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# Is the world facing a water-security crisis?

By Mariana Mazzucato, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Johan Rockström, and Tharman Shanmugaratnam

When it comes to water, the world confronts an unsustainable situation. Yet fixing the problem is not only within reach; it is also the low-hanging fruit in tackling climate change and generating jobs and growth.

The water crisis is plain to see. Year after year, in one region after another, record-high heat waves and droughts are followed by destructive storms and floods. Food systems are running dry and cities are sinking as we reach the limits of extracting water from the land. More than 1,000 children under the age of five die each day from illnesses caused by unsafe drinking water and a lack of sanitation, and hundreds of millions of women spend hours each day collecting and hauling water.



This is a human-made crisis, and it can and must be resolved through human interventions. But to achieve equity and sustainability everywhere, we will need new approaches to governing water and a wave of vastly

higher investment, scaled-up innovation, and capacity-building. The costs of these moves are insignificant compared to the economic and humanitarian harms that will be inflicted by continued inaction.

The first step is to recognize that the problems we face are not merely local tragedies. A destabilized water cycle increasingly affects every corner of the world. Current approaches tend to deal with the water we can see — the 'blue water' in our rivers, lakes, and aquifers — and assume that the water supply is stable year after year. But this is no longer true, as changes in land use, climate change, and a water cycle out of kilter are affecting rainfall patterns.

Too often, current thinking overlooks a critical freshwater resource, namely the 'green water' in our soil, plants, and forests, which transpires and is recycled through the atmosphere. Green water generates around half the rainfall that we receive on land, the very source of all our freshwater. In the same vein, countries are connected not only through flows of blue water (like rivers) but, more critically, through atmospheric flows of moisture.

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# Kuwait plans to build skyscraper more than a km high

According to the database of the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat, the Burj Khalifa may lose its title as the tallest building to the proposed Mubarak Al-Kabeer Tower, which is scheduled to be built in Kuwait City. The Mubarak Al-Kabeer Tower is planned to reach a height of 1,001 meters and feature 234 floors, though its completion date has not yet been announced.

However, Kuwait's potential claim to host the world's tallest building may be short-lived as Saudi Arabia plans to construct a two-kilometer high skyscraper north of Riyadh, which, when or if completed, will be the tallest building in the world.

According to Dezeen architecture and design magazine, the main architectural firm behind the Saudi proposal is Britain's Foster + Partners. Currently, the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE) is the tallest building in the world, standing at 828 meters. This 163-storey building was completed in 2010.

The Merdeka Tower 118 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, ranks second, with a height of 679 meters and 118 floors, followed by the Shanghai Tower in Shanghai, China, at 632 meters and 128 floors. Data from the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat show that Asia and the Middle East dominate the list of the world's tallest buildings.

Among the top ten, only one skyscraper,



the World Trade Center at 541 meters and 98 floors in New York City is located outside these two regions. China is particularly notable, with five of the world's top ten tallest buildings.

The same database indicates that China leads with 1,148 buildings over 200 meters in height and 117 buildings exceeding 300 meters. Additionally, the database shows that Saudi Arabia has 26 skyscrapers over 200 meters and five exceeding 300 meters.

Outside the top 20, the United Kingdom has 43 skyscrapers, France 26, Germany 21, Bahrain 19, and Kuwait 18, ranking 21st, 24th, 26th, 27th, and 28th in the world respectively.

## PAM revokes KSE authority to authenticate expat engineering certificates

Public Authority of Manpower (PAM) in Kuwait has decided to terminate a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed in 2018 with the Kuwait Society of Engineers (KSE), which had granted the society the authority to verify the credentials and experience of expat engineers seeking employment in Kuwait. The society was also previously responsible for approving the job titles of engineering support staff working in engineering firms.

Private sector entities viewed this step as a positive step by PAM, which reflected the new constructive cooperation between government agencies and the private sector aimed at benefiting public interest. Employers said the new move would help improve the business environment, increase the attractiveness of the

labor market, and preserve expertise within the country.

The decision by PAM was reportedly prompted by numerous complaints from companies, employers, and even the expat workers themselves regarding the verification process. The complaints highlighted the need for a more streamlined and efficient system for assessing engineering qualifications.

Although a replacement for the KSE authentication authority has not been announced, it is said that the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) is being considered as a potential candidate.

Given its expertise in evaluating educational qualifications, the ministry is well-positioned to oversee the verification of engineering credentials and related technical roles.

This decision is in line with Kuwait's Private Sector Labor Law No. 10 of 2010, specifically Article 7, paragraph 4, which grants the MoHE the authority to regulate the employment of expat workers. This includes defining jobs and professions that require passing professional tests set by the ministry in coordination with relevant authorities.



## Finger-printing deadline looms for citizens

Since the biometric fingerprinting process began in May 2023, about 805,000 citizens have completed the procedure, while 171,000 have yet to do so. Meanwhile, 864,000 expatriates have been fingerprinted, with approximately 970,000 still pending.

Reports also indicate that more than 250,000 citizens and residents might miss the fingerprinting deadline due to legal violations against them or for absconding and being wanted by the Law.

Ministry of Interior has announced that it will strictly enforce the suspension of all transactions for citizens and residents who fail to complete biometric fingerprinting by the deadline — September 30 for citizens and December 31 for expatriates. However, the ministry made clear that the status of fingerprinting does not affect a person's right to travel, as the Constitution guarantees the right to travel to everyone. Travel bans are only imposed by order of the Public Prosecution, the General Directorate of Investigations, or a ministerial decision for public interest.

Also, in response to a query about requiring illegal residents to undergo biometric fingerprinting, a source at the ministry quoted by the media indicated that this will be enforced in coordination with the General Directorate of Information Systems and the Central Organization to address illegal residents' situations, particularly during travel, security card renewals, or other transactions. Biometric fingerprinting project is a state initiative aimed at developing a comprehensive database of all individuals living in Kuwait, including citizens, residents aged 18 and above, and visitors. This project will enhance data accuracy, help eliminate passport forgery and duplication, assist in identifying wanted individuals, and verify the identity of any person in Kuwait. The preparation for the biometric fingerprint project is said to have begun in 2016, beginning with reviewing the practices in other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, and other countries, as well as sending delegations to learn from the experiences of other nations so as to avoid potential issues. The project was initially launched in May 2023 on a voluntary basis for travelers.

Subsequently, coordination with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry began to mandate biometric fingerprinting for those applying for commercial licenses. Centers were then established across the six governorates, accompanied by an awareness campaign and fingerprint appointments through the 'Sahel' website.

Ministry of Interior has warned all citizens and residents that after the deadline for expires, all transactions at ministries, government agencies, banks, and listed companies on the stock exchange will be suspended for those who have not completed the fingerprinting process. Investigations will then be conducted to determine the reasons for non-compliance.

To facilitate security measures and reduce hardship for people with special needs and bedridden individuals, the Ministry of Interior, in coordination with the General Directorate of Information Systems, has introduced mobile biometric fingerprint devices for on-site fingerprinting. This service has already benefited around 1,300 citizens and residents.

