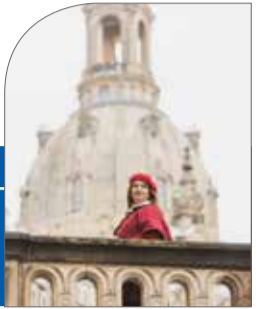




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Kuwait Economy 2025, a Door to Opportunities

THE TIMES KUWAIT REPORT

In 2025, Kuwait stands at an economic crossroad having to decide whether to continue down the increasingly unsustainable path of a prodigious welfare state that it has maintained since the country's independence in 1961, or transition to an economy that is dynamic, diversified, and offers sustainable growth opportunities for present and future generations.

Policy makers are keen to diversify the economy away from its heavy dependence on oil, promote non-oil sector growth and encourage greater private sector participation in the economy. But attempts to introduce the necessary structural and fiscal reforms to achieve the government's broader aims have been thwarted for over a decade by political turmoil and parliamentary gridlock.

Since 2020, Kuwait has experienced 10 Cabinet resignations and held four parliamentary elections in unsuccessful attempts to break the political impasse between the executive and legislative branches of government. The political instability was resolved only in May 2024, when His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah dissolved parliament and suspended parts of the Kuwaiti constitution for up to four years.

“ Kuwait has a window of opportunity to implement the needed fiscal and structural reforms to boost private sector engagement, diversify the economy away from oil, and foster inclusive growth. **”**

Disbanding of the National Assembly and the subsequent appointment of a Cabinet headed by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, to act in lieu of parliament, is expected to expedite the necessary economic, administrative, and social reforms that Kuwait needs, to regain its lost luster as an economic power-house and a pioneer in social and cultural reforms.

A report issued by International Monetary



Fund (IMF) staff, at the end of their Article IV Consultation Meetings held in Kuwait in October 2024, emphasized the potential of Kuwait's economy. The Fund indicated that despite the current economic recession Kuwait has a window of opportunity to implement the needed fiscal and structural reforms to boost private sector engagement, diversify the economy away from oil, and foster inclusive growth.

In its concluding statement issued in December 2024, on the Article IV Consultation mission to Kuwait, the IMF Executive Board projected that under the baseline assuming current policies, Kuwait's economy will continue to remain in recession in 2024 before recovering over the medium-term. Real GDP will contract by a further 2.8 percent, due to continuing oil production cuts mandated by the OPEC+ group, before expanding by 2.6 percent in 2025 as production cuts get relaxed.

Additionally, fiscal deficit of the budgetary central government will increase to 6.6 percent of GDP in fiscal year 2024-2025, with lower oil revenue more than offsetting expenditure rationalization. However, the emergence of recovery in the non-oil sector, moderating inflation in 2024, and the strong capital and liquidity buffers of local banks could support an economic revival.

In addition, the significant financial buffers provided by investment income of the sovereign wealth fund (SWF), and profit transfers from state enterprises would withstand any adverse shocks. The Board pointed out that the 2024 Article IV Consultation helps inform policymakers in Kuwait on processes, and emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive and well-sequenced package of fiscal and structural reforms, and provides recommendations to support the transition to a sustainable, dynamic and diversified economy.

The IMF document stresses that reforms pursued should focus on improving the business environment, attracting FDI, and unifying the labor market, along with prudent monetary and financial sector policies to maintain macroeconomic stability. In addition a gradual fiscal consolidation of about 12 percent of GDP could reinforce intergenerational equity. On the business front the environment could be further improved by raising economic competitiveness, increasing efficiency, improving transparency, and promoting private investment.

To support business and investment, public infrastructure needs to be enhanced, digital

public service delivery across ministries to be integrated, and business establishment processes further streamlined. Additionally, full foreign ownership of businesses, relaxing foreign ownership restrictions on land, and scaling up public land sales for residential and commercial development, could encourage investment flows to Kuwait.

Labor market reforms are also needed to promote economic diversification. To incentivize Kuwaitis to seek employment in the private sector, compensation and working conditions should be better harmonized across the public and private sectors. Furthermore, enhancing the quality of education and aligning it with private sector needs would raise productivity and support economic diversification.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

SAYING HI 🙌, HELLO 🙌, AND SHARING EMOJIS 😊
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Khaleeji Zain 26 highlights spirit of unity, interdependence, of Gulf states

Khaleeji Zain 26 stressed that sport is not only an area of competition, but also a means of strengthening cultural and social relations between countries. The importance of partnerships between the public and private sectors has also been shown in the success of major events, as entities such as Zain and Kuwait Airways played a prominent role in providing an exceptional experience for the masses.



