two nations and highlights the growing demand for Indian products in Kuwait. A diverse array of goods contributed to this significant rise, including aircraft, spacecraft, and their parts; cereals, luxury and high-value items; vehicles other than railway or tramway rolling stock and their parts; pharmaceutical products; natural and cultured pearls; precious and semi-precious stones; and articles made from precious metals.

## IBPC to host buyer-seller meet for food products

Indian Business and Professional Council (IBPC) of Kuwait, under the esteemed patronage of the Embassy of India, is inviting interested parties to attend its upcoming 'India-Kuwait Buyer-Seller Meet in Food and Agro Sectors.'

The event, which is being held in collaboration with the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO), will take place on Monday, September 9, at 6pm in the Jawhara Ballroom at the Crowne Plaza Hotel.

FIEO, which was established in 1965 by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, is the apex export promotion body of the Government of India. The event will feature 31 Indian companies specializing in a range of food products, including fruits, vegetables, rice, cereals, millets, meat, spices, seeds, tea, coffee, paper and wooden cutlery, carrier bags, and aluminum foil.

# The Rise and Fall of Kuwait's iconic Sharq Market

• Established in 1994 and inaugurated in 1998, the country's historic landmark with yacht-filled port views has transformed from a bustling hub to a site of diminished activity and reduced visitor numbers.



For more than a quarter-century one of Kuwait's most iconic and oldest shopping malls, the Sharq Market, has been the go-to shopping destination for discerning shoppers and for families looking to spend a leisurely evening.

Crowds of citizens and residents thronging the shopping arcade, children running around enjoying themselves, and people sitting sipping their favorite beverages under sun-umbrellas, viewing the yachts lined along the quay on the port-side of the mall, are all now nothing more than distant memories.

The once thriving Sharq Market, which was once bustling with commercial activity and fun-filled family outings, is today just a skeleton of its glorious days in the past. Causes for this decline and decay in what was once Kuwait's prime shopping arena can be attributed to many factors, including structural shortcomings, government apathy, financial woes, and poor management among others.

Sharq Market features two floors and includes about 70 restaurants and shops, many of which are of well-known international brands. It also offered a range of convenient services that made it a popular destination for citizens, residents and visitors to the country alike.

Established at a cost of over KD35 million dinars in 1994 and inaugurated in 1998, the Sharq Market was built under the Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) business model, and operated under private management throughout the initial contract period. Since 2023, with the market's evacuation, the Ministry of Finance has handed over management to Wafra Real Estate Company.

However, over the past year, the market has experienced a discernable decline in activity, the shuttering of many shops

displaying the latest products of international brands, and the closure of the popular cinema-complex at the venue. Media surveys among shoppers, business-people, and retail-industry analysts and observers paint a distinct picture of the mall's decline in recent months.

Survey respondents lamented the neglect in developing and updating the facilities and amenities at the mall, and the inability of the Market to keep pace with the features and attractions offered at the many new malls and shopping complexes that have sprung up over the years across the country.

Analysts and observers opined that a transfer of the management to the private sector and a new board of directors to operate the mall effectively and profitably was the solution to the continued deterioration of conditions at the mall. They called for the swift transfer of its management to the private sector through an auction, which they believe would revive this historic landmark.

They emphasized the need for a comprehensive development of both the interior and exterior facilities of the complex, including the reopening of its cinema. They noted that Sharq Market is now often empty of visitors, even during peak hours and holidays when it once experienced significant congestion.

Bou Talal, a long-time patron of the Sharq Market since its establishment, stated that the market needs an administrative overhaul and a refurbishment of all facilities, both inside and outside the mall. He believes this can only be achieved by transferring its management to the private sector, which he sees as essential for its redevelopment and effective management. This move would help attract shops again and

address the frequent closures that have recently plagued the complex.

Samira Al-Ajami noted that Sharq Market is a significant heritage site that Kuwaitis once celebrated. Unfortunately, she observed that it has surprisingly been left without development, leading to the ongoing closures of shops and restaurants.

She emphasized visitors, whether citizens, residents, or international guests, are the primary ones affected, as well as the public funds that have lost revenue from this market. She added it was particularly disappointing that what was once a major entertainment destination for families in Kuwait has declined to its current state.

On the other hand, Abdullah Mohammed welcomed the Sharq Market's shift to a quieter, elderly-friendly atmosphere. He observed that the complex has become quieter and more suitable for the elderly and those seeking a peaceful environment. He explained that although several shops have closed, regular visitors continue to frequent the complex, and the closures have not diminished their desire to visit. Mohammed also expressed his hope that the complex would be redeveloped, considering its status as one of Kuwait's historical landmarks. He called for focusing on enhancing both the market stalls and the waterfront area.

Meanwhile, the iconic Sharq Water Clock, one of only 21 water clocks in the world and the only one in the Gulf, built by the world renowned French physicist and artist, Professor Bernard Giton, remains a mute observer of the slow decline of the mall. The clock, which once vividly reflected the passage of time at Sharq Market, now stands as a symbol of how time has essentially run out for Sharq Market.

## LuLu Hypermarket launches 'Let's Eatalian 2024' promotion



LuLu Hypermarket has launched the 'Let's Eatalian 2024' promotion, celebrating Italian 'bella vita' or the 'beautiful life', with special offers and discounts on all Italian branded products and authentic Italian foods.

The promotion, which takes shoppers on a gastronomic journey to the heart of Italy, runs from 4-10 September at all outlets of the hypermarket.

Inauguration of the Italian festival was held

at the LuLu Hypermarket Qurain outlet, with the esteemed presence of the Italian Ambassador H.E. Lorenzo Morini. Displays of iconic Italian monuments created a captivating ambiance that transported shoppers to the picturesque streets of Italy, while the sounds of Italian music filled the air, adding to the festive atmosphere.

The promotion offers a unique opportunity for food enthusiasts to discover the sterling flavors of Italian cuisine. From classic pizzas

and pastas to regional specialties, the Italian food street stalls offer a wide selection of original dishes.

LuLu HYpermarket has also curated a special selection of Italian branded food products, offering shoppers the opportunity to taste Italy's delicacies at irresistible prices. Also on offer were gourmet ingredients and household essentials at incredible prices, allowing shoppers a wide selection of products that

cater to their preference.

The week-long journey through Italy's piquant culinary world not only tickled the taste buds of shoppers but also deepened their appreciation for Italian cuisine. With each dish savored and new products discovered, shoppers have truly experienced a slice of Italy, right in Kuwait. Until next time, 'ciao' to a gastronomic voyage that has brought the essence of Italy closer to home.

# Over 175,000 yet to complete biometric fingerprinting

As the biometric fingerprinting deadline for citizens approaches at the end of this month, about 175,000 nationals have yet to complete the process. Failure to complete the process by the deadline on 30 September could lead to a freezing of all transactions with government agencies for these individuals.

Director of the Interior Ministry's Department of Investigation and Research at the General Directorate of Forensic Evidence, Brigadier General Nayef Al-Mutairi, said that 2,601,800 citizens and residents have been fingerprinted over the past months. He noted that 975,000

individuals, including 175,000 citizens, still have not completed the fingerprinting process.

He further revealed that 800,000 citizens have completed fingerprinting, compared to 1.86 million residents. Additionally, he noted that incapacitated bedridden individuals accounted for 1,000 of those fingerprinted.

He added that the deadline for citizens to complete fingerprinting expires at the end of September, while the deadline for expatriates will be extended until the end of the year. After this, the transactions of anyone who has not completed fingerprinting will



be halted until they comply. He emphasized that the biometric fingerprinting is one of

the key national projects aimed at ensuring the security and safety of both citizens and residents. This initiative is being carried out under the direct guidance and support of First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior, and Minister of Defence, Sheikh Fahd Al-Yousef, who has dedicated all human resources, security personnel, and modern technology to the success of this project.

He urged anyone who has not yet completed the fingerprinting process to visit one of the fingerprinting centers promptly to avoid disruptions to their transactions.

## Digitalization at Municipality streamlines public services

*In a wide-ranging interview last week on Kuwait TV, Director-General of Kuwait Municipality, Eng. Saud Fayez Al-Dabbous, observed that the digitalization of transactions at the Municipality has led to delivering more streamlined and effective services to the public.*

Emphasizing the need to further digitalize transactions, Al-Dabbous noted that some old transactions are still processed on paper, and that they are now in the process of scanning and attaching the digital files for entry into the system. He indicated that the digitalization implementation process currently



ranges between 85 and 90 percent and work is ongoing to reach 100 percent at the earliest.

Al-Dabbous explained that all new services over the past two years have been conducted digitally, including licensing, renewal and delivery of electricity, transfer of ownership, building permits, and boundary demarcation. All of these

services are now managed through the engineering and consulting office. Elaborating on building permits, Al-Dabbous said that an upcoming initiative that the municipal team is currently working to implement will allow building permits to be issued digitally using engineering intelligence.

