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Sustaining Biodiversity Vital to Preserving Planet

THE TIMES KUWAIT REPORT

Biodiversity forms the foundation of all life on Earth, it also underpins every aspect of global well-being from supporting the economy, to sustaining food systems and health, as well as combating climate change. Experts warn that the current rate of biodiversity loss worldwide could be a death-knell for the planet, unless we implement effective measures to safeguard and conserve biodiversity.

According to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), biodiversity represents the diversity within species, between species, and in ecosystems, including plants, animals, bacteria, and fungi. It is this diversity and its interactions that create the amazing variety of life on Earth, and keep the global ecosystem in harmony, while providing everything in nature that humans need to survive, including food, clean water, medicine and shelter.



United Nations Biodiversity Summit, COP 16, which is being held in the Colombian city of Santiago de Cali from 21 October to 1 November, aims to raise awareness on the critical role that biodiversity plays in sustaining

life on Earth; ramp up measures to curb wanton destruction of nature by humans; and to revitalize global efforts to protect, preserve, and restore biodiversity in all its forms.

Two years ago, at the COP 15 in Montreal,

Canada, nearly 200 countries signed on to the landmark Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), which called on countries, among others, to protect and preserve biodiversity on 30 percent of their land and marine area by 2030. At COP 15, developed countries also agreed to contribute at least \$20 billion annually from 2025 to help developing countries meet the Framework's goals, with this amount rising to \$30 billion annually by 2030.

Two years from COP15, progress on implementing commitments to, and funding for, the goals of the Biodiversity Framework remains lukewarm and sluggish. According to figures from the UN Biodiversity Secretariat, by the start of COP 16 on 21 October, only 35 out of the 195 signatories to the Framework had submitted their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs). Funding for biodiversity work, at less than \$280 million so far, also falls far short of the \$20 billion promised by 2025.

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Vietnam begins high level engagement with UAE, Qatar and Saudi Arabia

Prime Minister of Vietnam Pham Minh Chinh and a high-level Vietnamese delegation left Hanoi on 27 October on an official visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar, as well as to Saudi Arabia where the delegation will attend the 8th edition of Future Investment Initiative (FII) taking place from 29–31 October.

Visit by the Vietnamese premier to the region comes following invitations by the President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Prime Minister of Qatar Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jasim Al-Thani, and Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia Mohammed Bin Salman.

These are the first official visits to the UAE and Qatar by a Vietnamese PM over the past 15 years, and the first-ever visit to Saudi Arabia since the two countries established diplomatic ties. This also marks the first time the premier has been invited as the chief guest and the only senior leader in Asia to speak at the FII.

The UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are viewed as important, long-term and comprehensive partners in the Middle East for Vietnam in a variety of fields. These three countries also regard Vietnam as a leading and important partner in Southeast Asia, and attach great importance to relations with Vietnam as part of a 'Look East' policy.

Recently, the relations between Vietnam and the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have been growing rapidly and achieving many substantive results, with their increasingly closer coordination and mutual support at multilateral forums.

The UAE represents Vietnam's largest export market in the Middle East and Africa, with last year's two-way trade reaching US\$4.7 billion. In the first seven months of this year alone, Vietnam's exports to the UAE soared by 51 percent relative to the same period last year to reach US\$3.37 billion. The two countries are also negotiating a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), with a view to finalizing the negotiations during the PM's visit.

As of June 2024, the UAE had 41 projects valued at US\$71.6 million in Vietnam, and there were roughly 3,000 Vietnamese workers in the UAE. The two countries share a common awareness of the importance of soon elevating bilateral relations to new heights, commensurate with the potential, economic scale and expectations of both sides.

Saudi Arabia is Vietnam's third largest trading partner in the Middle East and North Africa, with two-way trade standing at US\$2.68 billion in 2023. Major economic groups from Saudi Arabia are increasingly showing an interest in Vietnam, and there are around 4,000 Vietnamese workers in the country.

Meanwhile, Qatar, with its strong potential in energy and finance, provides significant economic and investment opportunities to Vietnam. Two-way trade hit US\$497.2 million



in 2023, up 32 percent from previous year. The Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) has been actively studying and speeding up investment projects, particularly in the fields of real estate and industry in Vietnam. Notably progress has also been seen in education and labor

three countries as well as the whole region.

The visits are viewed as a practical step in carrying out the foreign policy adopted at Vietnam's 13th National Party Congress, which includes the policy of multilateralization, diversification, proactive and

During this visits, the Vietnamese premier will have talks and meetings with all the top leaders, and representatives from investment funds, and major corporations of the three countries in a bid to promote relations in a more comprehensive and effective manner, especially in areas such as market opening, labor, education, culture, sports, tourism, people-to-people exchanges, climate change response, and emerging fields like sci-tech, clean energy, digital transformation, innovation, and the Halal industry.

The premier will also deliver keynote speeches conveying Vietnam's development orientations and foreign policy, not only toward the three countries but also toward the Middle East.

These activities are important for Vietnam and the three countries involved, to enhance mutual understanding, increase trust, strengthen cooperation, and more closely accompany each other in the development journey of each country, as well as in the effort to contribute to promoting peace, stability, and prosperous development in the region and the world.

“Recently, the relations between Vietnam and the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have been growing well, obtaining many substantive results, with their increasingly closer coordination and mutual support at multilateral forums.”

cooperation.

Prime Minister Chinh's visits are expected to provide fresh impetus for traditional cooperation areas, create new breakthroughs in promoting potential areas, and build a firm political trust to pave the way for a new phase of cooperation between Vietnam and the

active international integration. Priority in these policies is given to diversifying markets, partners, and supply chains as a way of continuing to consolidate the peaceful and cooperative environment, and maximizing the attraction of resources for national development.



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Traffic fines to be hiked to ensure adherence to traffic rules

The new traffic law, which is awaiting cabinet approval, will see a dramatic increase in traffic fines for all violations, in a bid to curb reckless driving, reduce the number of fatalities from road accidents and ensure all drivers adhere to prevailing traffic rules and regulations.

In a statement issued to the media last week, the Undersecretary of the Traffic and Operations Sector at the Ministry of Interior, Major General Youssef Al-Khada, said that the new law, reviewed by judicial bodies in Kuwait, was sent by First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yusuf Saud Al-Sabah to the cabinet last week for approval. It would then be referred to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for approval and its publication in the official gazette.

Major-General Al-Khada pointed out that the current law, implemented since 1979, did not represent enough deterrence for violators, with the country witnessing an average of 300 accidents a day, of which nearly 90 percent was due to recklessness and also the use of cell-phones while driving.

He noted that in the revised traffic law, the fine for cell-phone usage while driving would be hiked up from KD5 to KD 75; fine for not wearing seatbelts would be increased from KD10 to KD30, while the fine for reckless driving would be hiked from KD30 to KD150.

The new law would see the fine for racing on public roads increased from KD50 to KD150; the fine for driving run-down vehicles and cars that cause excessive noise would increase from KD10 to KD75; parking in spots dedicated for the disabled would see a fine of KD150 instead of

When the new law becomes effective residents will be allowed to own one vehicle only with the Interior Minister setting guidelines in this regard



the earlier KD10. As per the new law, speeding tickets would increase based on car overspeed and range from KD50 to KD150 from the previous flat rate of KD20

Driving in suspicious circumstances would entail fines based on the driver's condition and is divided into three categories. Category one, includes those attempting to drive or driving under the influence—of drugs or alcohol—would be fined KD3,000 instead of the KD1,000 previously. In addition, violators could face prison time ranging from no less than one year to no more than two years. Category two addressed those who drove under the influence and caused damage to public or private properties. Such violators would face a

fine of no less than KD2,000 and no more than KD3,000, with a possible prison sentence of no less than two years and no more than five years.

Category three includes those driving under the influence and causing injuries or deaths, which would entail a fine of no less than KD2,000 and no more than KD5,000 with a possible prison sentence ranging from no less than two years to no more than five years.

He revealed that article 33 bis of the new law would allow the court to issue its own verdict, or from a request by the Interior Ministry, which would allow for vehicles found in violation to be impounded if the defendants were found guilty of any of the violations such as crossing red traffic light, driving recklessly, going beyond

speed limits. Other violations that could lead to impounding of vehicle include racing on public streets, driving cars (buggies) in areas where the vehicles are not permitted, driving against traffic flow, using hand-held devices while driving, Operating unlicensed motor vehicles without license plates or damaged plates, and using private vehicles to transport passengers for a fee without permit.

He added that as per the new law, article 39 bis, the court would be authorized to replace the penalty of jail-term with other punishments including community service without pay for no more than a year and no more than eight hours of work daily. Perpetrators also may also be sentenced to attend awareness and rehabilitation programs in various bodies according to the sentencing issued.

Major General Al-Khadda also indicated that the article allowed the court to force defendants to pay for damages resulting from the crimes or violations committed, including by permitting legal and security authorities to impose house impounding for violating vehicles until the sentence is served. When ratified, the new traffic law would be published in the official gazette Al-Kuwait Al-Yawm (Kuwait today) and there would be a period of three months to amend Interior Ministry programs and allow for media campaigns before implementing the new regulations.

When asked about the number of licenses in Kuwait, Major General Al-Khadda revealed that there were around 1.9 million licenses in Kuwait and 2.5 million vehicles. He added that the new law would permit residents to own only one vehicle, with the Interior Minister setting guidelines in this regard.



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Kazakhstan firmly on path to progress 35 years after its Independence

Ambassador of Kazakhstan H.E. Azamat Berdybay

The Times Kuwait Report

In a recent interview with The Times Kuwait, Ambassador of Kazakhstan H.E. Azamat Berdybay spoke at length on his country's robust relations with Kuwait in various fields, including in political, economic, and cultural domains.

Ambassador Berdybay began by telling us about the significance of Kazakhstan Republic Day, which is observed every year on 25 October, and the rapid pace of developments in his nation following independence.

"On 25 October, Kazakhstan celebrates Republic Day, a day of unique significance as it marks the turning point in 1990 when Kazakhstan declared its sovereignty. This declaration was more than just a political statement; it marked the country's commitment to its people to determine a destiny that reflected their aspirations and cultural identity. For Kazakhstanis, this day is special; it reminds us all once again, especially in this difficult period of global turbulence, of the value of independence for every citizen.

"Kazakhstan's journey since gaining sovereignty can be considered remarkable. The country quickly adopted a constitution, defined the roles of the President, Parliament, and Government, and has since held several rounds of competitive elections. The last few years have been particularly significant for Kazakhstan. The country has made significant progress towards democratization, exemplified by large-scale political, economic and social reforms.

The country is focusing on industrial and economic self-sufficiency, especially the development of the manufacturing sector and diversification of the economy. The aim is to reduce dependence on imports and to create highly efficient clusters in various sectors. Today, Kazakhstan is the largest economy in Central Asia. Since gaining sovereignty, the country's standard of living has skyrocketed and the quality of health care and education has improved." Expanding on bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and Kuwait, the Kazakh envoy stated: "I am pleased to note that in January, 2025 we will celebrate the 32nd anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Kazakhstan and Kuwait, which took place on 11 January, 1993.

"In this regard, I would like to emphasize that Kazakhstan views the State of Kuwait as one of Kazakhstan's reliable partners in the Middle East and the Arab region.

The convergence of approaches to the key problems of our time makes it possible to develop regular political dialogue and establish constructive interaction in the international arena, including within the framework of the UN, OIC, CICA, OPEC and others.

"The treaty-legal base of Kazakhstan-Kuwait relations today includes more than 20 interstate, intergovernmental and interdepartmental agreements and memorandums. These documents have determined the main content and nature of the development of partnership between the two countries in all areas of mutual interest. "Regular political contacts between the two countries are the key to the consistent development of cooperation between Kazakhstan and Kuwait. At the same time, the established trustful political dialogue between our countries, similarity of positions on many topical issues of the international agenda, and absence of problematic issues in bilateral cooperation, creates a favourable climate for further active development of relations between Kazakhstan and the State of Kuwait.