By Sheikha Suhaila Al-Saba
Managing Editor

In a sports scene befitting its long history of hosting major events, Kuwait succeeded in organising the 26th edition of the Arabian Gulf Football Cup, which was held from 21 December 2024 to 4 January 2025.

The tournament, held under the name of 'Khaleeji Zain 26', was not just a sporting event, but a practical embodiment of the meanings of unity and interdependence among the peoples of the Arabian Gulf. Khaleeji Zain 26 was also not just a competitive football tournament; but a platform through which the Gulf brothers met under the banner of sports and love.

The participation of the eight teams—Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, the UAE, Iraq and Yemen—showed the world the depth of extended Gulf relations, where the stands of Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium and Jaber Al-Mubarak Stadium were filled with fans who came from all over to support their teams and live the enthusiastic atmosphere.

The Bahraini team was crowned the championship title after beating its Omani brother in the final match with a score of 2-1



they were at home.

The Fan Zones, created by Zain, also played a big role in enriching the audience experience. From interactive activities to competitions and cultural performances, these areas were an ideal gathering point for the masses, which enhanced the festive atmosphere and made the tournament an unforgettable experience.

In addition, local and Gulf media played a pivotal role in conveying the atmosphere of

The tournament also witnessed social and cultural initiatives aimed at highlighting the common Gulf heritage, where exhibitions and heritage performances were held on the sidelines of the matches. These activities not only impressed visitors, but also deepened the cultural awareness of the public about the deep ties that unite the Gulf countries.

In a related context, the players and officials participating in the tournament praised the level of organisation and the potential presented. The statements that expressed gratitude to Kuwait, reflected everyone's feeling that the tournament was not just a sports competition, but a loving and welcoming message addressed by Kuwait to everyone who attended or followed this sports wedding.

The current edition came under the name 'Gulf of Zain' for the second time in a row, thanks to the strategic partnership between the Arabian Gulf Cup Football Federation and Zain. Zain not only fulfilled her role as a main sponsor of the tournament, but also actively contributed to presenting a distinguished version.

From the design of the logo of the tournament, whose symbols were inspired by the components of the Gulf environment, to the launch of the 'Hudo' mascot, which attracted the attention of young and old, Zain succeeded in translating the common Gulf identity into tangible elements that

everyone interacted with.

The slogan 'The Future is Gulf' was chosen to express the unified vision that the peoples of the Gulf seek to achieve through cooperation and integration in various fields. This spirit was not far from the sports scene, as the tournament strengthened relations between the countries of the region and created new opportunities for communication between peoples.

Khaleeji Zain 26 stressed that sport is not only an area of competition, but also a means of strengthening cultural and social relations between countries.

The importance of partnerships between the public and private sectors has also been shown in the success of major events, as entities such as Zain and Kuwait Airways played a prominent role in providing an exceptional experience for the masses.

The tournament concluded with a majestic scene that reflected its remarkable success, as the Gulf fans lived unforgettable moments on the soil of Kuwait. From the special honoring of the legends of Gulf football to valuable prizes presented to the fans, 'Khaleeji Zain 26' was a sports and cultural festival that reflected the unity of the Arabian Gulf. And here is Kuwait, which has always been the beating heart of the Gulf, writes a new chapter in its sporting career, and shows the world that sport is capable of bringing people together in the spirit of unity and interdependence.



in an exciting match, making it the second title in the history of the competition for the Bahrainis. The tournament showed high levels of competitiveness, as it witnessed fiery confrontations and unexpected results, consolidating its position as one of the most important sporting events in the region.

Kuwait, which hosted the tournament for the fifth time, was at the level of the challenge. The opening ceremony was attended by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Also, the streets and facilities of Kuwait were decorated with the colors of the tournament, and the country had a festive atmosphere that made every visitor feel that

the tournament to the audiences in various countries. Comprehensive media coverage through television and radio channels and social media platforms allowed football fans to follow every moment of the matches and accompanying events, which strengthened the status of the tournament as a Gulf event that brings everyone together.

Efforts were not limited to the media aspect only, but the organising committee provided integrated services to ensure the comfort of players and fans. From providing advanced means of transportation to transport fans between stadiums to equipping sports facilities with the latest technologies, these preparations reflected Kuwait's keenness to offer a tournament befitting its sports history.