Clarifying business permits further, he added that all aspects of a building will in future be conducted online through the new program. He added details on the building plan, such as its needs, space, setbacks, and heights, will be entered in the system and if the parameters are approved, the license will be issued immediately. The municipality's role will be limited to subsequent compliance verification.

Al-Dabbous also mentioned a new initiative in the municipality's budget to detect violations through aerial surveys using satellites. This step will greatly assist in identifying properties built in violation and will be useful for monitoring violations in hard-to-reach land areas.

Underscoring the importance of digitalization, Al-Dabbous pointed out the online licensing of electronic advertisements that began just two weeks ago has so far netted over KD500,000, which is a significant improvement over past losses.

Turning to other issues, the Municipality Director-General said that the development of municipal laws must be an ongoing process, not limited to a specific timeframe such as a five-year plan or every ten to fifteen years.

Additionally, Al-Dabbous revealed that he has submitted a draft decision to amend Municipality Law No. 33 of 2016 to align with the vision for the future municipality. He indicated that the amendment will include provisions for immediate violations and placing a block on violators, noting that some violations, such as construction infractions, are already treated as immediate.

On the municipality's cleaning services and their renewal, Al-Dabbous revealed that the cleaning contracts will expire next November, but there is enough time to qualify new companies for future contracts. Companies not meeting the required standards will be excluded. He also noted that each governorate will be assigned a specific color in the new cleanliness contracts: green for the northern regions, wild for the south, and blue for the coastal areas.

On another matter, he explained that the upcoming Abdullah Al-Ahmad Entertainment Centre project will span over 57,000 square meters. The rehabilitation phase, completed through an auction, has qualified three companies. The project is currently in the coordination stage for a period of five years, according to the consulting study.

Al-Dabbous also indicated that the Shuwaikh Beach project will be divided into four sections, one of which has been used for tire recycling. This project was developed through a donation from the National Bank of Kuwait.

Additionally, he revealed that the Mubarakiya project is divided into two parts: reconstruction (after the fire) and market development. Work has begun on the first section, which costs eight million dinars and is funded by a donation from Finance House.

Regarding the proposed 'Urban Observatory' project, Al-Dabbous said the proposal is to study the entire Kuwait area. He noted that it is a consultative program that specializes in studying each governorate separately and measuring the extent of development within it. He also added that this proposal is the brainchild of former municipal director Engineer Ahmed Abdullah Al Manfouhi.

On the Labor City project, the Director-General indicated that the municipality has recently taken over the labor city project in the Sabhan area. He noted that

it will take about a year to accommodate workers, with a capacity of 30,000 workers. The municipality's role involves the general supervision of the project.

He concluded by admitting that there were several aspects in the services provided by the municipality that needed improvement, but that it has the potential to be stronger and better in future. He explained that the municipality does not have a magic wand to wave away its challenges, as many of the issues that the municipality currently encounters are related to legislative processes that need government intervention.

**مفـل مـحـل**  
SINCE 1965  
الإفطار الآن للصبح  
**MUGHAL MAHAL**  
Kuwait's First Choice

**ORDER WITH US DIRECTLY**

**Get Up to 5KD OFF on every Orders**

**1800 188**

# Ban on Article 18 visa holders from company partnerships rescinded

• The Ministry of Commerce and Industry's ban on company ownership for residents under Article 20, 22, and 24, including domestic workers, remains in effect. These individuals must either sell their shares or transfer to an Article 19 visa.

• Joint committees are being formed to set final guidelines for non-Kuwaitis' ownership, including deadlines for disposing of non-compliant properties. About 10,000 expatriate workers with Article 18 residencies hold partner or managing partner roles in around 45,000 company licenses.

Officials at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) have been directed to reopen the ministry's automated systems, so as to allow Article 18 residency holders employed by companies or institutions to be registered as partners or managing partners and listed in the commercial register.

The ban imposed last month by the MoCI, prohibiting residents from owning shares in companies unless their visa is under Article 19, still applies to those under Article 20, 22, and 24. This specifically includes domestic workers, who must dispose of their ownership in companies if they are shareholders, or transfer their residency to Article 19.

Once the MoCI systems are activated, existing commercial entities with shareholders holding Article 18 and 19 visas will be allowed to establish and renew their businesses, as well as make amendments to all companies and institutions, in accordance with the procedures that were in place before the ban was issued.

The rescinding of the earlier ban also includes the resumption of accepting applications for the establishment of new companies that include residents holding Article 18 visas



among their shareholders, in accordance with the previous regulations governing non-Kuwaitis' ownership in companies and institutions.

According to the new directive, the clause requiring partner agreement for existing and new licenses, where one of the partners or managers falls under Article 18, will be temporarily

suspended. They explained that the new regulatory directive will remain in effect until further notice, specifically until new regulatory controls are issued.

Coordination is reportedly underway with the Public Authority of Manpower (PAM) to review the controls and regulations governing non-Kuwaitis' ownership in companies and commercial institutions. They noted that joint committees are being formed to develop final guidelines on the return of ownership conditions for non-Kuwaitis, including establishing a binding legal deadline for the disposal of properties that do not comply with the anticipated regulations.

According to information from the PAM there are about 10,000 expatriate workers who are partners or managing partners in approximately 45,000 licenses for existing companies and institutions in the private sector, the majority of them holding Article 18 residencies. These figures highlight the need for regulatory measures to ensure the rights of all parties, including current shareholders, considering that they have obtained commercial licenses in accordance with existing regulatory and legal procedures.

## KIA sees heavy rush as summer travel season ends

Kuwait International Airport (KIA) witnessed the return of thousands of citizens and residents over the past few weeks as the official summer holiday season came to a close with schools, universities, and other institutions set to open for the new academic year.

Director of the Operations Department in the General Directorate of Civil Aviation, Mansour Al-Hashemi, noted that most passengers were returning from their summer vacationing abroad, or from visiting family in their home countries. He added that available data showed that some of the most popular travel destinations for passengers during the holiday season this year were Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, Dubai, Mashhad, and London.

Al-Hashemi said that the General Directorate of Airport Operations has implemented an integrated plan to receive passengers returning to the country. This plan, developed in coordination with the Ministry of Interior, airport-customs, airlines, and ground services, aims to address congestion and facilitate movement by opening more passport counters, operating baggage handling at full capacity, and providing staff to load bags and deliver them to vehicles of passengers.



He noted that the department's 'quality team' is actively working to assess the level of services provided at the airport and monitor any issues or shortcomings to take appropriate measures. This is part of the administration's commitment to preventing the recurrence of any mistakes that could disrupt passengers or the authorities working at the airport.

He also revealed that during the period from 1 June to 15 August 15, the Civil Aviation authority monitored 12,940 departures and 12,938 arrivals, totaling 25,878 flights. During this period, the number of departing passengers reached 1,919,727, while arriving passengers totaled 1,652,261, resulting in a combined total of 3,571,988 passengers.

## Literacy, Education and Human Capital

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The executive summary also highlights the need for comprehensive labor market reforms to enhance the employability of young nationals through improving their knowledge, skills, and training, as well as encouraging innovation and promoting entrepreneurship among the young, and creating job opportunities for them in the private sector.

In alignment with Kuwait's Vision 2035 and its KNDPs, the Ministry of Education in coordination with the National Center for Education Development (NCED) also signed a multiple five-year program with the World Bank. Known as the Integrated Education Reform Program (IERP), it aims to address issues in the education system, including through curriculum reforms, creating quality learning environments and effective teaching processes, as well as measuring effectiveness of the system and progress of the program through periodic national assessments.

A 'Learning Poverty Brief' published by the World Bank in 2019, ahead of the culmination of the second phase of IERP in 2020, highlights several challenges with Kuwait's education system. Learning poverty, which refers to the inability of a child to read and understand a simple text by age 10, assesses the minimum proficiency level at the end of primary school using schooling and learning indicators.

Among others, the report finds that:

Nearly 51 percent of 10-year-olds in Kuwait were unable to read and understand a simple text by the end of primary school in 2016. This is higher than the average for the region and income group.

Around 3 percent of primary school-aged children in Kuwait are not enrolled in school.

Large-scale learning assessments of students in Kuwait indicate that 49 percent do not achieve the Minimum Proficiency Level (MPL) at the end of primary school.

Although 'Learning Poverty' in Kuwait is 12.3 percentage points better than the average for the Middle East and North Africa

(MENA) region, it is still 27.1 percentage points worse than average for high income countries.

Learning Poverty is also higher for boys than for girls in Kuwait, mainly due to a mix of two effects. First the share of 'Out-of-School' children is higher for boys (5%) than for girls (1.4%). And second, boys are less likely to achieve minimum proficiency at the end of primary school (56%) than girls (43.3%).