"In this regard, I would like to highlight the bilateral meeting between the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Murat Nurtleu, and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Kuwait, Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya on 5 March, 2024, in Jeddah City on the sidelines of the Extraordinary Session of the OIC Ministerial Council. During the meeting, substantial and fruitful negotiations took place. A high level of mutual understanding and trust between the countries was confirmed, and the prospects for the development of Kazakh-Kuwaiti cooperation in trade, economic and investment spheres were discussed.

"The parties agreed to continue the implementation of the agreements reached during the meeting between the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and the then Crown Prince of Kuwait His Highness Sheikh Mishaal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, held on the sidelines of the first Central Asia - Gulf Cooperation Council Summit in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in July 2023.

"I am confident that the results of the above-mentioned meetings will give an additional impetus to the further development of comprehensive cooperation between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the State of Kuwait, as well as strengthen friendship and mutual understanding between our countries and peoples."

In reply to a question on economic and cultural exchanges between the two countries, the ambassador noted: "Kazakhstan's desire for progress is also evident in the country's economic history, which has earned it international recognition. With vast reserves of oil, gas, minerals and metals, the country has effectively utilized its natural wealth. Strategic infrastructure developments, attractive foreign investment and diversification initiatives have transformed

Kazakhstan from an agrarian country into a leading economic power in the Central Asian region.

"In the IMD World Competitiveness Ranking 2024, Kazakhstan ranked 35th among 67 countries, up 8 positions compared to 2022. The study evaluates such factors as Economic Performance, Government Efficiency, Business Efficiency, and Infrastructure.

"In the context of the development of trade and economic relations between Kazakhstan and Kuwait, I would like to note the increase in trade turnover from year to year. In particular, trade turnover between Kazakhstan and Kuwait at the end of 2023 amounted to \$3.7 million, including exports from Kazakhstan to Kuwait amounted to \$3 million, and imports to Kazakhstan from Kuwait amounted to \$670,000. The trade turnover for January-August 2024 amounted to \$3.1 million, where exports amounted to \$2.3 million and imports amounted to \$800,000.



"At the same time, in our opinion, the Intergovernmental Agreement on Tax Avoidance and Prevention of Fiscal Evasion with Respect to Taxes on Income, which is expected to be signed in the near future, should give a positive impetus to the development of trade cooperation between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the State of Kuwait. I am confident that we will continue to make efforts and take our interaction with the State of Kuwait to new frontiers in order to further develop cooperation between our countries.

"Speaking of cultural exchange, the Kazakh community in Kuwait is not very large, not more than 100 people. They have all lived in Kuwait for quite a long time and have friendly relations among themselves. Most of them are employed in the oil and education sectors. Since 2008 there has been a student exchange program with Kuwait University, with Kazakh students enrolled in a two-year language learning program at the university's Language Center.

"Also, we are currently concluding an agreement in the field of culture and art exchange between the two countries, which also provides for the exchange of students studying in the field of theatre art. In addition, on the sports side, athletes from both countries actively participate in various sports competitions held both in Kazakhstan and Kuwait, including in judo, karate, bench shooting and fencing. Athletes of our countries always show good results in sports and take prizes at competitions." Elaborating on the opportunities and scope for international investment in Kazakhstan, Ambassador Berdybay pointed out that the Kazakh government is working tirelessly to improve the investment climate in the country to meet the best international standards.

He added, "Firstly, Kazakhstan has created an appropriate legislative framework by signing 49 bilateral and multilateral investment agreements guaranteeing investors' rights. Secondly, the country has developed many platforms for effective communication and resolution of emerging issues. For example, the Foreign Investors Council, chaired by the President, deals with strategic investor issues, while the Investment Climate Improvement Council and the Investment Council under the Prime Minister addresses systemic and current investor issues.

"Since 1993, Kazakhstan has attracted \$441 billion in foreign direct investment, which is evidence of the growing investor confidence in the country. This is the result of specific reforms and initiatives undertaken over the years, including the establishment of the Astana International Financial Centre (AIFC). In 2024, more than 3,000 companies from 82 countries are registered in this financial centre. Since 2018, more than \$12 billion worth of investments have been attracted through the AIFC platform.

"In the ranking of the best markets for investment, compiled by fDi Intelligence, in 2024 Kazakhstan in the category of emerging markets took 6th position in terms of the dynamics of attracting foreign direct investment.

"Since Kazakhstan is the undisputed leader among Central Asian countries due to its positive investment climate and legal protection of investors, the Middle East countries, including Kuwait, are becoming increasingly interested in our country.

Over the past 10 years, the total volume of foreign direct investment from the State of Kuwait in the economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan amounted to \$45.3 million in various sectors, including in agriculture, construction and infrastructure development, trade and retail business.

"In addition, hundreds of capital-intensive projects are being implemented in Kazakhstan, a number of investment projects are also under discussion, and our countries intend to strengthen bilateral economic cooperation in this direction."

Indicating the significant role Kazakhstan can play in enhancing food security in Kuwait, the ambassador stated: "Kazakhstan attaches particular importance to the issue of strengthening food security in the area of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) with a total population of more than 1.7 billion people. That is why Kazakhstan initiated the establishment of the Islamic Organization for Food Security, actively helping to expand the membership of the Organization, and intends to continue work in that direction.

"In 2016, the 7th Islamic Ministerial Conference on Food Security of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation member countries was held in Astana. Within the framework of the conference, the establishment of the Islamic Organization for Food Security (IOFC) was announced. At that time, 31 countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, including the State of Kuwait, became members of the organization.

"In March 2018, the Statutes of the IOFC entered into full legal force. The headquarters of the Organization is located in the capital of Kazakhstan. The main objective of the IOFC is to consolidate the capacities of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation member states in the field of food security. Currently, 41 countries are members of the OIC, of which 18, including Kazakhstan and Kuwait, have ratified the Charter of the organization.

"Today the State of Kuwait is one of the most influential member states of IOFC, actively supporting all programs and initiatives of the organization. IOFC opens prospects for fruitful cooperation between Kazakhstan and Kuwait aimed at improving food security in both countries." Turning to the tourism potential of Kazakhstan, and the increasing number of visitors to his country, Ambassador Berdybay noted that Kazakhstan has a significant tourism potential due to its diverse natural and cultural heritage, as well as a variety of cultural and religious trends, as it is located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. He went on to add, "Due to its unique geographical location, Kazakhstan offers untouched corners of nature in a variety of landscapes. Tourists can visit ancient cities along the Great Silk Road, steppes and lakes of Central Kazakhstan, the world's largest high-altitude complex for winter sports Medeu, modern slopes of Shymbulak ski resort, and the coast of the Caspian Sea—the largest closed water body in the world.

"In addition, in Kazakhstan you can find deserts that can amaze any tourist, the famous Sharyn Canyon in the south of Kazakhstan, as well as forests in the north of the country. Kazakhstan has 13 national parks and 10 reserves located in different parts of the country.

"Kuwaiti citizens can freely visit and stay in Kazakhstan for up to 30 days without visa requirements. Over the last three years there has been an increase in passenger traffic between the two countries due to the launch in December 2021 of a direct flight by Jazeera Airways between Kuwait City and Almaty City. These flights provide an opportunity for thousands of Kuwaitis to visit Kazakhstan."

Speaking about his experiences in Kuwait during his tenure in the country, the ambassador stated, "A trusting dialogue has been established between our countries, our positions are similar on many topical issues and the culture and fundamental values of our peoples are very similar to each other. This creates favourable conditions for any Kazakhstani to stay here.

"The hospitality and openness of the locals gave me a deeper understanding of cultural values such as the importance of family and kinship ties, respect and honoring elders. I was impressed by how important their traditions are to them and how willingly they share them with foreigners.

"From the first day of my life in Kuwait I felt like I was in my native land. I would like to note especially that the Kuwaiti people are very open and friendly; they are always ready to help and share advice. The atmosphere in the country is also very cozy and it is favorable to staying for a long time. Every day I discover something new around me: from the picturesque streets to the great colorful cuisine, especially local traditional cuisine, which surprises me with its variety of flavors."

Italian cultural extravaganza unfolds in Kuwait

The Times Kuwait Report

A spectacular display of Italian cultural dominance in art, design, fashion, food and music is being staged in Kuwait over a nine-day period from 28 October to 5 November. Announcing this during a media briefing at the embassy last week, the Italian Ambassador H.E. Lorenzo Morini said that the series of cultural events being organized are in celebration of his country's National Unity and Armed Forces Day, which falls on 4 November every year.

He clarified that the cultural events come within the framework of the 'A Journey into Italian Creativity' festival, which aims to showcase aspects of Italian cultural excellences in various fields. He added that the festival will feature events that focus on Italian fashion designers, jewelry, artists, food and chocolate makers, in addition to other related elements to clearly present the Italian lifestyle to the Kuwaiti public.

Ambassador Morini further indicated that the festival comes within the framework of strengthening bilateral relations, and supporting and deepening the strong bonds of friendship between the Italian and Kuwaiti people.

Explaining the significance of National Unity and Armed Forces Day, the Italian ambassador said the day celebrates the end of World War I and the liberation of Italy. In addition, the day pays tribute to the Italian Armed Forces in recognition of the Italian soldiers who fought to liberate Italy, and who continue to work for peace and stability in the international community.

Revealing highlights of the nine-day program, the ambassador said that the festival will begin on 28 October with a classical music concert

presented by the 'Filarmonici di Roma', a well-known Italian string quintet, which will present a selection of masterpieces by the most important Italian composers such as Vivaldi, Rossini, Tartini, Pergolesi and Respighi.

He added that the concert, which will be held at the American University of Kuwait (AUK) is open to the public, and free of charge to everyone. He also highlighted that as part of cooperation with AUK, the Italian artists will provide music lessons for interested students.

On the festival's culinary side, the ambassador said that to underscore the premium status of Italian cuisine, several Italian chefs would be demonstrating the cooking of Italian culinary masterpieces and provide lessons on Italian cooking at select Italian restaurants in Kuwait.

The ambassador went on to reveal an art exhibition titled, 'A Dawn of Peace', would be held within the framework of the festival, reflecting Italian-Kuwait cooperation between the artist and calligrapher, Fareed Abdal and Aurora Company, one of the leading Italian companies for producing pens and inks. He added that the exhibition will be held on 4 November at his Residence and will be open to the public.

He also referred to a 'Casa Italia' initiative, which is based on the embassy opening its doors in the incoming months to cultural activities by providing a beautiful space to display artworks, hold exhibitions and workshops. He added that during the event, the Italian language would also be taught to people keen to learn Italian.

Pointing to the cultural commonalities between the two countries, Ambassador Morini said, "When I arrived in Kuwait, I felt like I was in my country because the way Kuwaitis speak, the way they communicate with people, and



the way they receive them is very similar to the Italian way of life."

He added, "We are similar, we live in a very similar way and we all share the same value for the same basic elements of life. This is also the reason why many Kuwaitis travel to Italy every year because when you arrive in Italy, you may not understand the language, but Italians will understand you and you will understand them immediately."

Elaborating on other cultural interactions between Italy and Kuwait, the Italian envoy pointed out that there are two Italian archaeological missions working in Kuwait, one from the University of Perugia that works on Failaka Island and the other from the University of La Sapienza that is starting a new project this year in the coastal area north of Kuwait City. He also noted that around 160 Kuwaiti students have gone to study in Italian universities during the last five years. Adding that this number is not

enough, the ambassador indicated that many Kuwaiti students do not realize that there are several prominent Italian universities that offer full courses in English language.

In response to a question about Italy's vision of the situation in the region, he said that dialogue is the only way out and an effective solution, and added, "We are fully convinced that the basis for resolving the current situation is to de-escalate the conflict, and after that, we can find a long-term solution within the framework of the UN Charter and resolutions."