American International University organizes spectacular film festival



- I had the privilege of enrolling in a short film directing workshop led by the talented director Mohammed Daham Al-Shammari, along with coordinators Maryam Al-Abad, Dima Al-Ansari, and Ashley.
- The International Film Festival provided a remarkable opportunity for amateurs to connect with industry professionals and also featured a diverse range of workshops, courses, lectures, and discussions, offering a platform for networking, sharing expertise, and gaining valuable insights.

By Fajr Sabah
Special to The Times Kuwait

Universities, especially the American International University, regularly organize cultural, literary, and artistic events. However, hosting an entire film festival on such a grand scale is truly remarkable.

The American International University has organized the film festival for three consecutive years, the most recent of which took place in mid-2024. I had the privilege of enrolling in a short film directing workshop led by the talented director Mohammed Daham Al-Shammari, along with coordinators Maryam Al-Abad, Dima Al-Ansari, and Ashley.

I participated in a two-week workshop held daily from 1am to 4pm at the university campus. The workshop covered various aspects of filmmaking, from conceptualizing ideas to producing a complete film created entirely by participants. These films were later showcased during the festival's opening ceremony.

The festival provided a remarkable opportunity for amateurs to connect with industry professionals. It also featured a diverse range of workshops, courses, lectures, and discussions, offering a platform for networking, sharing expertise, and gaining valuable insights.

The festival, organized to international standards, was an



incredible experience from the opening ceremony and continued through its subsequent days, culminating in the closing gala. It was attended by prominent artists and directors from around the world.

The university administration and the festival's organizers

succeeded in delivering a cultural, artistic, and literary celebration with exceptional visual and auditory appeal. They presented the best version of the Short Film Festival in a unique and distinguished edition, leaving a lasting impression on everyone who attended.

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Kuwaiti passport climbs five spots in annual mobility ranking

Kuwaiti citizens can now access 99 countries visa-free or on arrival as the passport climbs five spots in the 2025 Henley Index. Japan still maintains its position as the most powerful passport in the world, allowing holders to enter 194 destinations without a visa or with a visa on arrival. Singapore came in second with access to 193 destinations.

Kuwaiti passport has climbed five places in the annual Henley Global Mobility Index for 2025, rising to the 50th spot globally, going five rungs higher than the 55th place it occupied in 2024. Kuwaiti citizens can now travel to 99 countries visa-free or with visa-on-arrival access.

This annual index assesses the ability of the passports of 199 countries to travel without a visa, pointing to the relative improvement in the status of the Kuwaiti passport compared to the past five years.

The UAE passport ranks 10th globally, and the first among Gulf countries, granting

Emiratis visa-free access to 185 countries. The Qatari passport ranked 47th globally with 112 countries that the holder can enter without a visa, Bahraini passport holders ranked in 58th place with 87 countries, and the Saudi passport came in 60th place globally with 86 countries, and last but not least, Omani passport came in the 61st place with 86 countries. The results of the 2025 index showed the continued dominance of European and East Asian countries on the list of the top ten passports globally. Japan still maintains its position as the most powerful passport in the world, allowing holders to enter 194



destinations without a visa or with a visa on arrival. Singapore came in second with access to 193 destinations.

For the third to fifth places globally, it was distributed as follows: the third place was shared by Germany, South Korea, Finland, Italy, Luxembourg and Spain (with 192 destinations). Fourth place is shared by Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden (with 191 destinations).

In fifth spot was France, Ireland, Portugal and the United Kingdom (with 190 destinations) were in fifth place, while Belgium, Czech Republic, New Zealand, Norway and Switzerland ranked sixth with 189 destinations.

Ban on use of trans fat by food industry

Public Authority for Food and Nutrition has issued a ban on the use of hydrogenated fats to eliminate the use of trans-fatty acids by the food industry in Kuwait.

The Authority added that the ban, which will take effect in May, mandates that all food facilities, factories, and suppliers comply with new regulations. The Authority is reportedly planning to hold a media conference to outline the implementation mechanism for this regulation, which aims to enhance consumer protection and safety.

Commenting on the new measure, Fahad Al-Arbash, head of the Restaurants Union, told the newspaper that this decision will not impact restaurants, as many of them use vegetable oils. He pointed out that "factories



that rely on trans fats, such as factories manufacturing chips and other baked goods, will be affected by the decision."