Additionally, the World Bank's Human Capital Index (HCI), which tracks progress of countries in developing and utilizing human capital, shows that as of 2020:



A child born in Kuwait will be 56 percent as productive when they grow up as they could be if they enjoyed complete education and full health. This rate is slightly lower than the average for the MENA region (57%) and far lower than for High Income countries (71%).

In Kuwait, children who start school at age 4 can expect to complete 12 years of school by their 18th birthday. However, when factoring in what children actually learn, expected years of school drop to 7.4 years.

Students in Kuwait score 383 on Average Harmonized Test Scores — a scale where 625 represents advanced attainment and 300 represents minimum attainment.

The HCI quantifies how lack of quality education, skills development and health for children today undermines their future by reducing incomes and opportunities. The HCI provides a window for policymakers and other concerned entities in Kuwait to undertake necessary remedial measures today to ensure a brighter future for tomorrow's generations.

**Thought** “ Integrity Is  
for the **week** Doing The Right Thing Even  
When No One Is Watching.

- C.S Lewis



# Volunteering trip to Kenya spreads smiles, makes a difference

*The Sahabat Amal Volunteer Team of thirty Gulf volunteers supported Kenya by helping schools, orphanages, and families, building a shop, and distributing 200 food baskets, school supplies, and gifts.*

By Fajer Sabah  
Special to The Times Kuwait

In Arab and Muslim countries, especially in the Gulf states, it is a widely held belief that 'the hands of the charitable are always giving'. This was recently demonstrated during a trip to Kenya in late August by the Sahabat Amal Volunteer Team.



The volunteer team, consisting of thirty volunteers from various Gulf countries, left everything behind to help and give to the less fortunate. The trip, which covered three regions — Nairobi, Mombasa, and

Malindi-- visited schools, orphanages, and social shelters in the regions. They also held meetings with scholars of Islamic jurisprudence and the Quran, and met with widows and impoverished families.

The team shared smiles, comforted individuals by playing and talking with them; built a small shop for a widow, who was supporting seven children; distributed 200 food baskets to needy families; and provided school supplies, gifts, clothes, and toys to students. They also organized a marathon race.

The team went beyond offering moral support and material aid; they invested their time and effort by painting classrooms, meeting with shelter and school directors to assess needs, and making a special visit to



a shelter for girls who had been victims of harassment, to provide them with comfort.

Additionally, they organized a full-day medical camp at a hospital, where they examined, treated, and provided necessary medicines to villagers. Many team members were experienced in the medical field, while others were involved in charitable work.

Thanks to this humanitarian initiative, the team successfully collected significant donations from charitable individuals which



then went to provide sewing machines for less privileged women, enabling them to work independently and earn a living through sewing.

Despite the numerous projects and challenging travels, the team made the most of their visit to Kenya by exploring its

ancient and modern landmarks, participating in cultural and artistic events, and enjoying leisure time at waterfalls, the sea, and on a safari.

In the end, the trip and the humanitarian causes addressed would not have been possible without the support of generous individuals and sponsors. Our heartfelt gratitude goes to all the donors and sponsors for making this trip a resounding success and bringing many smiles to the faces of the less fortunate..

- You can find Fajer Sabah on Instagram at @Fajersabah\_blog. For inquiries, reach her at fajoor788@gmail.com. Additionally, follow @kenyainkuwait and @sahabt\_\_amal on Instagram for related updates.
- The Sahabat Amal Volunteer Team's trip to Kenya in late August was made possible thanks to the generous support of its sponsors. The Diamond Sponsors were @asnan\_tower, @asnankids, @dressaalessa, @almuthafarlg, and @mamuthafar1. Gold Sponsors included @backstage.kw, @m\_al7mly, @bestalyousifi, and @wesuffix. Silver Sponsors were @prolifesnacks, @q8saray, @joyo\_kw, and @crystal\_\_shine\_\_. The airline partner was @fly.ethiopian, and the strategic partner was @alrumaithiya.co.op.

## Vehicle ownership transfer service now on Sahel app

Ministry of Interior (MoI) has introduced a new 'vehicle ownership transfer' service via the 'Sahel' app. The initiative aligns with the ministry's vision of advancing digital transformation and streamlining of its services, so as to offer citizens a convenient, 24/7 electronic process that saves both time and effort.

In a statement on the launch of the new service, MoI praised the Insurance Regulation Unit for its role in finalizing the operational framework of the new electronic vehicle ownership transfer service. The process involves a simple series of steps. The seller must first access the Sahel app and go to the 'Services' list; then select 'Ministry of Interior'; followed by 'Traffic Services,' and 'Transfer of Vehicle Ownership'. They can then submit a new order, specify the vehicle, and enter the civil number of the new owner. A notice will be sent to the new owner, who must then review and approve the transfer request, pay the insurance transfer fees, and send a notice to



the seller. The seller must then acknowledge receipt of payment and pay the ownership transfer fees, which will trigger a notice to the buyer. The buyer will then access the notice to download the new electronic vehicle license, which will be added to their digital wallet via the 'ID' application.

The statement emphasized the commitment of MoI to digitizing services and enhancing its systems to provide accessible and efficient government services.

## Young people spend over 30 percent of time on video games

A recent study by global Management Consultancy firm, Bain & Company, showed that the global video game industry is experiencing significant growth, with revenues steadily rising. Projections are that revenues could exceed hundreds of billions of dollars by 2028. This growth is largely driven by the younger generation devoting an increasing share of their time and budget to gaming.

Data from the study revealed that revenues were projected to reach USD257 billion by 2028, representing a 6 percent year-on-year increase. Changes in consumer behavior and rapid technological advancements have driven growth in the industry, with young people now spending around 30 percent of their time on video games.

According to the study, nearly 80 percent of children and young people aged 2 to 18 play games, spending 30 percent of their



leisure time on gaming. This demographic is expected to become the primary source of future revenue for the sector. Older players, aged 45 and up, represent a smaller market, with only 31 percent engaging in gaming, often on their mobile phones.

Bain expects that rapid technological advancements and increased realism in games will attract more players. Faster mobile technologies such as 5G transmission and devices not initially designed for gaming, such as sophisticated mobile phones, and cloud gaming will become more affordable and widespread, making games easier to access anytime and anywhere without requiring powerful hardware.

# Household workers comprise over a quarter of expat workforce

A new report by AlShall Consulting Company, a leading financial advisory and business consultancy firm in Kuwait, showed that household workers accounted for around 27 percent of Kuwait's total expatriate workforce. The report, citing data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, showed that by the end of the first-quarter of 2024 (1Q-2024), there were about 789,000 domestic workers, representing a slight increase of 1.1 percent from the 780,000 workers reported at the end of 1Q-2023.

The total number of domestic workers were divided between 423,000 female workers and 366,000 male workers. Female household workers from the Philippines were in top spot with approximately 175,000 workers, a drop of 30,000 workers compared to the 205,000 at the end of 1Q-2023. Among male household helpers, India was in the lead with about 248,000 workers, an increase of 10,000 workers from the 247,000 workers at the end of 1Q-2023.

India also tops the total domestic labor force, accounting for 44.7 percent of workers in this

segment, followed by the Philippines with 22.5 percent. Overall, four nationalities — India, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh — accounted for about 93.3 percent of the total domestic laborers in the country. The remaining six nationalities from where domestic workers hail, include Nepal (4.6%), Ethiopia (0.9%), Benin (0.7%), Mali (0.3%), and Pakistan (0.2%).

The report also showed that when the domestic workforce was combined with other expatriate workers in the country, India continued to dominate with about 889,000 workers, compared to the 858,000 Indian workers at the end of 1Q-2023. Indian workers thus accounted for 30.3 percent of total employment, including Kuwaiti workers, and about 35.9 percent of total expatriate workers, placing it at the forefront in both categories.

Following in second place was Egyptian workers, with a total of about 476,000 workers compared to 489,000 at the end of 1Q-2023. The figure in 1Q-2024 represented 16.2 percent of total employees in Kuwait, and about 19.2 percent of total expatriate workers. In third place by total labor force was the 458,000 Kuwaiti workers, an increase from the 445,000 at the end of 1Q-2023, and representing 15.6 percent of total labor. However, figures from the Public



Authority for Civil Information (PACI) show that as of the end of June, total Kuwaiti employment was approximately 506,400. The discrepancy between data from the two government entities could be attributed to the inclusion of military personnel and the unemployed in PACI data.

Bangladesh ranks fourth, with a total of 266,000 workers, compared to 246,000 at the end of 1Q-2023, accounting for 9.1 percent of total employment and about 10.7 percent of total expatriate labor. The Philippines ranks fifth, with a total of 240,000 workers, compared to 274,000 at the end of 1Q-2023, representing 8.2 percent of total employment and about 9.7 percent of total expatriate labor.