He went on to note, "We have more than 1,000 soldiers serving in the UN Interim Force in Lebanon, and we will not leave until the UN resolutions are implemented. We have repeatedly called for de-escalation in the region with our European partners and also the G7 partners." The ambassador also highlighted the presence of approximately 400 Italian soldiers in Kuwait within the framework of the anti-Daesh coalition, and said that they are monitoring the situation in the region. He called on all parties to refrain from any action or activity that could be harmful to the stability and unity of the region, and added, "We are ready to do everything we can, but always within the framework of international law, the United Nations and UN resolutions."

He pointed out that there is coordination with the Kuwaiti side in terms of monitoring the area, as the Italian forces have a surveillance system that they use to monitor the coalition's area of jurisdiction. He added, "We work in full coordination with the Kuwaiti army, especially the air force, as we are working with them on training Eurofighter pilots, and supplying Kuwait with Eurofighter jets."

Crime rates drop due to intensified security campaigns

Director General of Ahmadi Security Directorate, Brigadier General Mohammed Rajab, confirmed in a media meeting that the recent security campaigns across the country have played a significant role in reducing the crime rate.

Brigadier Rajab added, "Under the instructions and directives of the First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Interior, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef, as well as the Undersecretary of the Ministry, Lieutenant General Sheikh Salem Al-Nawaf, and the Undersecretary of the Public Security Sector, Major General Hamad Al-Munafi, security



campaigns were recently conducted across the Al-Ahmadi Governorate. These efforts included 271,000 activities, such as organizing checkpoints, arresting criminals, apprehending residence law violators, detaining wanted individuals, addressing traffic violations, and impounding vehicles that violated traffic laws."

He added that "the campaigns carried out by the Ministry of Interior across its various sectors aim to uphold the law and maintain order in the country. The continuation and intensification of these security campaigns have contributed to a decrease in the crime rate, especially following the development of a

strategy for positioning these security points and selecting areas with a high number of violations. He noted that the success of the campaign can be attributed to cooperation among various sectors of the ministry.

He pointed out that "some sudden security campaigns in certain areas are prompted by the high volume of security reports. For instance, we have a neighborhood where many expatriates reside, some of whom violate the residence law or are wanted, while others engage in unregulated markets. However, we are monitoring the situation closely. He added, "Our campaigns are always comprehensive, focusing on negative phenomena in any region within the Al-Ahmadi Governorate."

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Plenty of opportunities to deepen ties between Czechia and Kuwait

Ambassador of the Czech Republic H.E. Juraj Chmiel

By Reaven D'Souza
Executive Managing Editor

In a recent exclusive interview with The Times Kuwait, Ambassador of the Czech Republic H.E. Juraj Chmiel spoke at length about relations between his country and Kuwait in various domains, and the prospects for strengthening people to people ties, and increasing the volume of bilateral trade and tourism. He also eloquently described the many amazing travel and tourism experiences that await visitors to Czechia, and invited everyone to pay a visit to his country.

He began by expanding on the strong ties between the two countries, "I can proudly say that the Czech-Kuwaiti relations are based on a solid foundation starting from the year 1961, and next year will mark 60 years since the opening of the Czechoslovak Embassy in Kuwait. Strong and friendly political ties were seen especially during the 1990-91 period, when 200 soldiers from the Czechoslovak Chemical Unit were deployed here to help Kuwait against the Iraqi occupation. More recently, the Czech Secretary of State from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs visited Kuwait last year and held high-level discussions. Other high ranking mutual visits are also in the pipeline.

"Nowadays, besides ties at the political and diplomatic level, our relations are based increasingly on people-to-people interactions, as well as on medical tourism and business ties. Thousands of Kuwaiti citizens are visiting Czechia each year. They mostly spend their time in famous thermal baths and medical spas, with a few Kuwaitis even owning some of these spas. They know very well cities and places like Prague, Karlovy Vary, Františkovy Lázně, Mariánské Lázně, Teplice, Darkov or Český Krumlov. But Czechia is not only about spas, we have plenty of ancient castles, beautiful rivers, lakes, dams, caves, mountains, excellent dishes and other attractions for visitors.

"Talking about nature and lifestyle, nearly everything can be found in Czechia: from wild nature including peat bogs in the Šumava National Park in the south of the country, to the ski slopes all over Czechia. You can go fishing in rivers, brooks and fishponds, or climb mountains, go hiking or skiing. One interesting thing about Czechs: as a people we are passionate mushroom pickers! If you are not a fan of mushrooms, you can just wander in the depth of forests, or hire a boat and go sailing.

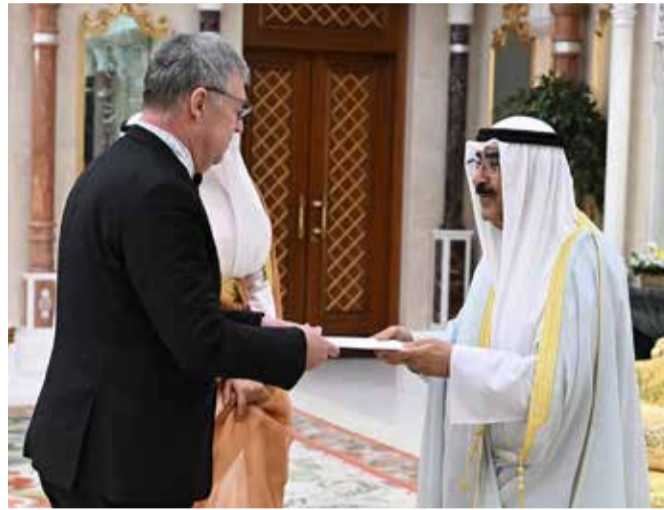
"Or maybe you are not a nature lover and prefer to visit some industrial sites? Why not! Czechia is the most industrial country in Central Europe. Coal mining history in Czechia is really rich; mostly around the town of Most and in the country's the third biggest city of Ostrava. You can also snuggle in the shadows of many towns and cities and explore their tiny historical streets, vast range of museums of all kinds or visit one of many music festivals and/or art galleries. Some of the most famous composers and writers were born here, for example Bedřich Smetana and Franz Kafka. We truly have everything; everything, but the sea and the desert, but we do have a few sand dunes.

"Our country is rich not only in culture and nature, history can also be felt everywhere you go, especially in the capital Prague. Our beautiful country is located in the very heart of Europe - just next to Germany, Poland, Austria and Slovakia. With Slovakia, we created Czechoslovakia in 1918 but then we were occupied by Nazis from 1938 to 1945, and from 1948 to 1989 we were under influence of the Soviet Union, and was even invaded by the Soviets and their satellites in 1968. The last Soviet soldier left in 1991, less than two years after the Velvet revolution in 1989. In 1992 the Czechs and Slovaks decided to peacefully separate and two independent states were created in 1993—Czechia and Slovakia."

Elaborating on economic and trade relations between the two countries, the ambassador noted: "On the economic side, Kuwaitis might know Czech brands such as Skoda, Lasvit—the large chandelier in the Assima Mall, which is even in the Guinness Book of Records as the biggest one in the world and, in my opinion, also the most beautiful one, is made by Lasvit. If I were to mention one more popular Czech product, it would be Marlenka, the traditional honey cake.

"I am pleased that our trade relations have also developed dynamically. Our trade volumes have been on the rise for the last few years. In the first half of this year, the bilateral trade exchange volumes already reached values of 2023 and it will, most probably, double by the end of this year. I am glad to see that Czech made Skoda cars have become more and more popular. Last November, ŠKODA Auto opened a new fully-digitized showroom in Kuwait. And, not a well known fact, but there is another Czech car in the market, the Hyundai Tucson. But how is a Korean car Czech, you might ask; because it is manufactured in my country. I am also proud that our Czech company DEKONTA is helping to effectively remediate the decontaminated soil in the oilfields, as part of Kuwait Oil Company's KERP-UNDP project.

"In the cultural field, or people to people diplomacy, I would



like to highlight the rich Czech history and our culture closer to the people living in this beautiful country. During my tenure I would like to continue the road shows, focusing on various aspects of Czechia. We plan to shortly introduce our most famous tourist attractions, a lot of them are listed as UNESCO sites, as well as our beautiful mountains, forests, rivers, lakes, historic towns, and achievements in the field of sciences, culture, sports etc through these shows, or exhibitions.

"Definitely I would also like to introduce the renowned Czech writer Franz Kafka to the Kuwaiti public, since many of his books were translated into Arabic, as well as more music from the famous Czech old and modern composers, such as Dvořák, Smetana, Janáček and others. Incidentally, we also have several Nobel Prize winners and Oscar movie winners who are Czech. Our animation movie studios are also acclaimed around the world.

"I would like to mention here that I have studied African and Oriental Studies. Despite my primary focus on African studies I also learned a lot about history and culture of the Gulf states. Already at that time I admired the bravery of the Kuwaiti merchant sailors and pearl divers and fell in love with Kuwait's rich past. In cooperation with the institutions in Kuwait and the Kuwaiti Embassy in Prague, I would love to make Kuwait's admirable history and culture more known in Czechia."

Turning to investments in his country, Ambassador Chmiel noted: "We have a lot of private Kuwaiti investments, for example in real estate in Prague, or in the spa areas, as Czechia offers wonderful green spaces, forests, mountains, historical cities, natural resources, excellent cuisine and shopping opportunities. Besides investments in real estates, Czechia also offers a broad spectrum of interesting investment in venture capital, focusing on new technologies, IT, cybersecurity, research in the medical or energy sector. Czechia is traditionally one of the most industrialized countries within the European Union and its educated people represent a great bond for future development and investment. Czechia is also well known as



a very secure and stable country offering attractive investment and business opportunities and climate. Our two countries also have a bilateral Investment Treaty, which helps a lot.

"On the diplomatic front, as I already mentioned, high level official visits and meetings are in the pipeline. For instance, a 'Bilateral Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation' focusing on energy and other prospective sectors will be signed at the first convenient occasion by representatives of the Ministry of Finance of the State of Kuwait and Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic. Based on this Agreement, a Joint Intergovernmental Commission, which meets regularly in Prague and in Kuwait, will be established. Political consultations will be held next year in Prague. Building on this solid foundation, I believe that we can further develop the existing bilateral ties and economic cooperation between our two friendly countries.

"In addition, there are lots of space to deepen the ties between Czechia and Kuwait in business, culture and diplomacy and I, with my Embassy team, will be happy to be part of that. More specifically I would like to see closer cooperation in the areas of energy, defense, health and education sectors, as well as in cybersecurity. These areas were also identified as the priority by His Highness the Amir, during presentation of my credentials to His Highness We can also cooperate in food security and food safety, waste-management, as well as in agriculture sectors focusing, for example, on irrigation, portable water production and others. Also, in the field of education we highly appreciate the scholarships given out by the Kuwaiti Government to study the Arabic language, and currently we have three students studying Arabic at the Kuwait University. And yes, we also have students from Kuwait in our Universities.

"I am glad that now in summer Czechia is even more accessible to people from Kuwait, thanks to direct flights initiated by Jazeera Airways this season. With direct flights, three times a week to Prague and the flight taking just five hours, there is every reason to visit Czechia this summer. Such direct flights help to better develop people-to-people relations, as well as, business and investment cooperation opportunities, especially if these direct flights between our capitals can be operated throughout the year. We plan to support this by means of a targeted project of economic diplomacy co-organized by the Czech Tourism agency."

Stressing the areas of priority and focus during his tenure here in Kuwait, the Czech ambassador said: "Briefly, we will be looking at closer cooperation on political level, and a focus on cooperation in energy, health, education, defense, including cybersecurity and agriculture sectors, waste management. We would also love to see all year round direct flights between Prague and Kuwait City, as well as more intense cultural exchanges."

On a personal note, Ambassador Chmiel revealed that he initially was in the academic field engaged in historical research before deciding to transition to diplomacy. "Prior to joining the state service in 1992, I was working in the Slovak Academy of Sciences as researcher on the history of sub-Saharan Africa, which included a scholarship at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London and several field trips to Ethiopia. I then decided to join the state service, and during my time in the foreign service I was engaged in various capacities, starting as desk officer in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and later occupying the post of director, and acting director-general in other Government offices.