It is noteworthy that this decision is part of the Authority's ongoing efforts to enhance consumer safety and foster integrated cooperation between government agencies and the private sector in the public interest.

This initiative is based on GCC Technical Regulation 2483 concerning trans fats and product contents, which highlights the potential health risks artificial trans fats pose to societal well-being.

CBK requests banks to unify WAMD, Link, transaction amounts

Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) has instructed banks not to set varying withdrawal limits for link payments or through 'WAMD' services as is currently the case.

The Central Bank noted that growing demand from customers for 'link' transfers in recent months has prompted several banks to increase transfer limits, which now vary from one bank to another. Some banks set a maximum daily limit of KD1,000 per transaction, while others exceed this amount, with limits reaching up to KD3,000 per day, and in some cases, KD10,000 is set as the total monthly transfer limit per customer.

The regulator has now requested banks not to rely on non-standardized limits with varying maximums, meaning banks must discontinue setting higher limits for these transactions, whether they are conducted at the bank itself or from a customer's account in another bank.

The Central Bank had previously doubled the upper limit for instant money transfers to individuals, asserting that the sender's payments are determined by the source and are therefore considered low-risk.

The new instructions apply only to individual transfers. The limits for settling financial payments for medium and large institutions and companies will remain unchanged for now, given their distinct needs for financial settlements.

Regarding the need for some customers to raise the maximum transfer limits via 'links' or 'WAMD,' whether daily or monthly, the Central



Bank stated that customers may apply through the app to request this, specifying the maximum limit they wish to set for their transactions. However, the implementation must comply with the regulatory guidelines.

According to CBK guidelines, the minimum amount for money transfers executed through 'links,' 'WAMD,' or other financial transfer applications will be open-ended in terms of value, set at the lowest possible rate. Accordingly, banks will continue to allow these transfers to be made starting from one dinar per transaction, without any changes.

The sources also indicated that the regulations will help the regulator enhance its capabilities to combat hacking operations, which often use electronic financial transfers as a major gateway for their activities.

They emphasized that 'links,' 'WAMD,' and all banks' financial transfer applications will remain active, with the only change being the abandonment of setting higher differential ceilings for these transfers. These ceilings will no longer be set unless requested by the customer.

DDI wins top 'Health App' award at Arab Media Forum

Dasman Diabetes Institute (DDI) won the best health application in Kuwait award for its 'Dasman Switch' app, in recognition of its importance to the community, as well for the features and services it provides to the public.



The Dasman Switch application is designed to benefit the community through a new health awareness concept titled, 'Wherever You Are,' making it easily accessible to increase health awareness in a smooth and innovative way that suits everyone.

The free and easy to use Dasman Switch health application helps citizens and residents make healthier food choices.

The award was presented to DDI at the 12th Arab Media Forum held in Kuwait, under the patronage of Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, on 2 January. The event was attended by the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information, Dr. Nasser Muhaisen, along with special guests, media professionals, artists, content creators, and influencers.

In his comments on the occasion, Director General of the Dasman Diabetes Institute, Dr. Faisal Al-Rifai, confirmed that the institute is committed to keeping pace with development and creativity, particularly in contributing to social responsibility and benefiting all segments of society.

He emphasized the institute's efforts to raise awareness about the dangers of unhealthy lifestyles and promote a healthy diet among people. He explained that the Dasman Switch app provides important nutritional information on most food products, as well as offers healthy alternatives to those that are unsuitable, thus contributing to the prevention of diabetes.

New penalties for residency violations

Ministry of Interior (Mol) announced last week that the new decree-into-law 114/2024, regarding the residency of expatriates, would be effective as of Sunday, 5 January. In a statement elaborating on the law and the penalties that it imposes, the Mol said that a 'consensual settlement' is stipulated in several residency cases.

The statement noted the following:

Provision 6 of the law concerns failure to report about the birth of a new child within four months of the birth. The provision further states that the concerned parent is liable to pay a fine of KD2 for each day of

delay in the first month, and KD4 per day in subsequent months, with a ceiling for the fines set at KD2,000.

Provision 9 of the law stipulates that a foreigner cannot obtain a residency permit under the following cases: Entering the country with a visit visa, for family reunion, for studies, for a temporary government contract, or for treatment. The settlement payment for such cases is set at KD2 for each day of overstay during the first month and KD4 per day in subsequent months, with a maximum fine set at KD1,200.