## More people opting for flights on low-cost airlines

Latest revenue figures from Travel and Tourism offices in Kuwait reveal that tickets worth around KD24 million were sold last July, marking a 3.7 percent increase from KD23 million in sales a month earlier. The data also showed ticket sales over the first seven months of 2024 totaled approximately KD151 million, down 1.7 percent from KD 153 million during the same period last year.

The sales figures reflect bookings through the Bank Settlement Plan (BSP) for full-service airlines only, and do not include bookings with low-cost airlines. The decline in overall sales is attributed to the increasing share of low-cost airlines, as most travelers are opting for flying in those airlines.

The figures also show that ticket sales decreased by 10 percent in January, 5 percent in February, and 2 percent compared to March, but rose again in April, May, June, and July with the start of the travel season. In the meantime, the number of offices increased



from 400 to about 550. In addition, some employees from large travel and tourism offices left their jobs to open their own home-based offices, allowing them to operate with no overhead costs. This shift has intensified competition in the market.

According to the General Directorate of Civil Aviation, passenger traffic at Kuwait International Airport in June totaled approximately 1.35 million passengers, with 580,718 arrivals and 770,255 departures.

## Citizens need biometric fingerprinting to operate bank accounts

Banks are reportedly preparing their electronic systems to implement biometric fingerprinting of citizens holding bank accounts with them. This move is in anticipation of restrictions to be imposed from 30 September, on online transaction processes provided by the Ministry of Interior, to citizens who fail to comply with the fingerprint requirement by the deadline.

Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) is said to have directed banks to adhere to the ministerial decision regarding biometric fingerprinting. Accounts of non-compliant citizens will face restrictions in four graduated stages, said CBK.

Banks will first send alert messages to all affected customers, urging them to complete biometric fingerprinting within the specified deadline. This initial step is expected to start this week.

Banks will then stop all electronic channels and payments for non-compliant customers by 30 September. This includes suspending account balance displays, account statements, and fund transfers, effectively halting online access to balances.

Continued non-compliance will then lead to suspending all bank cards for national customers who have not completed fingerprinting by 31 October. This will then evolve into a full block on all



accounts and bank balances of citizens who have not complied with fingerprinting by 1 December.

Banking restrictions on customer accounts will not be limited to bank balances alone. The ban is expected to extend to all accounts held by customers in financial markets, including shares, funds, portfolios, and other assets managed by third parties, whether in the private or government sector. This means that any funds from the sale of shares, real estate, or other commercial transactions will be transferred to accounts frozen by the bank.

Installments due from customers with frozen accounts will continue to be deducted during the restriction period to pay creditors, including financiers and for government benefits, if applicable.

## The Future Engineers Program Sparks Passion and Innovation



In collaboration with the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters (NCCAL) and the Kuwait Society of Engineering, ALSAYER Group successfully partnered in the Future Engineer Program, with 24 children aged 10-13 for interactive workshops and practical projects, nurturing their interest in disciplines such as chemical, mechanical, civil, and electrical engineering.

The Future Engineer Program conducted workshops at Al-Qibliya School's Department of Architectural and Engineering Affairs during the period from August 3 to August 21, 2024. Participants had the opportunity to craft functional prototypes from recycled materials and implement innovative ideas in their engineering projects.

As a key partner, ALSAYER played a pivotal role in empowering these young minds and was honored during the final ceremony at Dasma Theater. This event celebrated the accomplishments of the young participants and highlighted the support from their parents and the community, showcasing a dedication to fostering Kuwait's education and future talents.

Through engaging learning sessions and activities, children constructed engineering structures utilizing renewable energy sources like solar panels and wind turbines. They also designed battery-operated miniature food trucks to gain insights into engineering and entrepreneurship, all under the mentorship of experienced engineering volunteers.

The program culminated in an award ceremony acknowledging the young participants, organizers, partners, and volunteers, signifying a successful collaboration geared towards shaping Kuwait's upcoming generation of engineers.

Eng. Nehad Al-Haj Ali, Group Manager of Corporate Excellence, stated that this sponsorship reinforces ALSAYER Group's role in the community as a key player in the education and healthcare sectors, in addition to its pioneering role as a leading mobility solution provider. ALSAYER Group's entry into the education sector through the "Sama Educational Company," offers quality education and extracurricular activities through "American Creativity School" and the "The English School," in addition to prestigious international schools in Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman.



"By supporting initiatives like the Future Engineers program, ALSAYER Group is not only investing in future generations in Kuwait but also cultivating an environment of innovation and learning within the community. These programs provide invaluable hands-on experiences, instilling a sense of curiosity and passion for engineering disciplines, contributing to the development of future industry leaders, strengthening community ties and emphasizing dedication to nurturing talents for a bright future in Kuwait" added Eng. Nehad Al-Haj Ali.





# Tajik Independence shaped identity and destiny of nation

**Dr. Zubaydullo Zubaydzoda**  
Dean of the Diplomatic Corps,  
Ambassador of the Republic of Tajikistan to the  
State of Kuwait

In the tapestry of a nation's history, certain moments illuminate the path forward, shaping its identity and destiny. For Tajikistan, the 33rd Anniversary of Independence on September 9th is one such pivotal event—a day not only of celebration but of deep reflection on the resilience and remarkable journey that has forged the modern Tajik state.

Since gaining independence, Tajikistan, under the leadership of the Founder of Peace and National Unity, Leader of Nation, President Emomali Rahmon has made impressive strides in development. The country boasts a strong political and legal framework that promotes stability and economic prosperity. Tajikistan's commitment to these principles has also garnered international respect, solidifying its position as a valued member of the global community.

Since independence, Tajikistan's journey of nation-building and development has been nothing short of extraordinary. The adoption of national symbols, the introduction of a sovereign currency, and the revival of the Tajik language and culture have all marked the country's newfound autonomy. The Constitution, endorsed by popular referendum, has laid the bedrock for a modern, democratic, and secular state, propelling Tajikistan into a new era of governance and social progress.

The spirit of independence has breathed new life into Tajikistan, fostering a profound sense of patriotism and national pride. Over the past three decades, the country has made remarkable strides in infrastructure, industry, and energy development.

The industrial sector, once reliant on imports, has undergone a significant transformation. The establishment of numerous manufacturing enterprises has diversified the economy, reducing dependence on foreign goods and positioning Tajikistan as a competitive player in regional markets.

The government's strategic focus on industrialization has spurred the growth of key industries, including textile production, food processing, and mining, creating jobs and fostering economic resilience. Thanks to the significant achievements of the independence period, Tajikistan is developing rapidly.

The main development goals and priorities are defined in the National Development Strategy of the country for the period up to 2030. According to this Strategy, the Government is currently implementing large-scale economic reforms aimed at ensuring sustainable development.

In this process, Tajikistan has successfully cooperated with international financial institutions and other development partners



for decades. With their support, hundreds of investment projects and programs were implemented in Tajikistan in all fields.

In the energy sector, Tajikistan's ambitions have reached new heights. The Rogun Hydroelectric Power Plant, one of the largest

in the world, stands as a towering symbol of the nation's capability and vision. This project, alongside other hydroelectric developments, has significantly boosted Tajikistan's energy production, meeting domestic needs and enabling the export of surplus electricity to neighboring countries.

Meanwhile, the transport sector has seen major investments aimed at modernizing infrastructure. The construction of new highways, railways, and tunnels has enhanced connectivity within Tajikistan and with its regional neighbors, transforming the country into a crucial transit hub in Central Asia and driving economic growth and regional cooperation.

Amidst global challenges, including economic crises, Tajikistan has remained steadfast, steering its economy towards sustainable growth. This resilience is mirrored in the nation's commitment to nurturing a national identity rooted in patriotism and self-awareness, particularly among the younger generation.

Today, Tajikistan stands proudly on the international stage, maintaining diplomatic relations with over 180 countries and actively participating in global and regional organizations. The country's leadership in international water initiatives, recognized by the United Nations, underscores its growing influence and commitment to global cooperation.

As Tajikistan looks to the future, the nation remains dedicated to strengthening its statehood, ensuring lasting peace and stability, and enhancing its global standing. The story of the past 33 years is one of resilience, determination, and progress — a testament to the bright future Tajikistan continues to build for its people, securing its rightful place among the world's nations.



# Discover Serbia with majestic canyons, healing spas, and warm embraces

*Explore the European country's untouched natural beauty, immerse yourself in centuries-old culture, and fully experience its rich heritage through its sights, sounds, tastes, and hospitality.*



Picture yourself gazing in awe from a lookout above Europe's largest canyon, feeling the thrill as you conquer the wild river rapids. Hear a trumpet's powerful notes resonate through your soul, savor the rich flavors of local wine, and relax in healing spa waters. Marvel at the grand frescoes of an ancient Orthodox monastery and the intricate beauty of prehistoric figurines. Experience the genuine warmth of a stranger calling you 'brother' and 'friend.' This is the heart of Serbia.