The General Directorate of Security Relations and Information at the Ministry of Interior has also stated that bedridden individuals and those with medium to severe motor and mental disabilities must upload documents indicating their health condition to designated contact numbers via WhatsApp. Calls are not accepted. After submission, they will be contacted to schedule an appointment for biometric fingerprinting.

The interior ministry also noted that the working hours for fingerprinting centers in personal investigation departments and commercial complexes have been extended from 8 am to 10 pm, seven days a week. Appointments must be booked in advance through the 'Sahel' application before visiting the designated centers.





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# KOC plans to transition to a green and sustainable future

Following a comprehensive energy audit conducted to assess current energy usage patterns earlier this year, Kuwait Oil Company has reportedly drawn up a roadmap to derive around 17GW of power from renewable energy sources as well as through energy efficiency enhancement initiatives.

A roadmap drawn up to ensure this energy transition by 2050 outlines the scope of work, recommendations and results expected, as well as proposes cost-effective solutions to enhance efficiency and lower operating costs within the company.

Additionally, a scope of work was developed with the assistance of a technical consultant to study the feasibility of forming a renewable energy portfolio through a combination of renewable energy sources, including wind technologies, and photovoltaic energy to produce 1 GW of energy and meet part of the

company's electricity demand.

Furthermore, Kuwait Oil Company's green energy initiatives, aimed at reducing the impact of global warming, include the installation of solar panels at the sites of the South and North Kuwait projects under the United Nations Program for the Reclamation of Land Polluted by the Iraqi invasion.

An earlier initiative to reduce carbon emissions has since its inception seen the company reduce its carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions by more than 16 tons, while also increasing the proportion of renewable energy for those projects to 36 percent in northern Kuwait and 15 percent in southern Kuwait.

The company also successfully removed nearly seven million square meters of unexploded ordnance and contaminated soil from the Sabriya Oil Field in northern Kuwait, and treated and rehabilitated more than one



million tons of contaminated soil.

In November 2023, the company officially announced that it had cleared the lands around Sabriya Oil Field of ordinances and cleaned up the oil pollution that resulted from the 1990-91 Gulf War. This land reclamation project has increased the area available for the company's

operations and improved the quality of Kuwaiti environment.

In addition to these ambitious initiatives, the company is said to be continuing its investment in research and development to promote innovation in sustainable energy fields. These efforts include cooperation with local and international academic and research institutions to develop new and effective technologies for renewable energy use and to improve the efficiency of operational processes.

Furthermore, the company is also seeking to enhance human capabilities through specialized training programs aimed at qualifying national cadres in the fields of clean energy and environmental sustainability. These initiatives reflect the company's commitment to transitioning toward a green and sustainable future and building an economy based on knowledge and advanced technology.



## Dutch Center honors Kuwaiti female judges

Dutch International Legal Cooperation Centre (Silk) in Manama, Bahrain, last week honored eight Kuwaiti women judges who participated in the training program on women's leadership in the judiciary.

The closing ceremony of the training program for the Women's Leadership in the Judiciary and Exchange of Judicial Experiences Project held in Manama, witnessed the honoring of judges Sanabil Al-Houti, Fatima Al-Farhan, Bashayer Al-Raqdan, Lulwa Al-Ghanim, Ruwa Al-Tabtabaei, Shaden Al-Rumi, Farah Al-Ajeel, and Sharifa Al-Mubarak, from Kuwait.

During the ceremony, Kuwaiti female judges presented several proposals that would advance judicial work and improve its quality, especially empowering female judges in Kuwait. They also discussed their experiences and achievements and how they reached the judiciary platform. In addition, they also spoke about their representation of Kuwait in international forums and the exchange of women's judicial expertise with the participation of female judges and public prosecutors from Bahrain.

The closing ceremony was attended by Bahraini Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs Nawaf Al-Maawda, Dutch Ambassador to the Kingdom Laurens Westhoff, and officials from the Silk Centre. In this regard, it is worth noting that the eight judges had participated in the training program held at The Hague in the Netherlands from 29 January to 2 February of this year.

## Over 6,000 stray dogs caught in residential areas

Abdullah Al-Badhal, Director of the Animal Health Department at the Public Authority for Agriculture and Fish Resources, revealed that the Authority was able to catch about 6,500 stray dogs in the past year after receiving about complaints/ reports from various residential areas.

Abdullah Al-Badhal confirmed during an interview on Al-Akhbar channel that stray dogs are treated as per the Animal Welfare Law, noting that the Authority has two sanctuaries for strays, one in Fahaheel and the other on the Sixth Ring Road.

He explained that some of the seized dogs are adopted by people after their pictures are posted on social media, and the rest are left back in the wild after being sterilized to ensure that they do not reproduce.

He said that the Authority works 24 hours a day and receives reports via phone or WhatsApp on +965 56575070, indicating that there is a plan to increase the number of vehicles designated to control stray dogs, in order to expedite and resolve complaints.

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# Gasoline consumption nears five billion liters annually

Latest data from KPC show that spending on fuel for vehicles by citizens and residents in Kuwait totaled KD453.23 million in fiscal year 2023-24. During this period, 4.86 billion liters of gasoline were consumed, slightly down from 4.89 billion liters in the previous fiscal year. The decrease in local demand led to a reduction in total gasoline sales by less than 1 percent.

Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), through its subsidiaries, is responsible for supplying all types of fuels in Kuwait. A statement from KPC made clear that the corporation is committed to implementing its strategy of providing a mix of fuels that are both economically and environmentally optimal to meet the country's current and future energy needs.

Latest data from KPC show that spending on fuel for vehicles by citizens and residents in Kuwait totaled KD453.23 million in fiscal year 2023-24. During this period, 4.86 billion liters of gasoline were consumed, slightly down from 4.89 billion liters in the previous fiscal year. The decrease in local demand led to a reduction in total gasoline sales by less than 1 percent.

Regarding the types of gasoline and their consumption in Kuwait during the past fiscal year, the data revealed that premium gasoline accounted for the bulk of gasoline consumption in the country, with around three billion liters, with a sales value of KD 256.3 million, consumed in last fiscal year, compared to 3.04 billion liters in the fiscal year 2022-23.

Special gasoline ranked second, with total consumption of 1.81 billion liters, valued at KD190.2 million dinars, compared to 1.8 billion liters in the previous fiscal year. Ultra gasoline came in third, with a total consumption of 34 million liters and an estimated value of KD6.8 million, compared to 40 million liters in 2022/2023. The data shows that total consumption of the three types of gasoline in the last fiscal year amounted to 13.3 million liters per day.

In this regard it is worth noting that Kuwait recalibrates gasoline prices every three months through a committee that reviews the various types of state-provided subsidies. The prices of premium and special gasoline remain fixed, with premium priced at 85 fils, special at 105 fils, diesel at 115 fils, and kerosene at 115 fils.

Meanwhile, the price of ultra gasoline is adjusted according to global oil prices. In the last review, its price was reduced by 8.8 percent, or 20 fils, to 205 fils, effective from last July until the 30th of this September.

The country's annual consumption of kerosene is approximately 108 million liters, with sales valued at KD12.4 million, which marks a significant decrease of about 37 percent in sales, down from 172 million liters in fiscal year 2022-23, which had a value of KD19.8 million.