Provision 9 also covers the fines for irregular cases concerning domestic workers. The penalty is KD2 for each day of delay and the maximum fine is set at KD600.

Provision 11 tackles the cases of exceeding the visa validity. The settlement payment is set at KD10 for each day after the visa expiry.

Public Debt Law to help finance development projects

Government is said to be working on legislating a draft public debt law, as part of its broader efforts to enhance Kuwait's credit ratings and borrowing conditions, as well as to boost investor and creditor confidence locally and internationally.

Legislation is reportedly in advanced stages, with various options being considered, with the most likely scenario to be adopted being a law that would permit the government to borrow up to KD20 billion over 50 years. Kuwait has not had a public debt law since October 2017, when the previous bill expired and attempts to issue a new draft law have stalled in Parliament over the years.

Reports citing finance ministry sources say that the anticipated debt structure will include bonds and sukuk, with the allocation between local and international issuance determined by interest rates, available liquidity in Kuwaiti banks, and their capacity to meet financing needs across various economic sectors.

The 'public debt' facility is expected to be utilized in phases, with the state's financial requirements to cover deficits or finance development projects guiding the size of debt

Kuwait's strong rating boosts its ability to secure competitive financing through regional and international bonds and sukuk, with bank interest and liquidity determining their weight both domestically and internationally.



issuance, influenced by economic conditions. A public debt law has become a necessary

reform, considering the need to secure financing for the government's many ambitious

development plans. It also helps protect the national economy from financial shocks and speculation, while contributing to the development of debt markets that assist the private sector to build references for pricing other financial assets, particularly debt.

The public debt could also be used to refinance or replace existing government debt, including scheduled payments until 2027/2028, such as approximately KD1.42 billion due by 2027, with KD1.37 billion of international debt maturing in March 2027, and KD50 million of local debt due on 9 June 2027.

Additionally, this approach contributes to increasing the flexibility of the sovereign credit rating, mitigating the risks posed by oil price fluctuations and the long-term shift away from oil, especially in light of Kuwait's lack of a comprehensive financing strategy.

Kuwait's strong financial position, substantial sovereign wealth, and low debt levels, as well as its high ratings by credit rating agencies are expected to secure bond market loans for Kuwait at competitive interest rates compared to those available in the region.

Kuwait among few states to meet criteria for 'Healthy Cities'

Several positive factors have helped Kuwait overcome the obstacles and meet the standards required by the World Health Organization to designate healthy cities in a country, including the services provided in areas such as quality education, health, drinking water, and sanitation among others.

The comments on efforts by Kuwait to develop components in cities to meet the World Health Organization's (WHO) criteria for 'Healthy Cities' were made by Dr. Samar Al-Faqi, Regional Advisor for Health Promotion and Social Determinants of Health at the World Health Organization for the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

Dr. Al-Faqi's remarks came during a meeting with media representatives on the sidelines of a recent visit to Kuwait by a delegation from the World Health Organization to evaluate the holistic health services provided by several cities in the country. She began by clarifying a major misconception among many people regarding the term 'healthy city'. The WHO representative explained that the term is often narrowly understood as "simply building hospitals or health centers or focusing solely on health from a clinical perspective, which is incorrect. According to the World Health Organization, health is not just the absence of disease, but rather a state of complete mental, physical, social, and overall well-being of individuals in a society".

She noted that Kuwait has taken it upon itself to clarify the broader concept of health and the importance of cooperation between sectors, especially since the factors that affect health fall under the jurisdiction of other sectors. The environment, urban planning, and education all have an impact on health. The Ministry of Health is concerned with the overall health service aspect in Kuwait, so the ministry has clearly disseminated this concept to everyone. As a result, cooperation between sectors has been excellently enhanced in implementing healthy cities. She added that, in addition, the governors of governorates in Kuwait are playing a direct and crucial role in greatly promoting the healthy cities program.

Dr. Al-Faqi appreciated Kuwait's efforts, highlighting that it is one of the very few countries with a dedicated healthy cities department in the Ministry of Health. She also highlighted the significant role of volunteer work in the country, including the Kuwaiti national spirit, cooperative societies, and diwanias, where many important issues are discussed and used to raise community awareness.

She added that the expansion in the number of health cities in Kuwait is based on previous experience and follows a solid strategic foundation aligned with the state's policy and strategy. The approach of involvement at the governorate level is more effective because it offers multiple models within each governorate. This is what distinguishes Kuwait, as every health city is tailored to meet the specific needs of the society and age groups within the area.