From this land, paths lead you to vibrant cities, serene villages, rejuvenating spas, majestic rivers, historic monuments, and lively festivals. Embark on a journey through regions where nature's beauty remains untouched and immeasurable. Immerse yourself in a culture nurtured for centuries and feel secure as you bask in genuine hospitality. Discover Serbia by tasting, smelling, listening, and touching every aspect of its rich heritage.

## **Belgrade – A city that never sleeps**

There's an undeniable allure to Belgrade, both thrilling and mysterious. Here, the Sava River gracefully merges with the Danube, and the flat Pannonian plain begins to rise into rolling hills and mountains. Positioned at the crossroads of diverse cultural influences, Belgrade is a city that never sleeps. Its unique charm lies in its ability to embrace a variety of, at times, conflicting ideas and worldviews. You can feel the spirit of Belgrade in its streets, architecture, monuments, parks, and, most of all, in the warmth and openness of its people.

## **Knez Mihailova Street – Custodian of Belgrade's rich identity**

Knez Mihailova Street, located in the heart of the city, is more than just a shopping district; it serves as a custodian of Belgrade's rich identity. Lined with distinguished buildings, each one

narrates a chapter in the city's history. This central pedestrian area, along with its neighboring streets, is brimming with restaurants, cafes, galleries, and boutiques, while street performers add to the vibrant and captivating ambiance.

## **Kalemegdan – Timeless and romantic charm**

Kalemegdan, Belgrade's largest city park, continues to captivate visitors with its timeless, romantic charm. The restaurants, largely unchanged over the years, offer an authentic experience of Serbian cuisine, accompanied by traditional music from that era. The park is also the site of the historic Belgrade Fortress.

As you stroll through Kalemegdan, you're treated to stunning views of the Sava and Danube rivers merging, as well as a journey through centuries of history, from Roman times to the present day. Within this vast space, you'll encounter the iconic Victor monument, a symbol of the city, as well as the Belgrade Zoo, the Military and Natural History Museums, Ružica Church, and St. Petka's Chapel. At the base of the



fortress, along the Sava River, lies Beton Hala, a series of old customs warehouses transformed into a hub of excellent restaurants.

## **Niš – The birthplace of Roman Emperor Constantine the Great**

Niš, a city that has evolved from ancient Roman times to the present, continues to captivate with its rich history and vibrant culture. As the birthplace of Roman Emperor Constantine the Great, who established Christianity as the Roman Empire's official religion, Niš is home to the archaeological site of Mediana, showcasing the grandeur of his era.

For adventure seekers, the Suva Planina mountain, Nišava River, and the dramatic Sićevačka and Jelašnička gorges offer opportunities for rafting, paragliding, and hiking. Notable sites include the historic Hydroelectric Power Plant 'St. Petka,' designed by Nikola Tesla, the poignant Skull Tower, and the Red Cross concentration camp, which preserves the memory of WWII victims.

## **Novi Sad – Where life moves at a serene and unhurried pace**

In Novi Sad, life moves at a serene and unhurried pace. The best way to experience the city is by leisurely exploring its galleries, museums, the majestic Petrovaradin Fortress, tranquil river beaches, and charming streets lined with inviting restaurants and coffee bars. In Novi Sad, the art of taking things slow is an integral part of its elegance.

## **Skadarlija – The old bohemian quarter**

Skadarlija, the old bohemian quarter dating back to the early 20th century, continues to captivate visitors with its timeless, romantic charm. The restaurants, largely unchanged over the years, offer an authentic experience of Serbian cuisine, accompanied by the melodies of traditional music from that era.

## **Danube – The river giant of Europe**

This mighty river, second only to the Volga in Europe, is truly cosmopolitan, flowing through four European capitals and ten different countries. It carries the vibrant energy of cities and the echoes of ancient civilizations, from Neolithic cultures to Roman cities and medieval fortresses along its banks.

As the Danube journeys through Serbia, it showcases its versatility: it spreads across the vast Pannonian Plain, meanders through the dense forests and wetlands of the UNESCO-protected Bačko Podunavlje Biosphere Reserve, glides past sandy shores, and playfully winds around the Fruška Gora mountain range. Near Deliblatska Peščara, the Danube almost becomes an inland sea. Its most breathtaking transformation, however, occurs at Golubac, where it carves through the Carpathian Mountains, creating stunning, dramatic landscapes.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13





# An icon of luxury in the heart of Azerbaijan

By Khaled Mohammed  
Special to The Times Kuwait

This summer, my family and I decided to visit Baku, the beautiful capital of Azerbaijan, a country rich in history and culture. Our stay was at the Fairmont Baku Hotel, which is situated in one of the three Flame Towers that form the iconic landmark of Baku city.

Located around 27 km from Heydar Aliyev International Airport, the country's main airport, our stay at the Fairmont was an unforgettable experience, where luxury combined with comfort and superb hospitality. The hotel was like a second home to us, and we spent wonderful times there that made our trip to Baku unforgettable.

From the moment we arrived at Fairmont Baku Hotel, we felt welcomed and cared for. The staff greeted us with warm smiles and great care, as the check-in procedures were handled quickly and efficiently. The attention to detail was evident, and we were escorted to our room graciously.

When we entered our room, my family and I were amazed by the beauty of the design and the comfort of the furniture. The room was spacious and equipped with the latest amenities, with large windows offering stunning views of the Caspian Sea and the Baku skyline. The beds were very comfortable, and the decor blended modern elegance with traditional local touches.

The modern air-conditioned rooms at Fairmont Baku feature contemporary décor and a flat-screen TV. There is also a spacious work desk, a fully stocked minibar, and



panoramic windows in all rooms. The marble bathrooms include a bidet and a glass wall. The rooms include a coffee maker for guests, and some rooms offer access to the Fairmont Gold Lounge.

One of the highlights of our stay at Fairmont Baku was the dining experience, as the hotel has a variety of restaurants serving cuisine from around the world. We had breakfast daily at the main restaurant, where the buffet was full of delicious dishes to suit all tastes. We also had dinner at one of the upscale restaurants serving traditional local cuisine with a modern twist, and the experience was amazing.

We spent some time at the hotel's spa,

which is a haven of relaxation and wellbeing. There was a wide range of treatments available, from massage to skincare, which allowed us to rejuvenate after a long day of exploring. We also enjoyed the indoor pool, which offered beautiful views and allowed us to relax in a peaceful setting.

One of the things that made our stay at the Fairmont Baku so convenient was its central location. The hotel was close to many of Baku's main attractions, such as the Maiden Tower and the Old City. This made it easy for us to explore the city on foot or via short drives.

We took advantage of the hotel's concierge service to arrange private tours for the family.

We visited the famous Carpet Museum, enjoyed a tour of the beautiful Baku Boulevard, and learned about the city's rich history. The tours were well-organized, allowing us to learn about Azerbaijan's culture and history in a fun and exciting way.



In conclusion, our stay at Fairmont Baku was a unique experience, combining luxury and comfort in a welcoming environment. The hospitality and facilities made this trip one of the most beautiful trips we have ever taken as a family.

Baku, with its beauty and history, and Fairmont with its level of service, were the perfect choice for an unforgettable vacation. We leave Baku with wonderful memories in our hearts, and we hope to return soon to experience this wonderful hotel again.





# US Election Will Overturn Europe's Strategic Status Quo



**Mark Leonard**

Director of the European Council on Foreign Relations, is the author of *The Age of Unpeace: How Connectivity Causes Conflict*.

With the US election just two months away, European decision-makers have gone from grappling with Trumpian nightmare scenarios – new trade wars, abandoning Ukraine, withdrawing from NATO – to experiencing an emotion they had almost forgotten: hope. Vice President Kamala Harris's ascent to the top of the Democratic ticket has eliminated Donald Trump's polling lead and allowed Europeans to contemplate alternatives to their worst-case scenario.

Yet, even if Harris wins, it would be foolish to expect complete continuity with Joe Biden's administration. Europe remains unprepared for what's coming.

While Trump and J.D. Vance's talk of ending US support for Ukraine has set off alarms in European capitals, a Harris administration's Ukraine strategy probably would depart from the status quo, too. As the war grinds on, US officials have lost confidence that Ukraine will capture and hold enough ground to break the current deadlock. Despite the Ukrainians' offensive into Russia's Kursk region, they are still losing ground in Donetsk. Recovering the territory they have lost since February 2022

becomes more unlikely by the day.

Thus, a Harris administration would have to look for ways to strengthen Ukraine's hand in the short term in order to pivot toward a settlement. Knowing better than anyone that their situation is bleak, the Ukrainians have been looking for a way out of the stalemate. Though they have launched their Kursk gambit, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said in July that he wants the "hot stage" of the war to end this year. Privately, Ukrainian leaders may be hoping that the United States will push them to the negotiating table, as that would provide the political cover they need to change course. Such discussions are already well underway in Washington.