Kuwait Petroleum Corporation also meets the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy's (MEWRE) requirements for all types of fuel needed to operate gas and steam turbines for energy generation in Kuwait. During the fiscal year 2023-24 the ministry's energy demand amounted to approximately 800.44 billion British Thermal Units (BTU), representing a 5 percent increase over the previous year's needs.

The average quantities of liquid and gaseous fuel supplied to power and water stations during the past fiscal year were as follows: 342.57 billion BTU of liquefied natural gas, 172 billion BTU of lean gas, 238.6 billion BTU of fuel oil, 16.4 billion BTU of gas oil, and 30.7 billion BTU of crude oil.

The corporation periodically negotiates



2023-24, compared to 16.51 million cylinders in 2022/2023, marking an increase in production of approximately 5 percent.

Meanwhile, the distribution of gas cylinders used in homes (12 kg size) amounted to about 16.5 million cylinders in the last fiscal, marking an increase of 6 percent from the 15.6 million cylinders in fiscal 2022-23.

Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, through its subsidiary Kuwait National Petroleum Company, provides gasoline fueling services to citizens and residents across various regions of Kuwait by constructing gas stations that cater to local needs. In line with this, the company continues to implement its strategic plan to build new gas stations to keep pace with urban and population growth throughout the country.

The design of these new stations represents a significant advancement, featuring modern architecture and technological innovations that offer multiple services with ease and convenience, while also being environmentally friendly.

In this context, a temporary fuel station was opened recently at the entrance to Al-Mutlaa Residential City in the north of the country. As a result, the total number of fuel stations has reached 67 (61 permanent stations and 6 mobile stations). The company aims to increase this number to 148 stations by 2028 and 229 stations by 2040.

It is also worth noting that the local private sector owns 42 fuel stations under Al-Sour Company and 43 stations under Al-Oula Local Fuel Marketing Company.



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# Entertainment parks to come up in Wafra, Kabd, Abdali areas

Public Authority for Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR) announced last week the launch of consultative study for the Al-Wafra Entertainment Park project. The authority is reportedly awaiting proposals to develop a comprehensive plan for Al-WafraPark, which will cover an area of about one million square meters.

Similar recreational projects are also being considered in the agricultural areas of Abdali and Kabd, with equal-sized areas proposed for recreational and tourism investment, based on recommendations aimed at completing these projects as soon as possible.

The authority has outlined several features to be included in the proposed parks, including fish lakes, animal farms, various agricultural activities, covered botanical gardens, horse stables, sports stadiums, residential cabins, and swimming pools, as well as lake and water recreational activities.



Other features in the proposal include center, a bowling alley, bird sanctuaries, cultural cinemas, a covered play area, a rock climbing centers, free-sliding birds, restaurants and

cafeterias, open-air theaters, a moving train, and retail shops.

The consultative study will provide a unified vision for the parks, based on the insights of relevant authorities, and will establish the necessary timelines for each stage of the executive plan up to its completion. It will also explore the possibility of involving the private sector, public benefit associations, and entrepreneurs to help achieve the parks' goals.

To further this project, the authority is said to be coordinating with all relevant state entities to enhance the infrastructure, including road paving, parking lots, and securing electricity, water, sanitation, communication and internet networks, as well as municipal cleaning services.

The authority has asked companies and consulting firms interested in preparing the study for Al-Wafra Park to visit the PAAAFR Finance Department's Tenders Section in Al-Rabia to obtain the project documents.

## MoH suspends Afiya health insurance

Ministry of Health announced the suspension of Afiya health insurance services for retirees, following the termination of the contract with the company providing the service due to breach of contractual obligations.

In a statement, the ministry said that all legal measures will be taken against the concerned company, including filing a lawsuit and demanding compensation for damage resulting from its breach of contract.

The ministry explained that in accordance with Law No. 114 of 2014 regarding health insurance for retired citizens, and Law No. 71 of 2023 regarding adding new insurance services, and the refusal of the company to commit to the same previous conditions and prices without an increase, as well as various other violations, the contract was terminated.

The ministry addressed Kuwait's legal authorities to clarify relevant legal procedures that must be taken against the concerned company.

The ministry assured the citizens covered by Afiya health insurance services of its commitment to providing all primary, secondary and specialized health care services

## Kuwait to spend billions in infrastructure, green initiatives

According to a report from Research and Markets, the Ireland-based market research store, Kuwait plans to invest around USD60 billion (KD18.3 bn) in infrastructure, health, environment, and energy projects over the coming years, with 5 percent of these projects being conducted through the public-private partnership (PPP) model

The report explained that a significant share of this expenditure is driven by increased investment in public infrastructure projects, with Kuwait currently planning to allocate funds to 14 major public projects and four PPP projects, totaling approximately \$3.2 billion (KD1 bn). Research and Markets also noted that the Kuwaiti government invested about \$6.9 billion (KD2.1 bn) in 2023 to develop the South Saad Al-Abdullah residential suburb project, which seeks to create an environmentally

friendly smart city that meets international standards. The city will cover an area of 64.4 square kilometers and will feature over 30,000 housing units designed to accommodate 400,000 people.

The report also noted that the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy is overseeing the Al-Shagaya Renewable Energy Project, a major solar energy initiative that combines photovoltaic and concentrated solar power technologies. Additionally, Kuwait is planning other renewable energy projects, including a 200-megawatt photovoltaic project in Abdali.



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# Fitch accords AA ratings to Kuwait

*On the Gross government debt, Fitch forecasts it will rise to 4.8 percent of GDP in FY25 and further in FY26, despite a USD 4.5 billion Eurobond maturing in March 2027. Nonetheless, it expects the debt levels to remain well below the projected 2025 'AA' median of 50 percent of GDP.*

A report by Fitch Ratings, one of the top-three sovereign credit rating agencies in the world, highlighted several strengths and weaknesses in Kuwait's economy, as it rapidly realigns to the changed political environment in the country.

The rating agency made the economic observations while affirming Kuwait's long-term foreign-currency issuer default rating (LTFC IDR) at 'AA-' with a stable outlook.

Among others, the Fitch report noted that:

Kuwait's heavy dependence on oil, its generous welfare system and large public sector could be challenging to sustain in the long term. Nevertheless, the country's external balance sheets remain the strongest of all Fitch-rated sovereigns, with net foreign assets forecast to rise to 538 percent of GDP in 2024 and average 553 percent in 2025-2026, which is more than 10 times the agency's AA median.

On the implementation of the structural reform plans, Fitch noted that the initial reform plans of the new government appear to focus on diversifying oil revenue, improving government efficiency, rationalizing government spending and capping medium-term expenditure at KD24.5 billion (48 percent of projected GDP for the fiscal year 2024 (FY24) ending March 2025; (FY24)), which is slightly below FY23's.

Regarding the draft liquidity/debt law, the Fitch report said that the enactment of this law would enable Kuwait to raise new debt, following the expiry of the previous debt law in 2017. However, the agency expects the liquidity law to be deferred in this fiscal, and to be passed most likely in the coming fiscal year (FY25-26).