The five-day visit of the WHO delegation to Kuwait, was aimed at re-evaluating the Yarmouk Health City for re-accreditation, as it originally obtained the accreditation certificate as a healthy city in 2018. Since the organization's certificate is valid for only three years, it was time for a re-evaluation. In addition, three new cities—Cordoba and Daiya in the Capital Governorate, and Shaab in the Hawalli Governorate were evaluated for the first time.



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CBK urges banks to boost security of e-wallet transactions

The Central Bank urges banks to boost electronic wallet security by monitoring transactions, preventing coded card deals without activation, and blocking Apple Pay or Samsung Pay activation from outside Kuwait unless confirmed by the customer.

Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) has urged local banks to establish robust security mechanisms to protect financial transactions, including through tokenization of electronic wallets (e-wallets) such as Apple Pay and Samsung Pay.

According to Al Anba newspaper, this initiative involves leveraging card coding technologies and advanced data analytics with focus on tracking user behavior, the geographic location of transactions, frequency of operations, to proactively detect and address potential fraud.

The tokenization process enhances the security of electronic payment transactions by replacing sensitive card information, such as the full card number (PAN), with a 'Token' code. This code is used to complete transactions instead of the original card data, significantly reducing the risk of data breaches or misuse.

The security mechanisms mandated by the Central Bank are based on three key monitoring and analysis elements. The first element focuses on customer behavior by analyzing usual spending patterns, such as transaction amounts, types of operations, and timing.

If a transaction significantly deviates from the established pattern—such as a large purchase or a transaction with an unfamiliar merchant—the system raises an alert or halts the process for verification.

The second element considers geographical location, comparing the transaction's execution location with the customer's known location. Transactions from suspicious countries, regions, or locations far from the customer's usual location may be rejected or require additional confirmation.



The third element involves monitoring the repetition of operations by tracking the number of consecutive transactions within a short time frame. An abnormal increase in activity, such as multiple repeated payment attempts within a brief period, may signal potential fraudulent activity.

The Central Bank has called on banks to develop a mechanism allowing customers to choose whether to activate the service of adding bank cards to electronic wallets such as Apple Pay and Samsung Pay. The service must not be automatically activated for all customers, and no transactions related to tokenization should be processed unless the customer has explicitly activated this service in advance. For example, this includes refraining from sending the one-time verification code (OTP) required to add a bank card to an electronic wallet.

The Central Bank also emphasized in its directive that if a customer adds their bank card to an electronic wallet, such as Apple Pay or Samsung Pay, from outside the bank's application, the following procedures must be implemented:

Implement an additional security step requiring authentication through the bank's application to activate the bank card, along with an explanation of the purpose of the authentication.

Block requests to add cards from outside the bank's application if they originate from outside Kuwait, unless the customer contacts the bank to confirm the addition of the card personally.

The Central Bank emphasized the importance of adding a feature to the bank's application that allows customers to view their cards and identify any electronic wallets, such as Apple Pay or Samsung Pay, linked to them. The feature should also specify the types of devices through which activation was performed, such as iPhone, Android phone, or smart watch.

Additionally, the Central Bank highlighted the need to comply with Article (32) of the instructions for regulating electronic payment of funds, issued in May 2023. This article mandates the development of policies, procedures, systems, and controls necessary to detect and address fraud.

It also requires reporting fraud cases and related incidents to the competent authorities and providing continuous updates to the Central Bank within the specified timeframe and format determined in the Article. The Central Bank also called for strict adherence to the directives outlined in its letter and requested a detailed timeline for implementing the required measures.

Citizenship Law amendments protects rights of foreign wives of Kuwaitis

First Deputy Prime Minister Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior, Sheikh Fahad Yusuf Saud Al-Sabah reaffirmed on Sunday that Decree Law 158/2024 on amending Article 16 of Amiri Decree 15/1959 on Kuwaiti citizenship law, guarantees a decent life in accordance with Article 8 of the Kuwaiti Citizenship Law, for foreign wives of Kuwaitis whose citizenship were revoked.

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yusuf made the above statement during a meeting he chaired at the Al-Seif Palace with concerned government agencies, to follow up on the measures taken by those agencies to deal with the

revoked, retroactively from the date of stopping them.

For his part, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ziad Al-Najem, said that disbursement of food rations to the same category will continue and will not be cancelled. He added that the commercial licenses and company ownerships for that category will also not be affected, taking into consideration that in the event of a new company or institution being established, the maximum ownership will be 49 percent.