"This is my fifth Ambassadorial posting. I was in Nigeria, Australia, Hungary and in Slovenia, before being appointed to Kuwait. Despite this wide experience, I am most proud about three positions in my career so far. First, as Political Affairs Officer during the UN operation in Somalia (UNOSOM 1993-1994), then as Minister for European Affairs in the Government of the Czech Republic (2009-2010), and during my service as Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Agriculture (2010-2011).

"I also never fully abandoned my research career, and have continued to publish books, as well as scientific and popular articles. In addition, I like to lecture about various topics, including the Czech Republic and the EU in the globalized world, roots of migration, renewable sources of energy, and other topics, all of which are interestingly, interconnected.

"Last, but not least, I have to admit, despite being in the country for just a few months, I have already fallen in love with Kuwait. I was first here around 20 years ago for just a few days, but even back then, I told myself that I must return here for a longer period. And not only because of my education background, but because of the radiating aura, which I felt then and can feel it every day now.

"Whenever it is possible, I would like to travel to the desert areas of Kuwait, or walk on the beaches, or simply sit in the restaurants and observe life around me. I also look forward to visiting the museums and other places of cultural heritage here. And one more secret I will divulge; I love the very hot, but very dry weather here in Kuwait, so especially the summer months here are perfect for me."

US embassy holds gala celebration to mark 248th Independence Day



Embassy of the United States of America held a gala celebration at the embassy premises to commemorate the 248th anniversary of independence of the United States. The event which is marked every year on 4 July was celebrated on 23 October in better weather conditions and a larger inclusion of guests.

Over 1,500 guests were treated to mouth-watering delicacies, which also gave the guests an opportunity to experience American hospitality.

A dazzling display of fireworks and live music were the highlight of the evening giving a sense of the 4th of July celebrations held in the US every year. Ambassador of the United States H.E. Karen Sasahara expressed jubilation at the event adding that the night was all



about people having a good time by meeting, greeting and reconnecting with each other.

She also spoke about the special relations that the US has with Kuwait and stressed on wanting to remain a very good partner with



Kuwait, and to continue working together and moving forward.

She pointed out that the US commitment to Kuwait is pretty well documented and that they have a significant military presence here, and

added that it is the fourth largest presence of US troops outside of the United States.

Ambassador Sasahara further pointed out that the US would remain a strategic partner for Kuwait in a variety of domains, especially security, which reflects the firm US commitment to Kuwait's security and sovereignty.

Regarding the cultural relations, Ambassador Sasahara said that thousands of Kuwaiti students studied at and graduated from American universities and have returned home to effectively contribute to the development of their country.

The celebrations saw diplomats, businessmen, academics, media and a various cross section of the community come together and enjoy an evening of camaraderie and American hospitality.

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Diwali celebrations among global Indian community

THE TIMES KUWAIT REPORT

Celebrations marking Diwali, the Indian Festival of Light, is a high-point in the socializing and entertaining calendar in India, and among the Indian diaspora worldwide.

Diwali is celebrated with fun, festivities and religious traditions by global Indians living in south-east Asia, as well as in such far-flung countries as Guyana, on the north-eastern coast of South America, to Caribbean nations and island-states lying in the South Pacific and Indian Oceans. Diwali is also celebrated in countries across Africa where generations of Indians have long settled, and by the millions of migrant diaspora that have sought jobs and livelihood in countries lying in the Far-East, Middle-East, in Europe, and in the US and Canada.

The five-day festival of Diwali, which has traditional, religious, social and historical connotations attached to it, differs based on the celebrants, and though it has acquired a more mercantile aspect in recent times, the spiritual relevance of Diwali remains the same and has abided over the ages. The Festival of Light continues to symbolize the universal power of light to uplift, guide, and lead people along the righteous path.

The festival epitomizes the conquest of light over darkness, of good over evil, and on a more individual level, the eradication of ignorance with the light of knowledge. This eternal aspect of Diwali is what makes the festival so popular and is the reason it has prevailed for nearly three millennia on the Indian subcontinent and wherever Indians have made their home.

While in India Diwali is an unfettered celebration of the joy of life and marked by a profusion of riotous colors, aromas and sounds emanating from every quarter, it tends to be observed in a more subdued manner in countries populated by Indian communities, and in places where Indian expatriates live and work. No matter how it is commemorated, there is no denying the spirit of joie de vivre that the Festival of Lights spreads in the hearts



and minds of Indians everywhere.

Generations of Indians abroad have marked Diwali with festive and religious traditions, and shared the joy of the festival with the exchange of sweets and gifts among relatives, friends and colleagues. For the expatriate Indian community, Diwali is a celebration that reflects their longing to share the occasion with their near and dear ones back home. It is also a way to keep in touch with their roots, and to join friends, kith and kin in celebrating the rich culture and heritage of India.

However, in recent times, there has been a gradual but noticeable erosion of interest in Diwali as well as other traditional festivals among many young Indians overseas, engaged as they are in their own busy daily schedules. Many do not seem to share the sentiments of their parents' generation and appear to have no time for the rituals and rites associated with the festival.

Most young adolescent expats who probably were born and raised in a foreign environment, and have only made an occasional brief foray

back home to India during holiday breaks, have no resonance with the cultures and traditions of a country that many find and consider alien. Many of these youngsters have only a fuzzy idea of the culture and heritage of India, and often have difficulty in balancing the culture of their forebears with prevailing norms in the urban culture they grew up in, and in the foreign land that many have come to consider their true home.

But prevailing unsettling times, of geopolitical crises, global pandemics, and economic upheavals, have driven home the fleeting nature of our lives and livelihoods, and how dependent we are on communities and social interactions. The importance of our roots and our connections are never more poignantly accentuated than during times of global crises. Knowing and acknowledging that we have a country and people to fall back on in the worst case scenario, is often the only bright spot when a situation grows increasingly bleak.

Importance of the land of our ancestors that always remains open and welcome to us, should be reason enough for the younger generations to familiarize themselves with their roots, their cultures and traditions. The Festival of Light this year could be the right time and opportunity to revive and give a restart to relations with our native land and its culture.

The festival presents us with an occasion to immerse ourselves in the beauty and grandeur of Indian culture and heritage. It also provides us with a chance to experience the tantalizing tastes of traditional dishes and delicacies prepared during the festival period. But, most importantly, it delivers us with a golden opportunity to imbue the sense of community and friendship that is fundamental aspect of our Indian values.

So this Diwali, even if you do not like to consider yourself an 'Indian', go light up your house, don bright clothes, the brighter the better, and go have fun with other Indians and other expatriates, while remembering to take along a gift of Diwali delicacies to share with them.



'LuLu Wali Diwali 2024' lights up Kuwait with dazzling offers and festivities



LuLu Hypermarket, the regional retail giant, has kicked off its highly anticipated 'LuLu Wali Diwali 2024' celebrations across all its outlets in Kuwait, transforming its stores into a hub of cultural festivities, exciting offers, and lively competitions, and ensuring that customers can fully immerse themselves in the Indian Festival of Lights.

The Diwali promotion offers, which commenced on 23 October and runs until 5 November, provides shoppers with fantastic deals on a wide range of products, including namkeen, sweets, clothing, diyas, lights, and home decor.

The official opening ceremony of 'LuLu Wali Diwali' was held on 26 October, at the LuLu Hypermarket in Al Rai, where the top management ignited the festive spark by lighting the ceremonial lamp, setting the stage for two weeks of joyful



celebrations. Opening day was filled with excitement, featuring a lineup of special Diwali activities, including the Diwali Rangoli Competition, Diwali Sweets Making Competition, traditional cultural performances, against the background of energetic beats from a live Bhangra band.

First, second and third prize winners of the Rangoli and Sweets Making competitions will take home prestigious prizes, while every participant will be able to celebrate with consolation prizes for their efforts.

Beyond the competitions, all outlets feature Diwali-themed selfie counters, inviting shoppers to capture their festive memories against beautifully adorned backdrops. Every LuLu store has also been meticulously decorated to reflect the joy of Diwali, creating a unique shopping experience for all.



LuLu's special Diwali sweet counters, available across all locations, offer a wide assortment of traditional Indian delicacies, perfect for the season. Additionally, exclusive discounts are available on gifts, including LuLu Shopping Gift Cards with festive Diwali-themed holders, which are an ideal gift to share the joy of the festival with loved ones.

LuLu Hypermarket's Diwali celebrations are supported by the renowned Indian fashion accessory brand, Titan, which displayed its high end accessories including its eponymous watches.

Celebrate this Diwali with LuLu Hypermarket, where unbeatable offers, exciting competitions, and heartwarming festivities come together to make this season truly unforgettable.

Diwali, symbolic of our inner light, helps enlighten lives

Diwali, or the Festival of Lights, celebrated widely across the Indian subcontinent and among Indian communities worldwide, embodies the inner light within all of us and symbolizes the triumph of light over darkness, hope over despair, good over evil, and knowledge over ignorance.

Diwali, or the Festival of Light is one of the most vibrant and widely celebrated festivals across the Indian subcontinent and among Indian communities worldwide. The festival, also known as Deepavali in some Indian states, is celebrated over five days during the Hindu lunisolar month of Kartik, which corresponds to mid-October and mid-November each year. In the Indian subcontinent, Diwali coincides with, and is analogous to, various other religious, spiritual, and historical celebrations marked by different communities, cultures, and religions in the region.

Besides Diwali among Hindus, the festival is celebrated in various forms and names by Jains, Sikhs, and Newar Buddhists in Nepal, as well as by many tribal cultures in the northeastern states of India. For Hindus in India and around the world, the celebration of Diwali has religious connotations that vary based on regional and local interpretations of myths and legends

from the Indian epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata.

While the religious aspect of Diwali is the highlight of the festival for Hindus, it is the historical and sacred aspects, along with the spiritual implications of the festival, that take center stage for Sikhs and Jains.

For adherents of the Jain faith, Diwali venerates the attainment of 'Moksha'—the highest and noblest objective of the soul—achieved in the 6th century by Lord Mahavira, the 24th and last 'Tirthankar' or spiritual leader of the Jains. Meanwhile, the Sikh community worldwide celebrates Diwali as 'Bandi Chhor Divas' or Day of Liberation, commemorating the release from imprisonment of their sixth Guru and leader, Guru Hargobind ji, by Mughal invaders in the 17th century. In Nepal, it is celebrated as Tihar or Swanti by Buddhists, especially Newar Buddhists in the Kathmandu Valley.

In India, the origin of Diwali can be traced back to the ancient period when it was celebrated during the Hindu calendar month of Karthik as an important harvest festival. Over time, various legends and myths from the Hindu epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata were woven into these agrarian celebrations. Today, Diwali is celebrated among Hindus in different regions based on the religious legends they believe in.

In some places, Diwali celebrates both the birth and marriage of the Goddess Lakshmi to Lord Vishnu; in Bengal, the festival is dedicated to the worship of Divine Mother Kali, the Goddess of strength. Lord Ganesha, the elephant-headed God and symbol of auspiciousness and wisdom, is also worshiped in many Hindu homes on this day.

For many Hindus, Diwali commemorates the return of Lord Rama as king of Ayodhya in Northern India, along with his wife Sita and brother Lakshman, after a 14-year-long exile during which he vanquished the demon king Ravana. In joyous celebration of their king's return, the people of Ayodhya, the capital of Lord Rama's kingdom, illuminated the town with earthen diyas (oil lamps) and burst firecrackers.

The word Diwali comes from a fusion of two Sanskrit words: Dipa or Deepa, meaning 'light' or 'lamp', and Awali, meaning 'a row', 'a series', or 'a line'. In many parts of India, the festival is celebrated by lighting rows of small earthen oil lamps called diyas, which symbolize the driving away of darkness. In other regions, the Festival of Lights marks the start of a new year in the Hindu calendar.