This might come as a shock to those Europeans (including the next high representative for foreign affairs) who still talk

about supporting Ukraine for "as long as it takes," and whose rhetoric has hardly changed since February 24, 2022. Whatever happens, the challenge for Europeans is to ensure that the war does not result in a "peace" on Russian terms: a demilitarized Ukraine that is forced to abandon its aspirations to join NATO and the European Union.

Trade policy will be another major issue. Trump is promising a blanket 10 percent tariff

on all imports, and new tariffs of 60 percent or more on all goods from China (in addition to all the restrictions already introduced by the Biden administration). Faced with US tariffs and pressure from the Trump administration to apply its own tariffs on Chinese goods, Europe would find itself in an extremely difficult position.

But, again, there is no reason to expect that Harris would have a significantly softer China policy than Biden (whose approach has been much tougher than Trump's was while in office). The anti-China consensus in the US is solid, and in her few public statements on the matter, Harris has voiced strong support for Taiwan and complained about China dumping "substandard products into our economy." While her running mate, Tim Walz, has visited China many times, he has done so largely as an

they are merely trying to placate Trump, or whether they are genuinely serious about providing for their own long-term security.

Much of the task of envisioning what a Trump or a Harris presidency would mean for Europe will fall on the new European Commission, which will have to start preparing Europeans so that they do not panic if their biggest fears regarding Ukraine or China are realized. Failure to do so will increase the likelihood of a disjointed response, with smaller member states possibly peeling off to pursue bilateral deals with the US. It will be up to the bigger countries to calm their smaller counterparts (many of them in eastern Europe).

To that end, recasting relations with the United Kingdom could be a game-changer. If the EU and the UK can work in lockstep on geo-economic issues, they will have more policy leeway and clout vis-à-vis the US and China. Although Britain cannot replace the US, its reintegration into European defense and technology frameworks could significantly bolster the continent's strategic position. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer's new government has already embarked on an enhanced security and defense partnership with Germany, and similar deals with like-minded members could follow, culminating in a pact with the EU as a whole.

Poland and the Baltic and Nordic countries will likely take the lead in pursuing this outcome, but French President Emmanuel Macron may emerge as the key swing vote. Will he embrace a geopolitical vision of bringing the UK into the European fold on defense, technology, and climate issues? Or will he channel Charles de Gaulle by sidelining Britain, thus weakening the EU in the process? One thing is clear: Whether the next US president is Trump or Harris, Europeans must start planning for a change.

“When Europeans talk about investing more in defense, they should ask themselves whether they are merely trying to placate Trump, or whether they are genuinely serious about providing for their own long-term security.”

advocate of human rights.

Unlike Trump, Harris has been vocal in her support for America's network of alliances. But this commitment might make her expect more from US allies. Moreover, since she is no dyed-in-the-wool Atlanticist like Biden, the broader trend of US foreign policy shifting away from Europe and toward Asia would persist. When Europeans talk about investing more in defense, they should ask themselves whether

EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

# Small-Island Solidarity and Climate Common Sense



**Nadia Calviño and Jutta Urpilainen**

*Nadia Calviño is President of the European Investment Bank.*

*Jutta Urpilainen is European Commissioner for International Partnerships.*



While efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change will remain a top international priority for decades to come, the most urgent risks from global warming require immediate action and new ideas. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres said at the Pacific Islands Forum in Tonga last month, "If we save the Pacific, we save the world."

Since the Paris climate agreement was signed eight years ago, much progress has been made to create a more sustainable economy, with new technological solutions allowing countries to maintain strong growth while also reducing carbon-dioxide emissions. Governments, businesses, and households are increasingly determined to support climate investments. Renewable energy is becoming businesses' first choice for electricity generation. Innovation is boosting the competitiveness of green alternatives. And financial institutions are allocating more than \$1 trillion each year to green projects.

“For people living on small islands climate change is already an existential threat. Despite their minimal carbon footprints, these regions are at the forefront of the problem. Their challenges today will become the global crises of tomorrow.”

In this context, sustained and concerted action at a global level will be the key to success. Yet the progress has been too slow for the world's most vulnerable regions. For people living on small islands and grappling with rising sea levels, extreme weather, and ocean warming, climate change is already an existential threat. Despite their minimal carbon footprints, these regions are at the forefront of the problem. Their challenges today will become the global crises of tomorrow.

For small islands, adaptation is critical. Caribbean and Pacific Island states, along with parts of Latin America, Africa, and Asia,

face many more severe climate-related problems than other parts of the world. They also are more vulnerable financially. Whether borrowing money to recover from natural disasters or investing to strengthen their resilience to climate change, they face higher interest rates, and these additional costs come at the expense of investments in health and education.

As the world leader in humanitarian and development aid, the European Union is one of the closest partners that small island states and other vulnerable regions have in combating climate change. Under the EU's Global Gateway investment strategy, we have put our money where our mouth is, because our commitment reflects both genuine solidarity and common sense. We know that the costs of a disorderly green transition would far exceed the costs of investing in climate adaptation and mitigation right now. The gradual, credible changes that we make today are what will spare us the massive economic, social, and environmental damage caused by unchecked climate change.

A few recent examples illustrate our commitment. In Kiribati, a small island state in the central Pacific, rising sea levels may render many islands uninhabitable within a few decades. So, the EU and its financial arm, the European Investment Bank, are working with the World Bank and other international financial institutions to study the possibility of building a new seaport, which will help relocate people from smaller islands to safer ground. Such projects can be a beacon of hope for vulnerable populations everywhere.

In the Caribbean, where violent storms and rising temperatures are straining water infrastructure and the surrounding seas and marine ecosystems, an EU-backed water management and clean oceans program will provide expert support to launch water projects in 15 Caribbean countries. This work will improve water security, sanitation, solid-waste management, and flood protection, as well as helping to preserve our oceans.

The EU and EIB are also pooling resources to transform the way Cabo Verde (an island country off the coast of West Africa) uses and produces energy. This ambitious project will assist the government's plan to phase out fossil fuels by 2040. By focusing on renewable energy and storage, it will cut pollution and significantly benefit Cabo Verde's water sector, which relies heavily on desalination — a highly energy-intensive process. With far-reaching environmental and economic benefits, such

investments will make Cabo Verde a model for sustainable development across the region.

Finally, in Barbados, we are supporting

investments to help deal with floods and hurricanes. One project, in partnership with the Inter-American Development Bank, will improve sewage treatment and groundwater management, and we are also supporting a system to recycle wastewater for agricultural use. To enable these investments, we are funding a 'debt for climate conversion' program that responds to Barbados's particular financial needs in the bond market.

These projects demonstrate what meaningful support for small island states looks like. The Global Gateway program is helping not only with adaptation and water security, but also with renewable energy, digital innovation, education, health care, and green transportation.

In each case, we need to think differently, because we are confronting challenges that none of us has seen before. Tackling climate change is the most important mission of our time, and innovation and new ideas are essential. By working together to implement them, we will provide a better world for the world's most vulnerable populations — and for us all.

## Discover Serbia with majestic canyons, healing spas, and warm embraces

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

### Majestic Golubac Fortress – Serbia's most iconic landmarks

Perched on the banks of the Danube River, Golubac Fortress is one of Serbia's most iconic landmarks. This medieval stronghold, with its towering walls and strategic location at the entrance to the Đerdap Gorge, offers visitors a journey back in time.

Recently restored to its former glory, the fortress provides breathtaking views of the Danube and the surrounding landscape. As visitors explore its nine towers, they can imagine the battles and sieges that shaped this historic site. Golubac is not just a historical monument but also a gateway to the Đerdap National Park, home to the stunning Iron Gates gorge.

### Drina River – A symbol of the region's rich cultural heritage

For adventure seekers, the Drina River offers one of the best rafting experiences in the Balkans. The Drina's emerald waters, winding through lush forests and steep cliffs, provide both challenging rapids and serene stretches, making it ideal for both seasoned rafters and beginners.

The rafting route takes you through some of the most scenic parts of Serbia, including the dramatic Tara Canyon, offering unparalleled views of untouched nature. The Drina River is not only a natural border between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina but also a symbol of the region's rich cultural heritage.

### Exploring Serbia's rich cultural heritage through museums

Serbia's museums are a treasure trove of history, innovation, and culture, offering insights into the country's past and present.

**Nikola Tesla Museum:** Dedicated to one of the world's greatest inventors, the Nikola Tesla Museum in Belgrade houses an extensive collection of Tesla's personal belongings, original documents, and working models of his inventions. It's a must-visit for anyone interested in science and technology.