In turn, Acting Director General of the Public Authority for Civil Information, Jaber Al-Kandari, explained that the authority will soon activate the 'My Identity' application for the category, indicating that their new civil IDs will be issued at the end of this month.

On a related note, the Interior Ministry announced that a dedicated WhatsApp 97293232— has been assigned through which individuals whose citizenship has been withdrawn and their wives can access services related to the issue of citizenship withdrawal in accordance

with Article (8) of the Nationality Law.

The ministry added that the service is available during official working hours, from 8am to 2pm, during which all inquiries related to the citizenship withdrawal will be addressed, and the necessary support will be provided to beneficiaries in a convenient and efficient manner.

The ministry said that the initiative is part of its commitment to facilitate communication with beneficiaries and ensure that relevant information and services are provided quickly and effectively.



First Deputy Prime Minister Sheikh Fahad Yusuf Saud Al-Sabah while chairing a meeting at Al-Seif Palace with concerned government agencies

file on citizenship revocations. He further noted that the amendment allowed the rights and privileges the wives of Kuwaitis enjoyed before the decree was issued to be maintained, according to what it deems to be in the public interest.

For his part, Acting Deputy Director General for Insurance Affairs at the Public Institution for Social Security, Salama bin Salama, affirmed that from 9 January, the institution will continue disbursing retirement pensions and shares to foreign wives of Kuwaitis whose citizenships were



T2 air terminal a key component of New Kuwait 2035

The new airport terminal, T2, will play a key role in transforming Kuwait into a regional and international financial and commercial hub that attracts investment and enhances tourism to the country, said Minister of Public Works, Dr. Noura Mohammed Al-Mashaan. She added that the government was keen to complete all work related to T2 with emphasis on quality and efficiency, and in accordance with the approved technical specifications and the agreed-upon schedule.

The minister made the comments following a high-level meeting she held on 9 January with the President of the General Directorate of Civil Aviation, Sheikh Hamoud Mubarak Al-Hamoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and representatives from the Ministry of Interior, to discuss the required facilities and support for the project's successful execution.

During the meeting, Minister Al-Mashaan was briefed on the latest developments regarding the implementation of the works, and on initiatives aimed at accelerating the project's phases. The minister also emphasized that all services and facilities should be operated according to the scheduled timeline, while continuing progress toward completing the new airport project.

In a statement issued by the Ministry of Public Works after the meeting, Al-Mashaan explained that the purpose of the meeting was to closely monitor the progress of the project, address any challenges, and work toward overcoming

them. She highlighted that the new airport is one of the ambitious national projects aimed at developing and modernizing the country's infrastructure in line with the 'New Kuwait 2035' vision, and stressed the importance of close coordination with the Civil Aviation Directorate to ensure the timely and successful completion of the project.

According to the statement, one of the key components of Package 3, which supplements Packages 1 and 2, includes the food equipment building, and the technical support center. This also encompasses a security point, employee and cargo security inspection area, a waste disposal zone, service tunnels at the air terminal, as well as corridors and aircraft parking facilities.

In a related context, the project contractor has completed earthworks and reached the excavation stages for both the food equipment building and the tunnels, in line with the contract requirements. Obstacles encountered during the project have been cleared through cooperation with the relevant authorities, including the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Electricity and Water, and other concerned agencies.

The statement added that the materials, equipment, and specialized companies provided by the contractor are being approved in coordination with the contract consultant, the ministry's supervisory body, and the relevant government agencies.

New residency law seeks to address legal gaps, enhance business climate

Regarding violations of the new law, Al-Ayoub said that the new 'overstay' violation fees are now set at KD10 per day with the maximum fine fixed at KD2,000. A 'block' will also be placed on both the violator and the sponsor, and if the sponsor is an expatriate, the penalty may include deportation.

The new residency law issued by Decree 114/2024 aims to overcome prevailing legal lacunae and seeks to make the country more attractive for tourists, investors, and businesses, said Director of the General Department of Residency Affairs, Brigadier Yousef Al-Ayoub.

Elaborating on the new law during a recent interview on state television, Brigadier Al-Ayoub stated that the new residency law replaces the previous one, which was introduced 60 years ago and did not support the openness, ambitions, policies and plans of a 'new Kuwait'.