Beyond its religious, cultural, and historical significance, and despite the contextual differences in its celebration, to people across the



vast subcontinent Diwali remains symbolic of the inner light that guides us throughout our lives. The festival resonates with the message of the

ultimate victory of light over darkness, hope over despair, good over evil, and knowledge over ignorance.

Light is one of the oldest and most significant enduring symbols in the evolution of mankind, carrying different spiritual, mystical, and metaphorical connotations in various cultures and religions around the world. Notions and symbolisms of light have influenced centuries of philosophical speculation and given rise to a host of religious and philosophical theories over the ages.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14



- Diwali, or Deepavali as it is known in some Indian states, is celebrated over five days during the Hindu lunisolar month of Kartik, which corresponds to mid-October and mid-November each year.
- For Hindus in India and around the world, the celebration of Diwali has religious associations that vary based on regional and local interpretations of myths and legends from the Indian epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata.
- The five-day-long festival has become almost synonymous with shopping frenzies, bargain offers, and special discounts, as well as an occasion for socializing and entertaining among family and friends.



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Kuwait development plan 2023-24 receives significant update

A new follow-up report on Kuwait's development plan for the period 2023-24, issued recently by the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development shows 55 new public policies integrated into its ambitious development program. 35 of which will be activated through 130 supporting projects.

One particularly significant project initiative in the program is to build new international economic zones, and to institute an independent governance and oversight mechanism in the management of the economic zones.

Another aspect of the plan is activating the legislative and regulatory frameworks for privatization of several government entities, in adherence to the Vision 2035, New Kuwait Development Plan. The privatization program aims to increase citizens' partnership in specific public sector undertakings.

The policy is reportedly directly linked to the North Shuaiba Station project, which has reached a completion rate of 51 percent. The plan to privatize 'Northern Shuaiba' has been in the offing for years and is expected to transform the role of the government from operator and producer, to regulator and monitor of the project.

Privatization is also meant to provide the private sector the opportunity to own, operate and manage the facilities and production units in order to improve their production efficiency in a way that serves the general economy of

the country, and enhance the dynamics of the private sector.

The follow-up report on the ambitious development plan also referenced the program titled 'Strengthening a Dynamic Private Sector' under which five policies were activated by the end of the last quarter of 2023-2024. These policies are related to 17 development projects implemented through nine government entities, including one project in the delivery stage, seven in the implementation phase, and nine in the preparation stage.

The report also highlighted five activated policies, the most significant of which focuses on developing large-scale, highly efficient productive economies through the enhancement of economic priority sectors. This includes the Al-Zour Refinery Project by the Petroleum Corporation, which is in the handover stage with a completion rate of 99.9 percent.

Additionally, the program 'Reforming the Systems of Providing Health Care Services and Adopting Modern Treatment Technology and Techniques' encompasses ten policies, including the completed project 'New Maternity Hospital', six projects in the executive phase, and three others in the preparatory phase.

The development plans also included the program 'Providing Environmentally Harmonious Living Areas', which comprises five policies, four of which were activated in the annual plan 2023-2024 with 14 development projects implemented



through six government entities.

Among the most important of these projects are initiatives to increase the percentage of energy production from renewable sources and improve the solid waste management system. The completion rate for the first project reached eight percent, while the project 'Rehabilitating Waste Backfill Sites' is at about 57 percent, and the 'Converting Solid Waste into Dry Fuel' project has a 20 percent completion rate.

According to the report, the development plan includes another program titled 'Promoting the Health and Well-Being of All', under which the Ministry of Health oversees eight projects, the most significant of which focus on improving the general health of young people, combating drug use, increasing the number of healthy cities, and promoting individual health, which currently

has a completion rate of 85 percent.

The Supreme Planning Secretariat periodically monitors the Kuwaiti development plan, which is based on seven fundamental pillars supported by detailed technical data and reports. These pillars have been formulated to work together to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, including the creation of human capital that aligns with international indicators, and an effective government department aimed at reforming public administration systems while enhancing transparency, accountability, and the effectiveness of the government apparatus.

In addition, the plan includes a 'Sustainable diversified economy', which aims to empower the private sector, promote industries, utilize advanced technologies, and create highly efficient infrastructure that meets international standards.

The vision of 'New Kuwait 2035' seeks to transform the country into a regional and global financial and commercial hub that attracts investment, with the private sector leading economic activity. It aims to achieve human development, enhance the spirit of competition, and improve production efficiency, all under a supportive institutional framework that reinforces national values, preserves social identity, and fosters human development, while providing the appropriate infrastructure for a conducive and developed business environment.



IWG conducts walkathon to highlight Breast Cancer Awareness Month

In a powerful display of solidarity for breast cancer awareness, the International Women's Group (IWG) hosted a lively walkathon at Boulevard Park on 20 October. The event united women from various backgrounds to promote awareness about breast cancer as part of the global Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October, highlighting the critical importance of early detection and support in the battle against the disease.



Participants were welcomed with brochures and gifts from medical centers and participating companies, promoting breast health education. The event began with a warm welcome from IWG President Polina Dalmini, followed by a ribbon-cutting ceremony in the presence of the

ambassadors of Turkey and UN Habitat.

Dr. Hessa Al-Shahin from the National Cancer Awareness Campaign (CAN) delivered a compelling speech on the importance of regular screenings and early detection, emphasizing, "Breast cancer touches many lives, but early detection and regular check-ups can make all the difference."

A touching survivor story was shared with attendees, followed by an engaging Q&A session led by Mrs. Dalmini, which provided key facts about breast cancer. Before concluding the program, Mrs. Dalmini distributed nine shields to honor the contributors and partners whose support was instrumental in making the event possible.

Trainer and breathing specialist Yasmeen Alabduljader then led a warm-up session before the walk began, with walkers embarking on either a 1-kilometer or 2-kilometer walk, with a golf cart available for those needing assistance.

The event was a powerful reminder of the importance of breast cancer awareness and the role of early detection. With support from the community and sponsors such as CAN and Warba Medical Supplies Company, the IWG walkathon stood as a testament to the unity and strength of women working together for a healthier future.

ALSAYER Group Wins Arabia CSR and Sustainability Award

Mohamed Naser Al Sayer & Sons EST.CO has achieved the Winner place in 2024 Social Responsibility and Sustainability Award in the automotive category in the Arab countries. This achievement reflects the commitment to social responsibility and sustainability and the determination to make a positive impact on society and the environment.

The Arabia CSR and Sustainability Award has gained credibility, respect and recognition by integrating international standards and principles such as the 10 Principles of the United Nations Global Compact, the Global Investors Alliance for Sustainable Development (GISD), the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) standards framework, the Business Excellence Model (EFQM), and the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Mr. Hamad Musaed Al-Sayer, representative of ALSAYER Group, received the prestigious award during the award ceremony held recently at the Sheraton Dubai Creek Hotel & Towers.

The Arabia CSR Network is a beacon of sustainability in the Arab region and has been instrumental in setting regional standards for social responsibility and sustainability best practices. The requirements of the award align with some of the most important global principles and standards, promoting

a comprehensive understanding of social responsibility and sustainability.

Over the years, the award has undergone significant developments to reflect a broader commitment to sustainability. This year also marks two consecutive decades of successful establishment of the Arabia CSR Network, underscoring its dedication to promoting sustainability practices in the Arab world.



ALSAYER Group is grateful to the Arabia CSR and Sustainability Network for organizing this high-level event in demonstrating the efforts made by companies and institutions in promoting sustainability measures as ALSAYER Group remains committed to leading sustainability initiatives and promoting lasting positive change for all, today and in the future.



'Leadership Mentorship Program' to support and empower Kuwaiti women

The first edition of the initiative empowers women leaders while laying the groundwork for future programs that will expand to include children and men, nurturing the leadership potential of young Kuwaiti women.

This non-profit initiative proudly operates under the esteemed patronage of Dr. Amthal Al-Huwaila, Minister of Social Affairs, Family Affairs, and Childhood. The program is marked by exceptional partnerships and sponsorships from leading local and international organizations, including the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait, AmCham, the Public Authority for Disability Affairs (Friends of the Disabled team), Sabah Al Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity, the Youth Public Authority, ICF Kuwait Chapter, Arab Open University, Warba Insurance, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Kuwait Times, Times of Kuwait, Waldorf Astoria, Veolia, Learn and Evolve, Invictus, Kuwait Lawyers Association, and the Martyr's Office – Al Diwan Al Amiri.

The program embodies a strong vision of empowering Kuwaiti women leaders by offering a comprehensive and unique educational experience that opens new horizons for enhancing leadership and professional capabilities. The initiative aims to empower and qualify women to lead change and excel in various fields.

Eng. Manar Bin Sharar Almutairi, the Leader of Digital Transformation in the Leadership Mentorship Program, stated that "the program is completely digitally transformative, leveraging the latest digital trends to embrace a digital-first approach. Upon completion, participants will receive an e-portfolio that highlights their achievements, performance, and feedback from committee members and mentors. Mentors will also receive similar portfolios, showcasing their contributions in guiding and inspiring mentees on their career journeys."

While the "Strategic Planning & Implementation" workshop will be hosted by Warba Insurance, with Dr. Jassem Aljezza as the speaker, Arab Open University will host a "Public Communication & Speaking" workshop, with Dr. Khawla Al Hassan leading the session and the "Leadership & Mentorship Coaching" session will be led by Dr. Maleha Al Foderi and hosted by the ICF Kuwait Chapter.

The program will wrap up with a workshop on negotiation skills and conflict resolution, led by Ms. Suha Issac and hosted at the Sabah Al Ahmed Center for Giftedness and Creativity.

Ms. Jamila Al Otaibi, the Chairwoman of the Leadership Mentorship Program, said the program is committed to supporting and empowering Kuwaiti women in line with Kuwait Vision 2035 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This first edition focuses on empowering women leaders, setting the stage for future programs that will expand to include children and men.

The program pairs thirty talented women with experienced mentors, offering leadership training, networking opportunities, and hands-on skills in key sectors such as technology, healthcare, sports, governance, and entrepreneurship.

Paving the way for a stronger, more inclusive Kuwait

The first wave of this program is dedicated to women. This is where the journey starts—equipping women with the tools, mentorship, and opportunities to lead, paving the way for a stronger, more inclusive Kuwait.

When women are empowered, families, communities, and entire nations thrive! Our mission begins with women but will grow to include children and men, creating a ripple effect that will touch every part of society.

Empowering women leaders key for national progress

Empowering women leaders is not just a priority—it's essential for national progress. By investing in women today, the program will



Eng. Manar Bin Sharar Almutairi



Ms. Jamila G. Al-Otaibi



Dr. Arezou Harraf

develop leaders who will drive innovation, foster economic growth, and inspire future generations.

The Leadership Mentorship Program focuses on empowering Kuwaiti women in leadership by providing tools and opportunities for growth, fostering mentorship and inclusivity, and promoting gender equality across all sectors.

The program helps equip women with skills in key sectors like technology, healthcare, governance, and entrepreneurship. Through tailored mentorship, hands-on workshops, and real-world experience, the program enables women to innovate, lead, and shape Kuwait's future.

Driving gender equality

The program enhances the leadership skills of Kuwaiti women through structured workshops, promoting innovation and strategic leadership, and equipping participants with the necessary

• **Networking events:** Host networking events to facilitate connections between trainees, mentors, and industry leaders.

• **Group & individual sessions:** Provide both group and individual coaching sessions to address the unique needs of trainees.

• **Workshops and training:** Organize a series of workshops and training sessions focused on leadership, innovation, and professional skills.

• **Impact measurement:** Develop metrics to measure the program's impact on the professional growth and leadership development of trainees.

Program structure

• **Trainees:** 30 trainees, aged 21 to 45, will be selected based on their leadership potential and commitment to personal growth.