**Museum of Yugoslavia:** This museum offers a deep dive into the history of Yugoslavia, focusing

on the life and legacy of Josip Broz Tito, the country's long-time leader. The museum complex includes Tito's mausoleum, known as the House of Flowers, and exhibits that tell the story of a nation that once united the diverse cultures of the Balkans.

**Novak Djokovic Museum:** Serbia's pride and one of the greatest tennis players of all time, Novak Djokovic, is celebrated in this museum. It features memorabilia from his illustrious career, including trophies, rackets, and personal items, offering fans a closer look at the life of a sports icon.

**National Museum:** Serbia's National Museum is the oldest and largest in the country, with a vast collection spanning archaeology, art, and history. Highlights include artifacts from prehistoric Serbia, medieval frescoes, and works by European masters.

### Mysterious Đavolja Varoš (Devil's Town)

Đavolja Varoš, or Devil's Town, is one of Serbia's most peculiar and fascinating natural wonders. Located in southern Serbia, this eerie landscape features over 200 unique rock formations, some towering up to 15 meters high. These pillars, created by erosion over centuries, resemble a town of stone figures and are surrounded by local legends that add to the site's mystique.

The area also has two natural springs with highly acidic water, known for their unusual taste and believed to have healing properties. A visit to Đavolja Varoš feels like stepping into another world, making it a must-see for nature lovers and curious travelers alike.

### The untouched beauty of Uvac Canyon

Uvac Canyon is a masterpiece of nature, renowned for its meandering river and dramatic limestone cliffs. The canyon's most famous feature is the Uvac River's unique U-shaped meanders, best viewed from one of the many lookout points high above the river.

Uvac is also home to one of the largest populations of griffon vultures in Europe, making it a prime spot for birdwatching. Boat tours through the canyon offer a close-up view of its stunning geology and the chance to explore hidden caves and ancient rock art. Uvac is a place of tranquility and awe-inspiring beauty, perfect for those looking to escape into nature.



# Protesting Ethically



## Peter Singer and Martin Skladany

*Peter Singer, Founder of the organization The Life You Can Save, is Emeritus Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University. He is the author of Animal Liberation, Practical Ethics, The Life You Can Save, The Most Good You Can Do, and a co-author (with Shih Chao-Hwei) of The Buddhist and the Ethicist*

*Martin Skladany is Professor of Law at Penn State.*

Climate protesters have disrupted the tennis at Wimbledon, thrown tomato soup at the glass protecting famous paintings, sprayed orange powder on Stonehenge, and blocked traffic. In response, European governments have been cracking down on environmental protesters with detentions and fines, and, in one case, with a five-year prison sentence for advocating civil disobedience in a Zoom call.

Whether a protest is ethical is distinct from whether it is legal. As Martin Luther King, Jr., argued in his 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail', protesters who engage in civil disobedience show their respect for the law when they behave nonviolently and accept the penalty that the law imposes.

We agree that nonviolence is a crucial element in an ethical protest, and that protesters who live in a democracy with safeguards against excessive penalties for nonviolent political actions should be willing to accept the penalty that the law imposes. But

what counts as an excessive penalty depends on how much inconvenience protesters can ethically inflict on the public.

We suggest adapting the internationally recognized principle of proportionality in war. That principle prohibits military actions when the harm to civilians is disproportionate to the military advantage gained. To target a single enemy commander, while foreseeing that the method used will kill hundreds of innocent civilians, is wrong.

Applying this approach to nonviolent protests in liberal democracies has four aspects. First, a 'protest proportionality principle' should attempt to balance the annoyance to others against the

be willing to give up their time and make the effort to turn out. Vast numbers of protesters tell a democracy that something may be fundamentally wrong (although it is also possible that the protesters are wrong).

The second component of the protest proportionality principle is the importance of the issue relative to the inconvenience caused. Just because protesters are few in number does not necessarily make their actions wrong. The art-targeting climate activists are trying to spur us to action against a slow-motion crisis that has already harmed millions, and without drastic action, will alter our planet's climate in ways that harm billions. Even a small chance

media fog, they believe they must cause mass inconvenience.

It can be hard to think of creative ways to let others know about injustice without disturbing their lives, but it can be done. Instead of disrupting a Christmas tree lighting for kids, protesters could hold a rogue tree-planting event in a public park. The originality of such a protest could go viral, while also ensuring that any response by bureaucrats, such as removing the newly planted trees, would only add to the media coverage.

Intentionally inflicting inconvenience is not necessarily unethical; it must be weighed in relation to the other protest proportionality factors, including who is being inconvenienced. This is the fourth factor. A dozen climate protesters blocking thousands of people from driving their kids to school or going to work is more ethically worrisome than disrupting the routine of those with the power to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions.

It is more ethical to inconvenience politicians and bureaucrats in their official capacity than the public. For democracies to function, public officials must know the views of citizens. Yet protesters need to consider the importance of the services to be disrupted. Interrupting a politicians' meeting with corporate lobbyists is easier to justify than blocking the provision of public services.

Whether we are assessing international conflicts or nonviolent protests, the principle of proportionality will not yield precise answers. Yet ethical considerations remain vital. Unethical activism, even when nonviolent, can easily spur counter-protests that spiral into violence. The principle of proportionality can serve as a useful guide to the factors that protesters should consider, enabling us to defend the right to protest while also specifying protesters' ethical responsibilities.

“ Protesters feel they are trapped in an activist's dilemma: the easiest way to gain publicity is to protest in a disruptive way, but that might turn public opinion against their cause. ”

number of citizens protesting. If a million people join a protest march, it is inevitable that they will fill the street, stopping traffic.

Princeton University professor Zeynep Tufekci is correct that contemporary mass protests have lost gravitas because social media has made them so much easier to organize. Instead of investing years building bonds between like-minded individuals and then leveraging such grassroots efforts to culminate in a national protest, organizers can simply send a tweet with a time and place to meet.

Yet such ease of communication does not invalidate the difference between five protesters and 500,000. People still have to

waking people up to the need for change outweighs the disappointment of many tourists who are temporarily unable to see the Mona Lisa.

Of course, protesters tend to believe that their cause is crucial. If they are wrong, the protest may be unethical, even if it causes only minor inconvenience.

The third consideration is whether activists intend to inflict significant inconvenience or seek to minimize disruption. Protesters feel they are trapped in an activist's dilemma: the easiest way to gain publicity is to protest in a disruptive way that might turn public opinion against their cause. To break through the



# More potent, longer-lasting vaccine formulas being tested

*Current vaccines are not perfect, as many fail to generate long-lasting immunity or immunity against closely related strains such as flu or COVID vaccines. One way to improve them is to design more potent vaccine adjuvants. Combining different adjuvants to enhance the immune-stimulating effect is an area of research that is increasingly gaining significance.*



Vaccines trace their history back hundreds of years. The finding in 1774 that exposure to cowpox, a virus that can spread from cows to humans, could protect a person against smallpox, is said to have led to the discovery of vaccines two years later. In 1776, English physician Edward Jenner injected cowpox virus in the arm of a boy, who when later injected with smallpox virus, remained healthy and went on to become the first person to be successfully injected against smallpox. Dr. Jenner is said to have coined the term 'vaccine', from the Latin word for cow, 'vacca'.

As early as the 15th century, people were attempting to prevent illness by intentionally exposing healthy people to disease causing 'germs'. The practice, later known as variolation following the discovery of a vaccine for smallpox by Dr. Jenner, comes from the French word for smallpox, 'la variole'. By today's standards, the use of variolation by Dr. Jenner to develop the smallpox vaccine will be considered 'unethical' and 'medically unacceptable'.

But then, it is the practice of variolation that lies behind the discovery of most vaccines we take for granted today. And, there is no denying that vaccines have saved more human lives than any other medical invention in history. Today, for most vaccine testing purposes humans have been replaced by rabbits, rats, monkeys, or other non-human 'guinea-pigs' — which supposedly makes the practice a 'more ethical' method.

Despite these controversies, vaccines are currently the 'go-to' norm in preventing infection from most deadly diseases. Not only do vaccines work effectively in most people, they also can be produced in the millions on short-order during medical emergencies — provided such a vaccine is available.

Although vaccines work well in most scenarios, they are not perfect and could work even better with a little help. Researchers at Stanford University in the United States now appear poised to offer that 'little help'. In a recent breakthrough research, scientists at Stanford developed a new vaccine helper that combines two kinds of adjuvants — ingredients that improve a vaccine's efficacy — in a novel, customizable system.

In lab tests, the experimental additive improved the effectiveness of COVID-19 and HIV vaccine candidates, and it could even be adapted to stimulate immune responses to a variety of pathogens. The researchers say their new discovery could potentially be used one day to fine-tune vaccines for vulnerable groups like young children, older adults, and those with compromised immune systems.