Pointing out that the passing of a debt law would allow the government to finance nearly 30 percent of its budget deficit through debt



issuance, the agency added that even without a liquidity law, the government would still be able to meet its financing obligations in the coming years, given the assets at its disposal.

On the budget deficit, Fitch report expects it to widen to 4.4 percent of GDP in FY24, from 3.1 percent in FY23, and further to 6.0 percent in FY25. The agency explained, "The government plans to rationalize spending, in line with its expenditure target, is achievable through modest reductions in non-core expenditures and continued under-spending of the budget. However, significant reform of the generous public employment and welfare spending (81 percent of total expenditure; 41 percent of GDP) is unlikely, thereby keeping

total expenditure near the target ceiling.

Fitch expects the oil revenues to continue to decline, even as non-oil revenues rise modestly. Oil revenue loss from lower oil prices is partly mitigated by the potential unwinding of OPEC+ oil production quotas from 4Q24. The rating agency forecasts that the government will continue to rely on the assets of the General Reserve Fund (GRF) to cover its budget deficit and meet domestic maturities.

On the Gross government debt, Fitch forecasts it will rise to 4.8 percent of GDP in FY25 and further in FY26, despite a USD 4.5 billion Eurobond maturing in March 2027. Nonetheless, it expects the debt levels to remain well below the projected 2025 'AA'

median of 50 percent of GDP.

Regarding the impacts of regional conflict on the economy, Fitch report finds that the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East and disruptions to Red Sea shipping have had "minimal impact on Kuwait," which has large government assets that provide an important buffer to support the economy if tensions were to escalate. On Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG), Fitch rated Kuwait at '5[+]' on ESG Relevance Score (RS) respectively for both Political Stability and Rights, as well as for the Rule of Law, Institutional and Regulatory Quality and Control of Corruption.

"These scores reflect the high weight that the World Bank Governance Indicators (WBGi) have in our proprietary Sovereign Rating Model (SRM). Kuwait has a medium WBGi ranking at 53, reflecting low scores for voice and accountability, and middling scores across other governance indicators," said the report.

Regarding the factors that could, individually or collectively, lead to negative rating action (downgrade), the report noted that signs of sustained pressure on GRF liquidity, for example, due to the continued absence of a new liquidity law and of alternative measures to ensure that the government can continue to meet its payment obligations, including but not limited to debt service.

Other factors that could lead to a positive rating action (upgrade) include, strong evidence that Kuwait's institutions and political system are able to tackle long-term fiscal challenges, for example, through actions to implement a clear deficit reduction plan that is resilient to lower oil prices, as well as adopt a transparent and sustainable government funding strategy.



## LuLu Hypermarket launches 'Awesome Onam 2024' festival

LuLu Hypermarket, Kuwait's premier retail destination, kicked off its "Awesome Onam 2024" festivities, held on the occasion of the annual Onam festival in the southern Indian state of Kerala. The festivities began on 12 September with a lighting of the traditional oil lamp at the Al-Rai outlet by top management of LuLu Kuwait.

This year's Onam celebrations promise to be a treat for customers, with amazing discounts and offers across all LuLu Hyper outlets from 11-17 September that allow shoppers to enjoy unbelievable prices on fresh fruits, groceries, vegetables, household items, garments, and much more.

The retailer has also curated a special collection of Onam-themed products, such as Onam Special Mixed Flowers (available at all outlets), Onam Sadhya (a traditional Onam feast with 21 varieties of dishes), Payasams (delicious sweet puddings), 'Onam Special Ethnic Wear 'Dhawani' (available exclusively only at LuLu outlets), and special sale promotions on sarees, churidars, and ethnic wear.

The resplendent celebrations also feature an array of cultural events, including a traditional

'Kathakali' performance, a special highlight of the event. On the sidelines of the festival's inauguration on September 12, the Al Rai outlet hosted an Onam fashion show for kids, awarding gift vouchers for first, second & third place winners. In addition, all participants were rewarded with consolation prizes.

Other exciting events include the Onam Special 'Payasamela', also held on September 12 at Al Rai, with prizes of KD150, KD 125, and

KD 100 gift vouchers presented to the first, second and third place winners respectively.

In addition on September 12, a special Onam 'Floral Carpet Competition', was held at the Al Rai outlet, with the winner receiving KD130 worth of gift vouchers. The second and third placed winners received gift vouchers worth KD100 and KD75 respectively.

Traditional cultural programs, including 'Chenda melam' and 'Pulikali with Maveli', were

held at LuLu Al Rai, Fahaheel, and Dajeej outlets, added to the excitement of the inauguration on September 12 and provided an unforgettable experience for shoppers and visitors alike.

On September 13, the Al-Rai outlet witnessed an energetic 'Vadam Vali' (tug-of-war) competition, with KD400 worth of gift vouchers presented to the winning team. The second placed team received gift vouchers worth KD300, while the third place winning team were granted gift vouchers worth KD200 & KD100 for special consideration. More than 10 teams vigorously participated in the competitions.

Customers can also savor traditional Onam delicacies, enjoy exclusive discounts, or participate in lively cultural events, during the week-long festival, as this celebration has been specially crafted to bring people together and create lasting memories.

LuLu Hypermarket's Onam celebrations are supported and sponsored by Alwazzan, Bayara, Noor, London Dairy, and Eastern, ensuring a truly grand and memorable celebration. Visit the nearest LuLu Hypermarket outlet to experience the uniting spirit of Onam.





# Technical glitches in state entities raise alarm

Technical outages that have occurred recently at several government entities have led to growing concerns among citizens and raised alarm bells in concerned circles.

Last week the Ministry of Health had announced that one of its systems experienced a technical issue, prompting the activation of protection measures and the shift of most transactions to manual processing.

Even as the health services continued to be affected by the malfunction, the unified government app 'Sahel' also faced an urgent technical malfunction, causing users difficulties

in accessing and using its services.

In September last year, the Ministry of Finance had announced that one of its systems was subjected to a viral hacking attempt. This led to the disconnection of protection systems and procedures, as well as the disconnection of the systems themselves. Additionally, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry experienced a similar breach attempt.

With increasing and recurring reports of 'technical glitches' affecting vital government services, questions are being raised about whether these issues are interconnected, whether



they result from deliberate actions or are purely technical. It also calls into question the readiness of state agencies to address emergencies and protect their systems from external threats.

Youssef Kazem, the official spokesman for 'Sahel,' said that the technical teams are working to completely fix the defect and restore normal operations as soon as possible.

He added that users can gradually return to using the application by first updating their digital civil card data in the 'Id' application and then accessing 'Sahel' to enter the civil number for the authentication procedure.

## Over 400,000 Kuwaiti tourists travel to Turkey in 2023



H.E. Tuba Nur Sonmez, the Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait, stated that Turkish tourism is experiencing a notable rise in Kuwaiti interest. The ambassador highlighted that approximately 400,000 Kuwaitis visited Turkey in 2023 and that Kuwaiti nationals purchased around 15,000 properties in Turkey from 2015

to last June. The ambassador added that this reflects the high confidence Kuwaiti investors have in the Turkish market.