• **Mentors:** Each trainee will be paired with an experienced mentor from diverse fields, ensuring



• *The Leadership Mentorship Program pairs thirty talented women with experienced mentors, offering leadership training, networking and hands-on skills in key sectors such as technology, healthcare, sports, governance, and entrepreneurship.*

• *The first wave of the program will equip women with the tools, mentorship, and opportunities to lead, paving the way for a stronger, more inclusive Kuwait while fostering inclusivity and promoting gender equality across all sectors.*

skills. The program pairs participants with mentors for personalized guidance and provides ongoing support for continuous development.

Supporting Kuwait Vision 2035

The program is a key pillar in Kuwait's journey toward Vision 2035. By mentoring women in leadership, we are not only promoting gender equality but also building a diversified, sustainable economy that taps into the full potential of our population. Its vision extends beyond this first edition—it's about creating lasting change and ensuring that every Kuwaiti, regardless of gender or age, has the opportunity to lead. The program will conclude with a "Negotiation & Conflict Resolution" workshop.

How does the program work?

• **Mentorship matching:** Successfully match 30 trainees with distinguished mentors based on their areas of interest.

personalized guidance and support throughout the program.

• **Volunteers:** A team of young Kuwaiti women volunteers will support the implementation of the program and provide logistical services, ensuring its smooth operation.

• **Empowerment partners:** Kuwaiti women-owned and led startups, as well as small- and medium-sized enterprises, will play a crucial role in supporting the program and providing additional resources and expertise.

Program overview

The program includes main workshops focused on leadership development, innovation, and professional growth, spanning five weeks. It covers key industries such as technology, healthcare, sports, governance, and entrepreneurship.

Program activities

• **Sector-specific mentorship paths:** Tailored

guidance relevant to each participant's industry.

• **Hands-on leadership training:** Practical exercises and challenges designed to build leadership capabilities.

• **Communication events:** Sessions with embassy leaders, government officials, and business executives.

• **Evaluation and feedback:** Ongoing progress evaluations and feedback sessions with mentors and coaches.

Program outcomes

The program will focus on measurable results, contributing to the development of future leaders who are well-prepared to take on key roles in both the public and private sectors. Empowering women in leadership positions aligns with Kuwait's Vision 2035 and reinforces the country's commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Empowerment partners: Empowering 20 Kuwaiti women-owned startups and SMEs

Program success

The program's success begins even before its official launch by empowering and supporting twenty local companies led by Kuwaiti women. These companies offer essential services or products at discounted prices to our target group of young women.

Early program success

By supporting these twenty startups and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), we demonstrate our commitment to empowering female leaders in Kuwait, advancing our program's mission and vision even before its official start.

Recognition and visibility

Empowerment Partners will have their logos prominently displayed as "Empowerment Partners" in all program materials and events. They will also receive invitations to attend program events and celebrations, enhancing their network and visibility.

Strengthened network coverage and exposure

Through this partnership, Empowerment Partners gain enhanced network coverage and exposure through our events and media outreach.

Strategic partnerships

Key partners: The U.S. Embassy in Kuwait and leading public and private sector stakeholders, offering growth and networking opportunities for trainees.

Ms. Jamila G. Al-Otaibi, Chairwoman of the Kuwait Youth Assembly Platform, brings her dynamic leadership to the forefront. With a strong background in the healthcare sector, she is actively engaged in youth development initiatives both locally and internationally. Currently pursuing an MBA in International Business from Maastricht University, Ms. Al-Otaibi is also a recognized speaker and thought leader in digital transformation.

Dr. Arezou Harraf, Dean of the Business School at Box Hill College and Vice-Chair of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kuwait, has been named Vice-Chairwoman. Holding dual PhDs, Dr. Harraf has made significant contributions to academia and business, particularly in leadership, human resource development, and technology management. She is the founder of "Learn and Evolve" and the author of *The Uncensored Leader*.BBC

Indian Embassy celebrates new classical status for Bengali, Assamese, Marathi

The event in the newly refurbished auditorium featured mesmerizing performances of Bihu, Sattriya, Rabindra Sangeet, and Lavani dances by the Natyanjali group and young members of the Indian community.



The Embassy of India held an event on October 26 in the newly refurbished auditorium to celebrate the recent designation of Classical Language status for Bengali, Assamese, and Marathi.

A select gathering of representatives from these communities attended the celebration. Each of the respective speakers from these associations lauded the decision and highlighted the importance of these languages in India's rich history. They also thanked Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for this landmark decision.

Welcoming the gathering, His Excellency Dr. Adarsh Swaika, the Indian Ambassador to Kuwait, told the audience that classical languages serve

as custodians of Bharat's profound and ancient cultural heritage, embodying the essence of each community's historical and cultural milestones.

The ambassador noted that the Government of India created a new category of "Classical Languages" on October 12, 2004, with Tamil being the first to receive this designation. Since then, five other languages—Sanskrit, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, and Odia—have been accorded the same status. He highlighted that around 60-70% of Kuwait's one million-strong Indian community speaks these languages as their native tongue.



Speaking on the benefits of classical language status, Ambassador Swaika noted that it is not only an honor but brings several tangible

benefits, including employment, educational opportunities, and cultural preservation. This status creates significant job opportunities, especially in academic and research fields.

The preservation, documentation, and digitization of ancient texts will generate jobs in archiving, translation, publishing, and digital media. In education, it may lead to the establishment of research centers and educational programs focused on these languages, as well as scholarships for students in these fields.

For cultural preservation, it promotes the documentation and safeguarding of ancient texts, ensuring they are available for future generations. Additionally, the status underscores

India's linguistic diversity, as each language embodies unique cultural narratives and historical significance. By elevating their status, the government aims to preserve and promote these rich heritages.

In conclusion, the Indian ambassador thanked the three associations from Maharashtra, Bengal, and Assam for joining and partnering with the embassy to celebrate this important development. Mesmerizing performances of Bihu, Sattriya, RabindraSangeet, and Lavani dances by the Natyanjali group and young members of the Indian community entertained the audience with dazzling renditions, showcasing the rich cultures of Assam, West Bengal, and Maharashtra.

Celebrating Diwali's symbol of inner light

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In many mythologies of early cultures and religions, light was believed to emanate from the divine supreme being and was considered an attribute of the deity that led to the creation of life, endowing humanity with health, wealth, and knowledge. Gnostics and many agnostics do concur that light remains an enduring symbol of life and hope, joy and happiness, truth, wisdom, and guidance.

In Christianity, Christ is called 'Light' in the sense that he enlightens every man, although each individual is free to turn toward or away from that guiding light. The physical light symbolizes the divine presence that penetrates all things while maintaining its purity. Light is also seen as a molding power that leads humanity forward to ultimately unite with the divine. In many parts of the world, light is represented by candles, lamps, fires, and fireworks, depicting the ultimate victory of light in its perpetual struggle against darkness.

Today, in many places, Diwali has taken on a more temporal note, with merchants, retailers, and corporations using the festival to market and sell their products. The five-day-long Festival of Lights has become almost synonymous with shopping frenzies, bargain offers, and special discounts, as well as an occasion for socializing and entertaining among family and friends.

Like any major festival, preparations for Diwali in India begin days or weeks in advance, with the

formal festival lasting five days, starting two days before the night of Diwali and ending two days after. Each day of Diwali has its own tale, legend, and myth to tell. Sweet treats are exchanged, houses are thoroughly cleaned, and homes are lit with diyas and decorated with rangoli—the colorful designs and patterns created on the threshold and floor during the festival using natural colors, dyes, flowers, and other materials. New clothes are worn, and each day of the



festival is marked by different traditional rituals and colors.

Through all the celebrations and festivities, what remains true and consistent throughout the five days of Diwali is the celebration of life, its enjoyment, and goodness. This year, even if you are away from the sights and sounds of Diwali celebrations at home in India, take a moment to light a candle or diya, sit quietly, close your eyes, breathe deeply, and concentrate on that supreme light that illuminates your inner self and guides you along the path of life.



Dialogue on Breast Cancer at event hosted by French Ambassador

Under the patronage and participation of the Ambassador of France and his spouse, a special October Pink Café discussion was hosted at the French Residence last week.

This event, part of Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October, was in line with the October Pink initiative launched over three decades ago as a global campaign dedicated to raising breast cancer awareness. The initiative is aimed at encouraging early detection, improving access to care, and supporting research to better understand and treat the disease.

In his opening remarks, the French Ambassador H.E. Olivier Gauvin, underscored the importance of men's involvement in raising awareness. He

The event at the French Residence, part of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, aimed to promote early detection, prevention, and support for patients.

noted that participation by men is essential for strengthening solidarity and promoting a collective fight against this disease. He added that while breast cancer primarily affects women, about 1 percent of cases also occur in men.

The event featured three distinguished speakers who shared their expertise and inspiring personal stories. Dr. Jinan Abdallah, a medical oncologist at the Kuwait Cancer Center and a

French alumna, has over ten years of experience. Initially focused on lung and sarcoma cancers, she shifted her focus to breast cancer due to the increasing number of cases and the shortage of specialists in the region.

Dr. Jinan's presentation emphasized the importance of screening, current controversies, and preventive strategies for breast cancer.

Dr. Rania Azmi, founder of the 'Fadia Survive

& Thrive' initiative in Kuwait and a global expert in management and philanthropy, has dedicated over 15 years to advocating for cancer patients. Her presentation focused on improving patients' quality of life, proactive management of treatment side effects, and prevention strategies.

Menna Farag, a senior HR consultant, breast cancer survivor, and author of 'When Cancer Messed With the Wrong Girl', shared her personal journey of resilience and hope. She also highlighted her ongoing efforts to support other survivors and raise awareness.

The event concluded with a Q&A session, fostering open dialogue on breast cancer awareness, prevention, and support.



Sheikha Salwa Al-Sabah Center wins prestigious recognition

Sheikha Salwa Al-Sabah Center for Stem Cells and Umbilical Cord labs has been awarded the International Accreditation Certificate for Molecular Screening; by the Association for the Promotion of Blood and Biotherapies (AABB), an international, not-for-profit Association representing individuals and institutions worldwide

involved in the fields of transfusion medicine and biotherapies.

Speaking on the historical and momentous occasion, Director of the Blood Transfusion Services Department at the Ministry of Health, Dr. Reem Al-Radwan, said that the "accreditation is a very important step in the field of stem cell therapy; as it ensures that laboratories adhere to the highest standards of quality and safety in examination and treatment methods".

She added that "this international certificate enhances trust between health care providers and patients, as it ensures that laboratories adhere to strict regulatory requirements, and provide accurate and reliable results."

Dr. Radwan also pointed out that accredited laboratories adopt modern verified technologies, follow international best practices, which reduces the risk of contamination and ensures the safety of stem cell products.

She added, "Accreditation opens up new horizons to start programs for the collection of stem cells and umbilical cord cells, which represents a fundamental step towards the development of innovative and effective treatments."

Dr. Radwan also revealed that the laboratories of the Sheikh Salwa Center for Stem Cells and Umbilical Cord, is the first in the Arab world and the second globally outside the United States of America to obtain this accreditation.



Yusuff Ali MA, CMD of LuLu Group International extends greetings to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, at Bayan Palace in Kuwait.

IDCK delegation visits Al-Manakh, Al-Mubarakiya Souks



To highlight the experiences of pioneering businesswomen and support the empowerment of Kuwaiti women, Mrs. Sabeeka Al-Bahr and Mrs. Jihan Marafi welcomed

A delegation from the International Diplomatic Club - Kuwait (IDCK), led by the President of the IDCK Executive Board, Ghada Shawky, visited Souk Al-Manakh and Souk Al-Mubarakiya on 22 October.

The visit, at the invitation of Sabeekah Al-Bahr and Jihan Marafi, two certified brokers in the Kuwaiti real estate industry, aimed to highlight the experiences of pioneering Kuwaiti businesswomen and support the empowerment

of women in general. The delegation expressed its honor to have the chance to witness the two brokers showcase their journey of growth and achievement as women in a predominantly male field.