Current vaccines are not perfect, as many fail to generate long-lasting immunity or immunity against closely related strains such as flu or COVID vaccines. One way to improve them is to design more potent vaccine adjuvants. Combining different adjuvants to enhance the immune-stimulating effect is an area of research that is increasingly gaining significance.

For their tests, the research team developed sphere-shaped nanoparticles made of saponins — immune-stimulating molecules common in adjuvant development. To these nanoparticles, they attached toll-like receptor (TLR) agonists — molecules that stimulate a variety of immune responses. They then tested the new adjuvant platform in COVID and HIV vaccines, comparing it to vaccines containing alum (aluminum hydroxide) — a widely used adjuvant.

The new nanoparticle-adjuvanted vaccines were found to trigger stronger, longer-lasting effects. Notably, the combination of the new adjuvant system with a SARS-CoV-2 virus vaccine was effective in mice against the original SARS-CoV-2 virus and against Delta, Omicron, and other variants that emerged in the months and years after the initial outbreak.

TLR agonists are a highly valuable tool in the vaccine toolbox. They activate the innate immune system, putting it on a heightened alert state that can result in a higher antibody production and longer-lasting protection. Different combinations activate different parts of the immune system. TLR agonists have also shown promise against Alzheimer's disease, allergies, cancer, and even addiction. An experimental immunotherapy using TLR agonists for advanced solid tumors has just entered human trials.

In the Stanford study, researchers tested five different combinations of TLR agonists hooked to the saponin nanoparticle framework. Based on which TLR was activated, each elicited a slightly different response from the immune cells. Ultimately, the latest advance is expected to spur the development of vaccines tuned for stronger immune protection.

The customizable aspect of TLR agonists is important too. The human immune system changes dramatically from birth to childhood into adulthood into older maturity. It is not a one-size-fits-all. Vaccines need to be tailored to these populations for maximum effectiveness and safety. Combining a saponin with a TLR agonist has found success before. The live attenuated yellow fever vaccine, given to more than 600 million people around the world and considered one of the most powerful vaccines ever developed, uses several TLR agonists.

The nanoparticle platform could also easily be used to test different TLR agonist adjuvant combinations in vaccines. "We now have a single nanoparticle adjuvant platform with formulations containing different TLRs, scientists can pick which specific formulation is the most suitable for their needs," said the Stanford team.

However, the researchers added that their discovery was still a long way off from becoming readily available for human use. The success of tests on mice will first need to be replicated in larger animals and then in rigorous clinical trials. This could likely be the next step that the researchers will be looking into.

## Ready-to-eat baby-foods unhealthy

Promising claims on food packaging, especially on baby foods, such as 'organic', 'preservative-free', no added sweeteners 'or no artificial colors', would appear to be a healthy option for your young child, but they could just as well be deceptive marketing tactics.

A new study by researchers at the University of North Carolina in the United States, which examined over 600 baby-food products from the top 10 grocery stores in the US, found that nearly 60 percent of them do not meet the nutrition standards set by the World Health Organization (WHO).

More specifically, the researchers found that 70 percent of ready-to-eat food products for infants and toddlers, usually provided in convenient squeeze-pouches, failed to meet the WHO's protein requirements and 44 percent exceeded total sugar requirements.

Not meeting or exceeding the WHO's nutrition requirements does not just have short-term health implications for kids. Foods introduced at that age will shape their future palate, influencing what flavors and ingredients they will prefer as they grow up, and choose as adults.

More incriminating was the fact that none of the products examined by the researchers met the promotional claims on the back of packaging used to advertise and market the product. Information provided on the food packing is supposed to help people make informed choices. If the information provided is blatantly false, as the research found, then the authorities need to act swiftly to address this issue.



Pediatricians also point out that baby food provided in squeeze pouches pose a particular threat to the eating development of kids. Sucking down foods from a pouch reduces the ability to learn how to eat from a spoon. If we provide food in squeeze pouches — for our convenience of not having to clean up the mess created by infants and toddlers when they are learning to eat — they will miss out on that important eating behavior development phase.

Additionally, most people would find it difficult to decide which product in the baby food aisle is the better choice for their children. Not only do many people not know what to look for in baby food products, even more people do not understand the jargon used to detail ingredients in food packaging.

As young parents you would be best advised to take a look at the back of the package to see what the total sugar content is, and watch out to make sure there are no added sugars listed. Also, scan the list of ingredients to see if there are any items that you do not understand, and clarify this with your pediatrician or dietician.

But then, not everyone flips the package around to look at the label on the back, with research on the topic showing that most people do not do so. Switching to front-of-package labeling, which has been done in many countries around the world, would be a welcome change.

Even more importantly, introducing policies to ensure that what is advertised on the front, is accurately reflected in the contents inside the pack, would be a potential game-changer, especially considering the importance of good quality foods for the growth and health of infants and toddlers.

EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

# Beware of Big Tech Steering AI Regulation



**Peter G. Kirchschräger**

Professor of Ethics and Director of the Institute of Social Ethics at the University of Lucerne, is a visiting professor at ETH Zurich.



Last October, the European Commission adopted a new roadmap to fight drug trafficking and organized crime, one of the most serious security threats facing the bloc. For obvious reasons, European Union policymakers did not invite cartel members to help design and develop this strategy; asking for input from criminal networks would have only made it easier for them to continue operating with impunity.

But when it comes to regulating the digital transformation and artificial intelligence, both of which pose myriad risks, policymakers are doing the opposite. They are collaborating with Big Tech companies such as Meta (Facebook), Alphabet (Google), Amazon, Apple, and Microsoft, even though their executives have demonstrated a brazen willingness to create dangerous tools and harm users in the name of maximizing profits.

For example, national, regional, and international 'working groups', 'expert groups', and 'advisory boards' that include representatives from Big Tech companies are preparing proposals to regulate the digital transformation and AI. Beyond that, some initiatives and conferences on this topic are funded by the very companies those endeavors aim to regulate.

The threats posed by digital systems are

complex and far-reaching. New technologies are dramatically widening global inequality, and tech giants have emerged as massive energy users, with serious implications for climate change and the environment. Perhaps most worrying are the near-constant violations of the right to privacy, owing to the lack of data security or protections against surveillance. It is standard industry practice for vast amounts of data to be collected and sold to the highest bidder. As a result, digital platforms seem to know us better than we know ourselves, and life online is awash in economic and political manipulation.

Moreover, algorithmic manipulation and disinformation have already been shown to threaten the proper functioning of democracy. Ahead of the 2016 presidential election in the United States, for example, the political consulting firm Cambridge Analytica harvested information from as many as 87 million Facebook users in an

attempt to sway voters. The company and its affiliates had already likewise misused data to try to influence the United Kingdom's Brexit vote.

More recently, the rapid development of large language models such as OpenAI's ChatGPT has opened up new avenues for fraud, including through audio and visual deepfakes that can destroy reputations. LLMs have also facilitated the spread of fake news, a scourge that is most acutely felt in democracies, where a flood of AI-generated content threatens to drown out quality journalism and to destabilize entire countries within a few hours (as happened with the recent far-right riots in the UK). Moreover, the same strategies can be used to hoodwink consumers.

But that is not all: use of social media has been associated with significant mental-health harms for young people. And many in the field have expressed concern about the disruptive impact that AI-enabled cyberattacks and autonomous

weapons could have on international peace and security, not to mention the existential risks such weapons pose.

Big Tech firms have consistently shown little concern about harming people and violating their rights. That is especially true for social-media companies, which generally earn more in advertising revenue the longer that users stay on their platforms. In 2021, a whistleblower provided documents showing that Facebook knew that its algorithms and platforms promoted damaging content but failed to deploy meaningful countermeasures. That should come as no surprise: studies have found that users spend more time online when expressing hate, anger, and rage.

Despite its unwillingness to police itself, Big Tech wants to help devise regulations for the digital sphere and AI. Giving these companies a seat at the table is both ironic and tragic. Governments and the international community are allowing these behemoths to dominate the process of establishing a new global regulatory framework and oversight mechanisms. But entrusting those who profit from the sector's fundamental problems is a dangerous mistake.

The good news is that there are plenty of independent experts and academics who can provide valuable input about how best to regulate the development and use of AI and other digital technologies. Of course, the private sector must be involved in such policymaking processes, but not more than other stakeholders, including civil-society organizations.

Technological innovation should no longer serve only the interests of a few multinational corporations. To ensure a sustainable future in which everyone can lead dignified and prosperous lives, policymakers must not allow tech giants to steer the regulation of digital platforms and emerging AI applications.




Make your transactions in AI Muzaini App  
**FASTER AND EASIER WITH APPLE PAY**  
now available online & in all branches



Terms & Conditions apply




[muzainiexchange](#)

[al muzaini exchange co.](#)





**18 888 18**  
[www.muzaini.com](http://www.muzaini.com)