Ambassador Sonmez noted that the agreement on the promotion and mutual protection of investments between Turkey and Kuwait, renewed in 2010 and effective from 2013, has strengthened investments between the two countries. She emphasized that it serves as a crucial foundation for developing long-term investment relations.

## Filipino household workers start arriving in Kuwait

Media reports in late July that Filipino household workers would start returning to Kuwait within two months, were confirmed on 14 September with the arrival of a new batch of Filipino household workers. Their arrival marks the revival in hiring of household workers from the Philippines after a year-long pause, due to suspension of hiring of Filipino household workers by that nation, and Kuwait responding by placing a ban on recruitment of new workers from Manila.

Commenting on the return of Filipino workers, Bassam Al Shammari, a specialist in domestic labor affairs and owner of a recruitment company, explained that following the arrival of the first batch of workers on Saturday, more workers were expected to arrive within the coming days and weeks.

He noted that the average age of the new recruits is between 30 and 45 years, which is considered a favorable age by many households in Kuwait. The imminent influx of Filipino household helpers is expected to address the domestic labor market's long-standing issues caused by a shortage of exporting countries and the inability of other nationalities to fill the gap left by the Filipino workers since the recruitment ban.

He added that the Filipino workers arriving over the next few days and weeks have been recruited based on their previous experience in Kuwait and the region, as new recruits are not currently being considered.

The large number of Filipino domestic workers in the local market underscores their importance to Kuwaiti and



expatriate families due to their ease of communication, quality care, good educational levels, and familiarity with societal customs and traditions.

Al-Shammari emphasized that adhering to the contract terms is crucial for maintaining continuous recruitment. He also highlighted that the Public Authority of Manpower needs to address any past deficiencies related to the process of labor hiring.

Additionally, Al-Shammari reiterated his call to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to amend Ministerial Decision No. 2 of 2024, which sets the recruitment prices for domestic workers, including travel tickets, at KD750 from Asian countries, KD575 from African countries, and KD350 for the special passport provided by the sponsor. He stressed that continuing to maintain this decision has a negative impact on the labor market and affects the quality of workers arriving in the country.

## SIF-Kuwait to launch Season 9 of SPC 2024-25 in November

Science International Forum-Kuwait (SIF-Kuwait) is set to hold Kuwait's largest and most prestigious science talent competition, 'Sastra Pratibha Contest -2024' (SPC 2024-25) among students of Indian schools in Kuwait, in November.

The annual contest will be held in two phases to select one Sastra Pratibha from each grade IV to X. The first level of the SPC 2024-25 will be held on November 7 (Thursday) at various Indian schools, with the second level scheduled for January 17, 2025 (Friday).

Students from classes four to ten are eligible to register in the categories: sub junior (Classes 4 and 5), junior (classes 6, 7, and 8), and senior (classes 9 and 10). Registrations will be accepted strictly through schools. After the registration process, a question bank based on the prescribed syllabus will be available to students on our website.

SPC Level 1 will consist of an 80-question exam over one hour. It will include 30 questions from the question bank, 30 from the existing syllabus, ten analytical questions, and ten general questions.

### Important dates

Registration deadline: October 12, 2024

Level-1 SPC examination: November 7, 2024

Level-2 SPC examination: January 17, 2025

For updates on SPC Season 9, visit SIF-Kuwait's Facebook page or email sifkwt@gmail.com. Registration is exclusively through schools, with forms available from the second week of September.



# The parade of Olympic and paralympic athletes, final celebration of the Paris 2024 games

*The French Embassy in Kuwait is honored with Kuwait's participation in the Olympic and Paralympic Games and extends its congratulations to all Kuwaiti athletes and para-athletes, who helped make this event a great moment of sporting unity.*

On the occasion of the end of the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the grand Champions Parade will gather Olympic and Paralympic athletes on the Champs-Élysées this Saturday, September 14, 2024.

The massive parade of athletes will also include the Paris 2024 teams (volunteers, security, coaches...) before a ceremony for awarding French medalists – the Legion of Honor and National Order of Merit – at Place de l'Étoile. Finally, a concert will conclude this day of celebrations, for which 40,000 spectators are expected.

This parade marks the final celebration of the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games. A true hymn to the love of sport, these Games have thrilled the world from the arrival of the Olympic flame in Marseille on May 8, until the end of the Paralympic Games at the Stade de France on Sunday, September 8, 2024. The ceremony of July 26, 2024, will remain memorable as the first Olympic opening ceremony held outside a stadium.

These Olympic and Paralympic Games have been marked by inclusiveness and sustainability, with an emphasis on openness, accessibility, and respect for the environment, as 95% of the sports infrastructure was either existing or temporary.

In total, 14,900 athletes and para-athletes



participated in the Olympic and Paralympic events. The Olympic Games were the first gender-equal Games, with 5,250 women and 5,250 men.

These Games stand out for the legacy they leave, with 92 world records broken, including 27 Olympic records and 120 Paralympic records.

These popular Games, with 12,000,000

tickets sold, allowed France and the entire world to experience an unforgettable summer, reminding us of the unifying power of sport.

The French Embassy in Kuwait is honored with Kuwait's participation in the Olympic and Paralympic Games and extends its congratulations to all Kuwaiti athletes and para-athletes, who helped make this event a great moment of sporting unity.

The French Embassy in Kuwait particularly congratulates the Kuwaiti Paralympic medalists, Mr. Faisal Sorour and Mr. Faisal Al-Rajhi.

Mr. Faisal Al-Rajhi brilliantly won the bronze medal in the final of the 5,000 m – T54 wheelchair race, the first Kuwaiti medal at the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games.

Mr. Faisal Sorour had an exceptional journey, reaching the shot put final (F53 category), which he won. This is a historic victory, giving Kuwait its first gold medal in the history of its participation in the Paralympic Games.

Alongside the entire delegation of Kuwaiti athletes, they showcased Kuwaiti sport on the international stage. In a moment of unity around the values of sport, the French Embassy in Kuwait salutes the performance of these two exceptional athletes, who thrilled the audience gathered in large numbers for the occasion and offered a moment of great emotion for all sports lovers.

## Is the world facing a water-security crisis?

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

As a critical component of the global water cycle, green water urgently needs to be better managed. Most dangerously, disruptions to the water cycle are deeply intertwined with global warming and the decline of the world's biodiversity, with each reinforcing the other. A stable supply of green water in soil is crucial to sustaining the land-based natural systems that absorb 25-30 percent of the carbon dioxide emitted from fossil-fuel combustion.

This process represents one of the most significant natural subsidies to the global economy. Yet the loss of wetlands and soil moisture, together with deforestation, is depleting the planet's greatest carbon stores, with devastating consequences for the pace of global warming. Rising temperatures then trigger extreme heat waves and increase evaporative demand in the atmosphere, which severely dries landscapes and heightens the risk of wildfires.

Hence, the water crisis impacts virtually every one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and threatens people everywhere. Insufficient food for a growing world population, an accelerated spread of diseases, and increased forced migration and cross-border conflicts are just a few of the predictable outcomes.

Such a large-scale collective and systemic problem can be fixed only with concerted action in every country and through collaboration across boundaries and cultures. A shared understanding of the common good is crucial. Otherwise, what might look good for one country today could easily create problems for that same country tomorrow, as well as for others around the world.