The group comprised IDCK members, including female ambassadors and the wives of ambassadors, as well as prominent Kuwaiti women in the political sphere, including former Minister of Social Affairs Dr. Ghadeer Aseri and Alia Al-Khaled, a former Kuwaiti MP.

The group was proud to witness the power of women in Kuwait, who can work in various sectors, including real estate. Both Mrs. Marafi

and Mrs. Al-Bahr described the nature of their work and the challenges they encounter in their line of work, especially since it is a male-dominated field.

Located in the heart of Kuwait City, Souk Al-Manakh is a symbol of Kuwait's historical financial development and was once the third-largest stock exchange in the world. By 1978, Souk Al-Manakh experienced a significant trading surge, surpassing even the London markets with all their foreign listings combined, making it one of the few avenues for investment. However, in 1982, the stock market crashed, leading to the closure of Souk Al-Manakh, which later reopened

as a hub for brokers in the real estate sector.

Following their tour of Souk Al-Manakh, the IDCK members had the opportunity to visit Souk Al-Mubarakiya, Kuwait's oldest and most famous market. The ladies, accompanied by three guides, experienced the lively atmosphere that has flourished for over 200 years.

The souk is a true gem for local goods, including handicrafts, vintage items, spices, textiles, and other commodities. It is also a gastronomic haven, where people enjoy delicious Kuwaiti dishes. To complete their perfect Kuwaiti day, the members were generously invited to lunch at Chocolate Ice Café in Souk Al-Mubarakiya.



Uzbekistan offers a way out of the “deadlock” in the transport sector

Development of the regional transport system in Central Asia is among the top priorities for Uzbekistan

The Central Asian region is located at the crossroads of two key trade routes: ‘North-South’ and ‘East-West’, which enhances the attractiveness of the regional transport system.

Recent trends related to the diversification of international transport routes due to conflicts, and economic sanctions also open up new opportunities for countries in the region in the field of transit transport. European and Asian countries are seeking to reroute their cargo through the historic Silk Road. This shift is altering the infrastructure of transport flows in Central Asia (CA), which lacks direct access to seaports.

Thereafter, the volume of transit traffic in Central Asia grew two to three times in 2023, which is linked to the increasing transit significance of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan in global supply chains.

It is important to note that the “deadlock” in the transport sector significantly hinders the economic growth of the region. In this regard, the President of Uzbekistan, in his speech, pointed out that transportation costs in Central Asian countries can reach up to 50% of the final cost of goods, which is almost 5 times higher than the global average. “At the same time, the global average does not exceed 11%. As a result, our economies have to bear a transportation burden two to three times greater than in developed countries”.

To prevent the aforementioned negative factors and to maximize the benefits of factors that promote the development of the regional transportation system, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan is implementing the most effective initiatives. These initiatives contribute to the formation of a new architecture for transportation flows in the region.

The President of Uzbekistan, Sh. Mirziyoyev, emphasizes the need for integrating Central Asia into the global transportation system as a single region. An important event was his speech at the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly in September 2017, where he declared the priority of the Central Asian region in his foreign policy and proposed the creation of a format for consultative meetings of the heads of state of the region. Since then, six similar meetings have taken place, including in Astana, Tashkent, Bishkek, Avaza, Cholpon-Ata, and Dushanbe.

It should be noted that within the framework of this format the leaders adopted the Pentalateral Agreement on Strengthening the Interconnectedness of Land Transport in Central Asia, which has practical significance for the development of new cooperative partnerships. The signing of this document means that state leaders have set a course for the formation of an integrated transport infrastructure as a key driver of economic growth and realization of the potential of Central Asia.

As the President of Uzbekistan stated in his speech at the Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia, held in Dushanbe in 2023, “Our region is becoming one of the key centers of economic growth and investment activity, regaining its historical role as a transport hub connecting the West with the East and the North with the South”.

At the initiative of the President of Uzbekistan, an international conference was held in Tashkent in 2018, where strategic prospects for transport corridors in Central Asia were discussed.

In September 2020, at the 75th session of the UN General Assembly, an initiative to create a Central Asian regional center for the development of transport and communication interconnectivity (Center) was put forward and supported at the Consultative Meeting in Turkmenistan in August 2021.



The creation of such a Center under the auspices of the UN will help to solve problems such as the effective use of international transport corridors, the development of new transport routes, the formation of reliable transit corridors and improvement of the competitiveness of Central Asian countries in the global transport services market.

The President of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev, in his speeches at meetings of the Council of Heads of SCO Member States, also put forward a number of initiatives aimed at consolidating the efforts of SCO participants in the transport sector. In particular,

at a meeting of the Council of Heads of SCO Member States (Qingdao, China, June 10, 2018) it was proposed to consider the possibility of establishing the SCO International Transport and Logistics Association. In addition, the Qingdao Declaration of the Council of Heads of SCO Member States (June 10, 2018) supported the holding in Uzbekistan of the first meeting of the heads of railway administrations of the SCO member states.

At a meeting of the Council of Heads of SCO Member States in Bishkek (June, 2019), the President of Uzbekistan proposed developing an SCO Cooperation Strategy for the development of interconnectedness, effective economic and transport corridors.

The initiatives and proposals of the Head of Uzbekistan are widely supported by the SCO member states, one of them is the approval of the Concept of interaction between the railway administrations of the SCO member states.

The above initiatives and proposals are a mechanism for implementing the following main priorities for the development of the regional transport system, established by the President based on national and regional interests:

- implementation of transport and communication projects that allow connecting Central Asia with the largest seaports and world markets;
- formation of a trans-Afghan corridor with access to South Asia, as well as the construction of the China – Kyrgyzstan – Uzbekistan railway. By integrating these corridors, link the world’s major markets through Central Asia;
- further development of transit potential and increase in the transport component in the national economy.

To realize these interests, target indicators

have been established, which are reflected in strategic documents, such as the Strategy “Uzbekistan – 2030”, “Strategy for the development of the transport system of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2035” (draft), as well as the “Transport Strategy until 2030” (adopted within the framework of CAREC).

As can be seen from the strategic documents, one of the main priorities is the southern direction. The President of Uzbekistan proposed the construction of the Termez – Mazari – Sharif – Kabul – Peshawar railway, which will significantly reduce the time and costs of transporting goods.

In July 2023, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Pak-



istan signed an agreement on the construction of the Trans-Afghan corridor.

This corridor, according to officials, will be the shortest and cheapest route to seaports. For Tashkent, this project represents not only economic, but also a geopolitical opportunity. Firstly, the route from Termez to Peshawar will create reliable connections with the rapidly developing South Asia, which contributes to increased trade and increased exports of transport services. Secondly, it will become a strategic bridge connecting major powers with rich regions of the world.

It is important to note that within the framework of the “Strategy for the development of the transport system of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2035”, the implementation of the Trans-Afghan Highway is designated as a key measure for the integration of the country into international transport corridors.

Besides that, this route is of great importance in strengthening the international transport system and will connect the European Union, Russia, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and further states of Southeast Asia.

Thus, in November 2022, Uzbekistan proposed creating an international transport cor-

ridor “Belarus – Russia – Kazakhstan – Uzbekistan – Afghanistan – Pakistan”, and in 2023 a memorandum on its implementation was signed. According to experts, the new route, 5,532 km long, will make it possible to cover the distance in 20 days.

In order to increase the transport potential of the countries of the region, the President of Uzbekistan proposed, within the framework of meetings of sectoral ministers, to develop an Agreement on Transport and Transit in Central Asia, to form specific mechanisms for promoting effective transport corridors to enter the markets of China, the countries of South Asia and the Middle East, and the European Union using through tariffs, beneficial for business, prepare a Program of measures to liberalize the transport services market, optimize permitting procedures, consider issues of creating an integrated digital Platform for international transport.

Also, Uzbekistan seeks to strengthen its transit position by developing cooperation with key partners that provide access to world markets.

Construction of the China, Kyrgyzstan Uzbekistan railway has begun.

The project is intended to become an important link in the regional transport network within the framework of the East-West and North-South project, providing access to international seaports for the geographically closed states of Central Asia. According to preliminary forecasts of the Ministry of Transport of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the reduction in routes from East Asia to the countries of the Middle East and Southern Europe will be about 900 km, and the delivery time will be reduced by 7-8 days.

Traditional routes also remain a priority due to their developed transport infrastructure. In particular, Iran plays an important role in Central Asia’s connections with the Middle East, South Asia, Transcaucasia and Europe. After the suspension of relations in the early 2000s, since 2017, Uzbek-Iranian cooperation has been actively developing, increasing the number of joint ventures and the volume of mutual trade.

A new logistics route has recently been developed through Chabahar Port in Iran, which is operated by India. Uzbekistan has received the right to use this port and plans to create a marine terminal and a logistics center, which should improve trade not only with Iran, but also with India. In addition, Tashkent uses transit through Iran and Turkmenistan to create cross routes, including the new railway corridor “Turkey – Iran – Turkmenistan – Uzbekistan”. This route provides an alternative to trans-Caspian transport and has recently been integrated to the international multimodal route “APAC Countries – Europe”.

In general, the development of the regional transport system remains one of the main priority areas and in this regard, Uzbekistan has set big goals for itself. According to the World Bank forecast, it is expected that by 2030, the capacity of Uzbekistan’s transit potential will increase by 4.4 times, and investments in the transport sector will increase to \$46.7 billion.

In particular, by 2030, transit cargo transportation on the Uzbekistan-Europe route will increase by 71%, to 1.3 million tons, according to a World Bank report.

Thus, reforms and initiatives in the field of transport and communication corridors in Central Asia are aimed at creating a modern and efficient transport system, which will contribute to economic integration, increased competitiveness and prosperity of the countries of the region. Geopolitical factors contribute to Uzbekistan becoming strategically important in Central Asia, and it plays a key role in regional processes thanks to its developed transport infrastructure.



MACAU

Asia's Las Vegas that blends East and West

By Nourah Khan
Travel Writer
The Times Kuwait

Macau, often described as the 'Vegas of the East', is so much more than its glittering casinos. This unique city, nestled on the southern coast of China, offers a fascinating fusion of Portuguese colonial history and rich Chinese heritage. As a UNESCO World Heritage site, Macau is a destination that caters to both leisure and culture-seeking travelers.

A vibrant city known for its historic charm and contemporary allure, Macau, which is only a short distance from Hong Kong, is a perfect destination for families. If you are planning a family trip to Macau, here is a guide on how to reach this charming city and some must-visit attractions.

One of the most popular ways to reach Macau from Hong Kong is by taking a ferry. The ride typically takes about an hour, offering scenic views of the waters between the two cities. For a more exclusive experience, you can opt for a helicopter ride from Hong Kong to Macau. The helicopter service is available from the Hong Kong Macau Ferry Terminal and takes just 15 minutes.

Macau International Airport serves flights from various cities in Asia, making it convenient for international travelers. Airlines connect Macau with cities like Bangkok, Singapore, Seoul, Tokyo,



and several others. From the airport, taxis or shuttle services can take you to your hotel or the main attractions in the city.

Macau's mix of cultural experiences, luxurious hotels, and family-friendly attractions makes it an ideal destination for a memorable family holiday. Whether you are exploring historic sites or enjoying gondola rides, Macau is a place where your family can find joy, adventure, and a touch of luxury.

Some of the family-friendly attractions in the city include:

Macau Science Center: An exciting destination for families. Its unique, conical design houses interactive exhibits on technology, space, and nature. Kids will love the planetarium, one of the



most advanced in Asia, offering 3D and immersive films about space exploration.

Taipa Village: If you are looking to immerse your family in Macau's culture and history, a visit to Taipa Village is a must. Stroll through its narrow streets lined with pastel-colored colonial buildings, quaint shops, and authentic eateries. Here, you can visit the Taipa Houses Museum, which showcases traditional Portuguese houses with exhibits on Macanese culture.

Giant Panda Pavilion: Located in Seac Pai Van Park, the Macau Giant Panda Pavilion is a favorite among families. It's home to two adorable giant pandas, Kai Kai and Xin Xin. The park itself is lush and well-maintained, making it a great spot for a family day out with walking trails and children's play areas.