The situation demands not only greater ambition but also a mission-driven approach to water – one that cuts across multiple sectors and focuses on all levels, from managing local river basins to shaping multilateral cooperation. We can and must succeed on the world's most important water missions:

Launching a new Green Revolution in food systems to cut back on water use while increasing agricultural yields to meet a growing population's nutritional needs. Conserving and restoring the natural habitats that are critical for protecting green water resources.

Establishing a circular water economy in every sector. And ensuring that every vulnerable community has adequate clean and safe water and sanitation services by 2030.

While these missions should drive policy shifts, align the public and private sectors, and spur innovation, they also require new ways of governing. Policymaking must become more collaborative, accountable, and inclusive of all voices, especially those of youth, women, marginalized communities, and the Indigenous Peoples who are on the frontlines of water conservation.

The most fundamental policy shift lies in valuing water properly to reflect its scarcity as well as its critical role in sustaining the natural ecosystems that every society depends on. We must cease the underpricing of water across the economy and the harmful agricultural subsidies that drive unsustainable usage and degrade the land. Rechanneling those funds toward promoting water-saving solutions and providing targeted support for the poor and vulnerable would go a long way.

To fix chronic underinvestment in water, we must reprioritize water infrastructure in public finance, where it is oddly neglected

in most countries. Policymakers can draw on best practices in public-private partnerships to provide fair incentives for long-term commitments, while serving the interests of the public, especially underserved communities.

Given the collective nature of the water challenge, we must ensure larger and more reliable flows of finance to help low- and lower-middle-income countries invest in water resilience. Multilateral development banks, development finance institutions, and public development banks will need to work closely with governments to support national water missions that reflect local needs and ecological conditions. International trade agreements also offer potential levers to promote efficient water use, because they can help to ensure that the 'virtual water' embedded in traded goods does not aggravate scarcity in water-stressed regions.

Just as we are doing for emissions, we must compile high-integrity data on corporate water footprints and create frameworks for water-use disclosure. We must also develop systems for valuing water as part of natural capital. Putting a price on this most critical resource could deliver significant dividends for countries over time.

In short, we must shape markets across our economies — from agriculture and mining to energy and semiconductors — so that they become radically more efficient, equitable, and sustainable in their water use.

The 2023 preliminary report of the Global Commission on the Economics of Water set out the case for pursuing fundamental change in the way the world manages water. Our final report this October will show how we can do so through transformative, collective action.

We are only in 2024. If we do not address

these problems head on, wildfires, floods, and other water- and climate-driven extreme events will only get more intense and deadly in the years to come. Advancing the water-security agenda may seem more difficult amid growing geopolitical tensions, but it presents an opportunity to prove that collaboration can benefit all countries and enable a just and livable future for all. We cannot shrink from this challenge.



**Mariana Mazzucato, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Johan Rockström, and Tharman Shanmugaratnam**

Mariana Mazzucato, *Founding Director of the UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, is Co-Chair of the Global Commission on the Economics of Water.*

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, *Director-General of the World Trade Organization, is Co-Chair of the Global Commission on the Economics of Water, a former finance minister and foreign affairs minister of Nigeria, and a former board chair of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance.*

Johan Rockström, *Director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and Professor of Earth System Science at the University of Potsdam, is Co-Chair of the Global Commission on the Economics of Water.*

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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT



# Confronting Africa's Cost-of-Living Crisis



**Hippolyte Fofack**

A former chief economist and director of research at the African Export-Import Bank, is a Parker fellow with the SDSN at Columbia University, a research associate at the Harvard University Center for African Studies, a distinguished fellow at the Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils, and a fellow at the African Academy of Sciences.

The rising cost of living in Africa has triggered a wave of protests in recent months, underscoring the disproportionately higher economic and social costs of inflation on a continent with persistent widespread poverty and heightened vulnerability to global volatility. The world, it seems, is now living through a tale of two inflations.

Initially, the current inflation cycle — a product of pandemic supply shocks and escalating geopolitical tensions — affected developed and developing countries alike. But inflationary pressures have become less synchronous over time. While price growth has fallen sharply in advanced economies, it remains stubbornly high, and, in some cases, rising, in Africa. And even though inflation in many developed countries is trending down to central banks' 2 percent target, it has hit double digits in nearly one-third of African countries (a ratio that is even higher when excluding CFA franc countries, where the euro peg has contributed to monetary stability).

For example, the annualized inflation rate in Nigeria, one of Africa's largest economies, hit 34 percent — a 28-year high — in May, and is forecast to remain elevated in the second half of the year, largely owing to soaring food inflation, which accelerated to 40 percent. This stands to reduce household purchasing power and raise the risk of food insecurity even more, especially

for Nigeria's growing rank of poverty-stricken and most vulnerable citizens. The country has the world's largest population living in poverty after India. Meanwhile, government reforms to attract foreign investors — including the sharp devaluation of the naira, which has lost 70 percent of its value against the dollar since June 2023 — have only made matters worse for a country that relies heavily on imports of food and other essentials.

In August, protests against the resulting economic hardship spread across several large Nigerian cities. They followed weeks of riots in Kenya against the government's finance bill, which proposed tax hikes on basic goods such as oil, bread, and sanitary pads, even as millions were already struggling to make ends meet. Dozens of demonstrators in both countries were killed during official attempts to quell the uprisings.

Food-price inflation affects low-income households more than their high-income counterparts because they spend a greater portion of their budget on necessities. Consider that food costs account for 16 percent of consumer spending in advanced economies, but around 40 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). This difference in the composition of spending explains the more regressive nature

constraint on shared prosperity — account for roughly 85 percent of total employment on the continent, and these workers must also deal with income volatility and unexpected components of inflation, further tightening the squeeze on households.

Recent research assessing the distributional effects of the inflation cycle on households in the United States found a phenomenon known as 'inflation inequality': prices have risen more quickly for those at the bottom of the income distribution than for those at the top. The spread of protests across Africa suggests that a similar dynamic is at work on the continent, where the disproportionately higher food prices caused by positive exchange-rate pass-throughs have dramatically increased the welfare costs of this inflation cycle.

Government policies have also heightened the cost-of-living crisis. Instead of supporting vulnerable groups through targeted interventions, African governments have indiscriminately raised taxes and cut spending to meet external liabilities. Interest payments on sovereign debt now consume around one-third of Kenya's revenue and more than two-thirds of Nigeria's. In both countries, procyclical fiscal policy and austerity measures have had a knock-on effect on prices, stoking inflation and

by the International Monetary Fund. In Nigeria, the government has announced a 150-day suspension of import duties for certain foods to alleviate the pressure on struggling households.

Nonetheless, more must be done to close the gap between actual and potential growth and expand opportunities for young people. Africa is the world's most natural-resource-rich continent, yet Africans face bleak futures in countries that lack sufficient engineers and political will to transform these resources, create enough well-paying jobs, and expand prosperity. Africa's excessive reliance on imports as an alternative to expanding aggregate output has sustained external imbalances and hollowed out the jobs market, causing more people to fall into destitution.