The Venetian Macau: This is more than just a luxury hotel, it is a destination in itself. Families can enjoy gondola rides along the indoor canals, marvel at the extravagant interiors, or shop at the Grand Canal Shoppes. Children will be particularly entertained by the Streetmosphere performers, who sing, dance, and interact with visitors throughout the day.

Macau Tower: For a bit of adventure, take your family to the Macau Tower. While the tower is known for its thrilling bungee jump, it also



offers family-friendly activities like the Skywalk, an outdoor walk around the outer rim of the tower. At 233 meters above ground, the views are breathtaking, and the experience is safe and suitable for older children and teenagers.

Senado Square: An iconic landmark and a great family-friendly location to explore, Senado Square offers kids the opportunity to enjoy feeding the pigeons and wandering through the wave-patterned mosaic tiles while you admire the colonial architecture. Nearby, you will find ice cream shops and local eateries offering family-friendly treats.

Families visiting Macau could select family-friendly venues. Many luxury hotels in Macau offer family suites and kid-friendly amenities. Hotels like The Venetian Macau, Studio City, and the Parisian Macau provide entertainment and facilities geared toward children, such as pools, game zones, and themed rooms.



Beyond sightseeing, ensure you allow time for leisurely activities like poolside relaxation, movie nights at the hotels, or even a family spa day in some of the city's top resorts. This makes for a balanced experience that suits all age groups.

Macau has an efficient public bus system, but taxis are also plentiful and relatively inexpensive. Most major attractions are close to one another,

making it easy to explore with kids in tow.

Macau's mix of cultural experiences, luxurious hotels, and family-friendly attractions makes it an ideal destination for a memorable family holiday. Whether you're exploring historic sites or enjoying gondola rides, Macau is a place where your family can find joy, adventure, and a touch of luxury.

Staying in Macau would not be complete without experiencing the extravagance of the Cotai Strip. One afternoon, I decided to explore the famed Venetian Macau. Strolling through its indoor canals, where gondoliers sang classic Italian songs, felt like a trip to Venice itself. Later, I visited the City of Dreams to catch one of their highly-acclaimed water shows. It was an evening of lights, water acrobatics, and stunning visuals—a performance that rivals any top-tier show in the world.

These mega-resorts offer a blend of opulence and entertainment that leaves visitors in awe. Yet, what stood out to me was the blend of classic luxury with distinct elements of local culture. Even in their grandeur, the hotels subtly integrated touches of Chinese art and Macanese history, reflecting the city's identity.

My time in Macau left me with vivid memories of contrasts and harmonies. From indulging in a fusion of flavors to exploring both Portuguese and Chinese landmarks, every moment was a new discovery. What impressed me the most was Macau's ability to seamlessly merge its rich history with contemporary extravagance.



If you are seeking a destination that combines history, culture, luxury, and excitement, look no further than Macau. It is a city where East meets West in the most delightful way possible, and where each moment holds something spectacular waiting to be discovered.

Noura Khan, a travel influencer and content creator, is a Kuwaiti national, holds a degree in law from Kuwait University and has worked as a journalist prior to taking up a position in the government. In 2018 she started blogging on travel and visited more than 57 countries since. She has more than 105k followers on her blog post @nourajtraveller is well appreciated for content and travel information. Noura writes exclusively for The Times Kuwait on her travel visits.

Thought “ for the week

It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop.

- Confucius

Cholera: A Public Health Threat

Ask Mira: Eating Right to Live Happy & Healthy



Cholera is a severe diarrheal disease caused by the bacterium *Vibrio cholerae*. While largely preventable and treatable, it remains a public health threat.

Cholera is primarily transmitted through the consumption of contaminated water or food. Some of the most common ways cholera is spread include drinking contaminated water; eating food, especially seafood or raw fruits and vegetables, washed with contaminated water; or, consuming food prepared by someone who is infected with cholera.

Cholera symptoms can range from mild to severe, often appearing between a few hours to five days after infection. The most common symptoms include:

Severe diarrhea: Very watery

Vomiting: contributes to dehydration.

Rapid dehydration: Due to excessive loss of fluids and electrolytes.

Muscle cramps: Resulting from electrolyte imbalances.

Low blood pressure, dry mouth, and rapid heart rate due to severe dehydration.

If left untreated, severe cholera can lead to shock, organ failure and death.

Preventing cholera requires ensuring that food and water are safe for consumption. Here are a few essential precautions:

Boil water: Drink only boiled or properly treated water. Avoid ice unless it's made from boiled or treated water.

Peel fruits and vegetables: Always peel fruits and vegetables before eating. Wash them with clean, safe water if peeling is not possible.

Cook food thoroughly: Cholera bacteria are killed by heat, so make sure food, especially seafood, is cooked thoroughly.

Avoid raw foods: Raw or undercooked seafood, particularly shellfish, is a common source of cholera bacteria.

Wash hands frequently: Use soap and clean water before handling food, after using the

bathroom, and before eating.

Store food safely: Keep your food covered. Ensure that leftovers are stored in clean containers and properly refrigerated.

Daily food safety habits that can be practiced at home include:

Clean: Wash hands and utensils, and sanitize your cutting boards.

Separate: Use separate cutting boards for raw meat and other foods to avoid cross-contamination. Store raw meat below other foods in the fridge.

Cook: Ensure that foods reach a safe internal temperature to kill harmful bacteria. For example, poultry should reach 75°C (165°F), and seafood 65°C (150°F).

Chill: Refrigerate foods within two hours of cooking, and keep your fridge at or below 4°C (40°F).

Defrost food in the refrigerator, never at room temperature.

Reheat properly: Reheat leftovers until they are steaming hot to kill any bacteria that may have grown.

Cholera is a dangerous disease. Early prevention can save your health and that of your loved ones.

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Create healthy habits, not restrictions

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www.eatlikemira.com.



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



Sustaining Biodiversity Vital to Preserving Planet

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Delegates to COP 16 are in the process of reviewing progress in implementation of the KMGBF, and alignment of the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) submitted by countries, with the goals of the Framework. COP 16 will also strive to enhance the monitoring framework, advance resource mobilization, and operationalize mechanisms to equitably share benefits from genetic resources. In addition, considering the increasingly evident correlation between biodiversity loss and climate change, the conference will seek to address them concurrently.

The Convention of Parties (COP), which meets every two years, is the governing body made up of all members (Parties) that ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The CBD, a seminal international treaty adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, recognizes the importance of biological diversity, and covers all ecosystems, species, and genetic resources, as well as links traditional conservation efforts to the economic goal of using biological resources sustainably. Importantly, the CBD is legally binding; countries that join it are obliged to implement its provisions.

Kuwait, which ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 2002, remains committed to conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. Despite this commitment, the absence of coherent and cohesive strategies to address biodiversity loss, the lack of coordination between government agencies and civil society organizations engaged in protecting the environment, as well as the dearth of specialists and technical capabilities to protect and promote biodiversity, have hampered Kuwait's efforts.

Although at first glance, Kuwait would appear to be an arid desert area where high temperatures and scant rainfall lead to sparse vegetation and biodiversity, the land is home to over 30 different species of mammals and reptiles, as well as being host to more than 440 species of birds. Given its location at the head of the Arabian Gulf and adjacent to the mouth of the Euphrates-Tigris Rivers, Kuwait is also a major crossroad of several bird migration routes, with millions of birds transiting the country each year.

But it is Kuwait's marine and littoral ecosystems that contain the bulk of its biodiversity heritage, particularly the marine area, which is characterized by an abundance and diversity of species and environments. Kuwait Bay, considered a natural nursery for fish and shrimp larvae, also gives rise to mudflats that serve as an important transit area for migratory birds. Saline wetlands to the south of Kuwait, and coral reefs off the country's southern coast, are other rich and productive locations for biodiversity in the country.

Over the last many decades, land area in Kuwait, especially the desert ecosystem, has borne the brunt of the country's progress and development. Overgrazing, uprooting of trees and shrubs, increased human intrusions,

including through new constructions, leisure and entertainment activities, stone quarries, earlier military operations, and lack of rigor in implementing laws for protecting biodiversity, have all contributed to a significant reduction in species and their habitats.

Additionally, threats to marine biodiversity come from overfishing, bottom trawling and illegal fishing, as well as fishing in breeding areas and anchoring on coral reefs. Marine habitats and species are also being negatively impacted by chemical runoffs from industries, increased salinity from desalination plants, and polluted waters arriving through the Shatt El-Arab, the main waterway feeding the Arabian Gulf.

On a positive note, the new government has made sustainable growth a key plank of its development plans, including through strengthening coordination and coherence among policies, programs, and legislation in various institutional activities. The authorities are also aiming to streamline and improve efficiency of public sector undertakings, and avoid overlap in their work. Integrating the multiple public entities currently engaged in environmental work, could lead to more effective, concerted and coherent efforts in protecting and preserving biodiversity.

The urgency of stemming biodiversity loss and reviving ecosystems is underlined by the 'Living Planet Report-2022' released by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). The Fund found that the global population of vertebrate species—organisms with a vertebral column or backbone, such as mammals, birds, reptiles, fishes and amphibians—have declined by an average of 69 percent since 1970. In the same period, the decline in freshwater vertebrate species was a staggering 83 percent.

Although biodiversity loss in plants, fungi and invertebrates such as insects, which make up over 75 percent of all animal species is less well known, severe declines have been documented in many places. The WWF report, along with other scientific studies, estimates that over a million species may be threatened with extinction in the coming decades.

Species loss has been attributed to several factors, including habitat destruction from unsustainable agricultural practices, industrial logging, and the introduction of invasive species into traditional habitats of other species. A new report on global habitat loss shows nearly 75 percent of ice-free land and 63 percent of oceans have already been negatively transformed by human activities. Biodiversity loss has also been exacerbated by overfishing, pollution, and climate change, which is expected to become the greatest threat to biodiversity in coming decades.

In a video message to the opening ceremony of COP 16, UN Secretary-General António Guterres urged delegates to "make peace with nature" and shore up plans to stop habitat loss, save endangered species, and preserve our planet's precious ecosystems. Noting that the Global Biodiversity Framework promises to reset relations with Earth and its ecosystems, the UN Chief added, "The framework is grounded in a clear truth— for humanity to survive, nature must flourish."

RECIPE

Paan Katori Delight

These coconut katoris offer a bite of tradition minced with a modern touch. They are infused with paan essence (a flavoring agent with a distinct flavor of areca leaves and nuts) and filled with crunchy nuts and rich gulkand—a sweet preserve of rose petals popular in Indian foods. These sweet delights offer a blend of flavors in an elegant presentation, with each bite bringing a refreshing burst of flavor, and a perfect way to end a meal on a sweet note.

Serves: 8-10 pieces
Total Time: 30 minutes

Ingredients:

For the Katori:

- 2 cups freshly grated or desiccated coconut
- 1 cup condensed milk
- 2 tbsp gulkand (rose petal preserve)
- 1 tbsp paan syrup or essence
- 1 tsp cardamom powder
- 1 tsp ghee (for greasing)
- A few drops of green food color (optional)
- For the Filling:
- ½ cup chopped mixed nuts (cashews, almonds, pistachios)
- 2 tbsp gulkand
- 1 tsp fennel seeds
- 1 tbsp tutti-frutti (candied fruits)
- Dry rose petals (optional, for garnish)



Chef Chhaya Thakker



Instructions:

- Toast coconut lightly in a pan.
- Add condensed milk, gulkand, paan syrup, and cardamom
- Mix well and cook until thick and sticky
- Grease small katoris (bowls) with ghee and press the mixture into them to form a bowl shape. Set aside to cool.
- Meanwhile, toast and chop the nuts and mix with gulkand
- Once the katoris are cool and set, fill each katori with the nut and gulkand mixture. Serve garnished with dry

rose petals, if desired.

- Serve as a refreshing, indulgent dessert!

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



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