To meet the aspirations of young populations, African governments should rethink constraints on public spending and overcome the recurrent balance-of-payments crises that have long shaped economic policy across the continent. Increased investment in building a workforce that is fluent in emerging technologies is critical to spurring industrialization. This, in turn, would bolster Africa's manufacturing sector, which in other parts of the world has long served as a social escalator and growth accelerator, catalyzing convergence with high-income countries. The transformation of African economies will also drive the development of regional value chains, bolster intra-African trade (and thus mitigate the region's exposure to global volatility), and build large national buffers to wean the region off debilitating aid dependency.

Africa's policymakers must not only invest in human capital to move their countries up the value ladder in a global economy where technology has become a key driver of growth. They must also strive to equalize access to opportunities and achieve shared prosperity to strengthen the concept of the nation-state and enhance national security. To quote Samora Machel, the first president of Mozambique, "For the nation to live, the tribe must die." For too long, a tribal approach to governance has undermined national development, perpetuating intergenerational poverty and exacerbating inflation inequality.

“ While price growth has fallen sharply in advanced economies, it remains stubbornly high in Africa. While inflation in many developed countries is trending down to a 2 percent target, it has hit double digits in nearly a third of African states. ”

of inflation in SSA, which is home to 60 percent of the world's extreme poor, and why inflation there carries a greater risk of political upheaval.

The lack of formal employment opportunities has also exacerbated Africa's cost-of-living crisis. To be sure, the wages of low-income workers with formal jobs are not keeping pace with price increases. But informal sector activities — a disguised form of unemployment and

worsening the cost-of-living crisis.

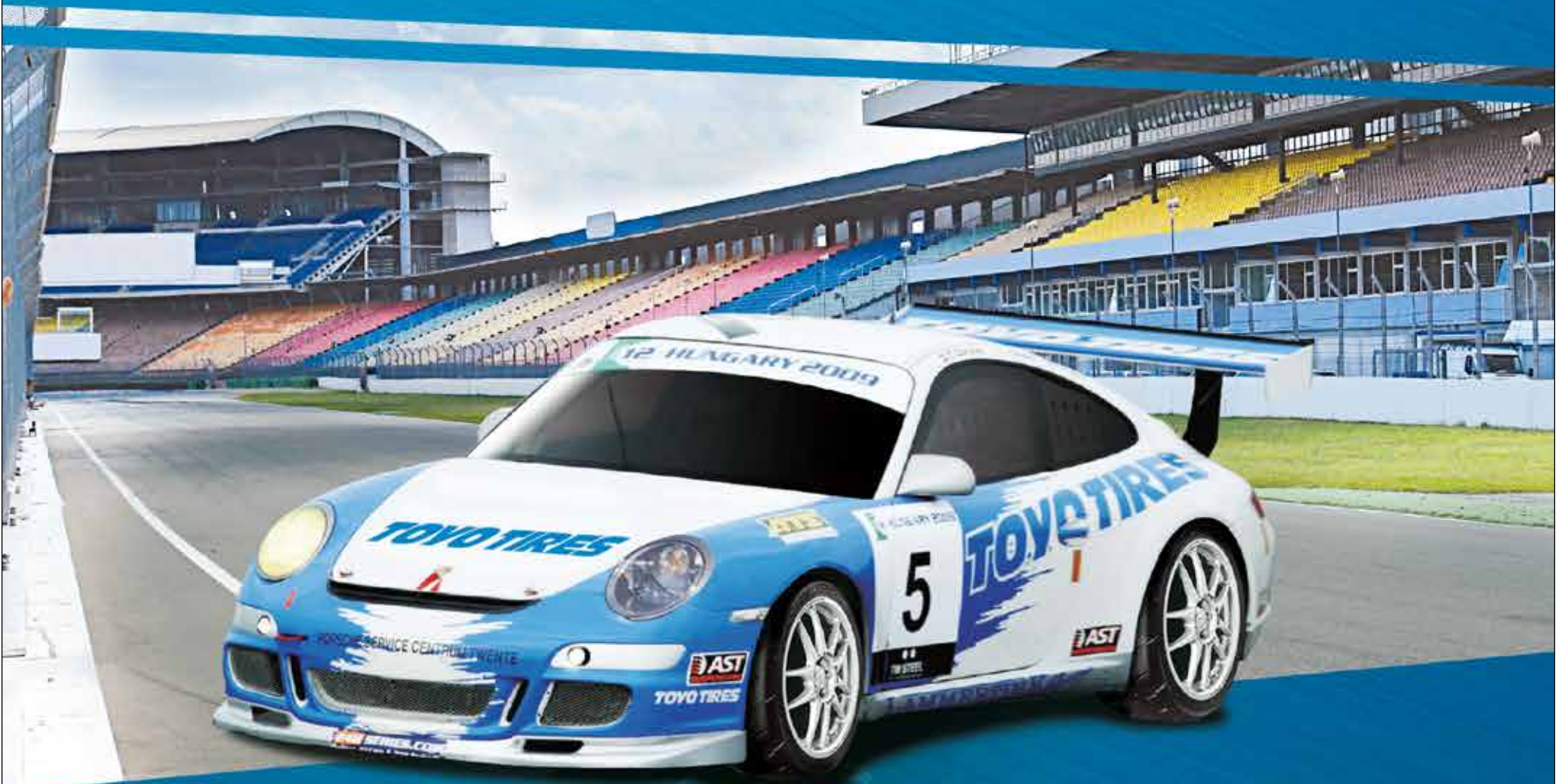
But in response to the protests, governments are reversing some of their procyclical policies or implementing complementary measures to mitigate their impact. Kenyan President William Ruto dismissed his entire cabinet and withdrew the controversial finance bill, which was expected to raise \$2.7 billion in additional revenue to meet fiscal targets set



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# Countries That March Together Should Trade Together



**Todd G. Buchholz**

*A former White House director of economic policy under President George H.W. Bush, and managing director of the Tiger hedge fund, is the recipient of the Harvard Department of Economics' Allyn Young Teaching Prize. He is the author of New Ideas from Dead Economists, The Price of Prosperity, and co-author of the musical Glory Ride.*

Donald Trump and Kamala Harris agree on little, except a disdain for free trade. Ahead of the 2024 US presidential election, Trump has threatened a 10 percent across-the-board tariff on imports, while Harris, whose policy positions remain murky, has indicated that she would follow in President Joe Biden's footsteps with "targeted and strategic tariffs." American politicians' free-trade enthusiasm of the 1980s and 1990s has vanished, and this scares other countries, which know that the United States, despite its wobbles and foibles, remains the world's most attractive trading partner.

Of course, free-trade economists should try to buck the anti-trade wave with facts. But, given the widespread antipathy to globalization, there is a more urgent question at hand: What principle should guide policy?

I propose that countries whose armies march and drill together should trade together, too. Rather than slam the border shut haphazardly,

the US must be able to distinguish good from bad actors on the world stage.

Since the 2008 financial crisis, trade as a share of US GDP has shrunk by about 10 percent. The blunt truth is that America, with its enormous internal market of 335 million people, can weather trade wars and skirmishes better than most other countries. Over the last 15 years, US GDP has outpaced that of every G7 country, leaving even Chinese officials wondering where they have gone wrong.

The anti-globalization narrative seems to treat all foreigners alike, imagining that they are all trying to steal jobs, swipe intellectual property, and take advantage of loopholes. As a result, American trade warriors can get just as worked up over butter and maple syrup from Canada as bomb components from North

assumed that he would do the opposite of what his predecessor had done, including reversing the policies of Trump's US Trade Representative, Robert Lighthizer. Instead, Biden embraced Trump's trade restrictions but with a disregard for national security. In fact, some of his moves are as baffling as they are alarming. For example, Biden hiked tariffs on Canadian lumber and shut down the Keystone pipeline, which would have carried oil from Canada to US refineries. But he relaxed oil-export constraints on Iran and even released \$6 billion in frozen Iranian assets, which the country used to menace US allies through its Hezbollah and Houthi proxies.

The Biden administration's border policy has increased antipathy toward trade. After all, many Americans figure, if the federal

Global trade increases national wealth, so perhaps Americans do not want certain countries to grow richer. Given that trade success can inflame as much as enrichen, a wealthier China may not be in the interest of the US at this time. China's threats to Taiwan, construction of artificial islands in the South China Sea, confrontations with Japan, and overt pledges to dominate the world economy harken back to Nikita Khrushchev's alleged warning, "We will bury you."

Whoever wins the White House in November must create a stronger link between national and economic security. The US is currently vulnerable in many spheres. Precious semiconductor equipment lies in Taiwan, roughly 100 miles from mainland China and within striking range of its Navy's catamarans, not to mention its new aircraft carriers. China and Russia have a head start on hypersonic missiles. Russian and Iranian proxies in the Red Sea and the Strait of Hormuz are disrupting trade with explosive-laden drones, proving themselves to be far more lethal pirates than Johnny Depp's mischievous Jack Sparrow. In the past year, Red Sea commercial traffic dropped by half, with ships instead traveling an extra 6,000 miles around the southern tip of Africa. Supply-chain worries continue to weigh on businesses long after pandemic-era lockdowns ended.

No one needs to be convinced that the world has grown more dangerous. On any given night, newscasts can show missiles launching from Lebanon, Crimea, or North Korea. But it is even more dangerous if US economic policy does not differentiate between enemy fire and friendly competition. Americans should trade with those who march in step with us on battlefields, and in defense of democracy.

“ If the US government did not notice nearly one million migrants crossing the Southern border in 2023, how can it be trusted with 20 million uninspected containers of corrugated steel arriving on ships from who-knows-where? ”

Korea. But the US should be more open to trade with countries with which it maintains close military-to-military cooperation; it conducts dozens of joint training maneuvers with the Canadian armed forces and, of course, none with North Korea. Alongside Canada, countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, Japan, and Germany should be at the top of the list.

When Biden took office, most pundits

government did not notice nearly one million 'got-away' (yes, that's the official term) migrants crossing the Southern border in 2023, how can it be trusted with 20 million uninspected containers of corrugated steel arriving on ships from who-knows-where? If the government cannot mind pedestrians, how can it mind engine pistons marked 'Toronto', which might have originated in Tianjin?





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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

# Tracking Air Quality the Right Way



**Soumya Swaminathan and Christa Hasenkopf**

*Soumya Swaminathan, a former chief scientist of the World Health Organization, is Co-Chair of Our Common Air and Principal Adviser for the National Tuberculosis Elimination Program at India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.*

*Christa Hasenkopf is Director of the Clean Air Program at the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago and a commissioner at Our Common Air.*

Every year, the World Health Organization summarizes global progress on malaria control. It details the number of cases in affected countries, shows year-on-year changes, outlines goals, and assesses the current funding landscape. The United Nations puts out a similar annual report for HIV/AIDS. This regular tracking of serious public-health concerns is essential for addressing them effectively, because it can help channel resources to where they are most needed and identify interventions that are working.

But there is no authoritative, up-to-date global accounting of air pollution, a health risk that takes a larger toll than malaria and HIV/AIDS combined. Particulate matter, a form of air pollution often associated with dust and smoke, was the leading contributor to the world's disease burden in 2021, and has

been found to cut 1.9 years from average life expectancy. Air pollution was also linked to more than 700,000 deaths in children under five years old in 2021, making it the second-highest risk factor for death in this age group.

The world's main authority on air quality is arguably the WHO, which produces globally influential standards for pollution levels. Its most recent guidelines, published in 2021, aimed to improve air-quality standards by lowering the recommended level of fine particulate matter (PM2.5) from ten micrograms per cubic meter to five.

The WHO also compiles data on annual

global progress or to ensure strategic resource allocation.

Satellite-derived data could fill in the gaps. But while several groups generate and compile such information, there is no definitive database. (Anecdotally, when we asked ten air-quality experts where they go for the most recent data, we received 14 different answers, none of which meet the criteria for an authoritative global source.) Moreover, annual data often have a lag of up to two years, and there is no established mechanism to assess their quality. Contrary to its name, calculating satellite-derived air-quality data

incentivizing countries to contribute more recent ground-monitoring data, establishing a process to combine these data with available satellite information to determine their annual pollution levels, and identifying capacity and data gaps and directing resources accordingly.

Global development and philanthropic organizations will have to provide significant financial and human resources to launch such an effort, including support for countries that currently lack the capacity to monitor or measure air quality. It will also require public-health, environmental, and finance leaders to work together, much as they have done to tackle other serious issues such as malaria, HIV/AIDS, COVID-19, and tuberculosis.

Several UN agencies, including the WHO, the World Meteorological Organization, and the UN Environment Programme, could house or coordinate these data-gathering and capacity-building efforts. And institutions such as the World Bank, regional development banks (the African Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank, among others), bilateral donors, and philanthropies must help finance them.

There is a dire need for international collective action to tackle this challenge, which is local, yet has global consequences. The latest report on reporting and tracking air quality, published by Our Common Air, addresses some of the key concerns in the commission's recommendations. We have successfully confronted global health challenges in recent years and, in doing so, created a playbook that can be applied to others. The question now is whether the international community will use it to tackle the world's single greatest external risk to human health.

“ Building a system that regularly tracks collective progress on reducing particulate matter, with built-in mechanisms to help improve data-gathering efforts in the most polluted places, is technologically, logistically, and politically feasible. ”

particulate matter in cities worldwide through its ambient air quality database, which is primarily sourced from government measurements and updated every two to three years. But in the most recent edition (updated in January 2024), only 0.4 percent of cities reported data from 2022, and more than half of the data are at least seven years old. Many countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia — which bear a disproportionate share of the health burden from air pollution — are missing measurements, with four of the most polluted countries reporting none at all. This lack of data makes it impossible to gauge

requires ground monitoring data, which can make satellite data less reliable in countries with little monitoring capacity.

Addressing air pollution worldwide requires a clear view of the global picture. Fortunately, building a system that regularly tracks collective progress on reducing particulate matter, with built-in mechanisms to help improve data-gathering efforts in the most polluted places, is technologically, logistically, and politically feasible.

The first goal should be to create an annual, authoritative accounting of PM2.5 pollution in every country. This would require







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