A major focus of the new law is to attract investors and new businesses to Kuwait and to position the country as a financial and economic hub, while also ensuring fairness to all, said Al-Ayoub. Explaining some features of the new law, Al Ayoub noted that under the new law, "foreign real estate



owners are granted residence for up to ten years, provided their passports are valid, while investors are granted a 15-year

residence, which is renewable according to the conditions set by the Council of Ministers."

He explained that "this step aims to attract capital owners." The new law also provides for visitors to the country to obtain a tourist, commercial, or family visa with a stay of up to three months, instead of the previous one-month period.

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For those in residence for family reunification, study, or work, the violation fine will be up to 1,400 dinars, while the fine for domestic labor violations will be 600 dinars."

Cultural fest brings together Nepalis in Kuwait for New Year



By Raj Malla
Special to The Times Kuwait

Kirat Rai Yayokha Kuwait hosted a spectacular 'First Cultural Blast' event to celebrate New Year 2025. Held at the Aspire School Auditorium in Jleeb Shyukh, the program captivated the audience with performances by renowned singer Chewang Lama and popular artist Babina Kirati.

Ambassador of Nepal H.E. Ghanshyam Lamsal, graced the event as the Chief Guest.

Special guests included NRNA NCC Kuwait President Ranadhvaj Lama, Nepal Journalists Association Kuwait President Raj Malla, along with representatives from various political parties, organizational officials, and journalists based in Kuwait.

The cultural program unfolded in a harmonious and peaceful environment. The electrifying performances by guest artists captivated over a thousand attendees. The event also featured cultural showcases from the Kirati community, adding vibrancy and richness



to the program. The event fostered unity and strengthened relationships among Nepalis working in Kuwait, creating a festive atmosphere to celebrate the New Year. According to the organizers, such programs honoring Nepali art, literature, and music help maintain camaraderie among expatriate Nepalis while preserving the spirit of Nepali culture abroad.

Kirat Rai Yayokha emphasized that events like these highlight Nepalese heritage and strengthen the bonds within the Nepali diaspora.

Residents without biometric fingerprinting restricted from travel

Ministry of Interior has announced that residents who have not completed the biometric fingerprint process will be unable to travel until it is completed. Following expiry of the 31 December, 2024 deadline, restrictions will also apply to other transactions, including government and banking services. These restrictions will not be lifted from the ministry's system until the biometric fingerprinting is completed.

Elaborating on the current status of biometric fingerprinting in the country, First Lieutenant Talal Al-Khaldi, an officer at the General Directorate

of Forensic Evidence, stated during a recent television interview that the total number of biometric fingerprints



registered so far has reached 3,526,000 citizens and residents.

He explained that the target group among citizens comprised around 972,253 individuals, of whom about 956,000 completed the fingerprinting process, leaving 16,000 who have not. Among residents, the target group comprised around 2,685,000 individuals, of whom 2,504,000 completed the process and 181,718 are yet to do so.

Regarding the category of illegal residents 'Bedouin', Al-Khaldi noted that the target group consists of 148,000 individuals, of whom 66,000 have

completed their fingerprints, while 82,000 have not.

Al-Khaldi emphasized that the General Directorate of Forensic Evidence is open seven days a week at eight centers to accommodate those who have not yet completed their biometric fingerprinting. He added that the fingerprinting process takes no more than three minutes, and that the 'forensic evidence' department has the capacity to handle 10,000 appointments per day, provided individuals register through the application to book an appointment in advance.



Indian Embassy celebrates World Hindi Day

The Times Kuwait Report

World Hindi Day was marked at the Indian Embassy auditorium on 10 January with a variety of cultural programs in Hindi. Students and teachers from Indian schools provided an impressive set of performances, including by reciting poems, songs and dances to the delight of the packed embassy auditorium.

Indian Ambassador H.E. Dr. Adarsh Swaika read out the prime minister's message in Hindi which highlighted the significance of World Hindi Day and the Hindi language. In his address to the gathering Ambassador Swaika pointed out that World Hindi Day was not just a celebration of a language, but a tribute to the diverse linguistic traditions of the country, and the unifying role that the Indian language plays in connecting millions of Indians around the world.

He added that the Day provided an opportunity to promote the language and encourage its use in various fields, and to reflect on its historical importance in promoting a sense

of national identity and to cherish the language. He went on to state, "Let us celebrate on this day, the beauty of the Indian language, its profound impact on literature, culture and art, and pledge to preserve its legacy for future generations."

Indian school students enthusiastically participated in the activities such as by recitation of Hindi poetry, novels and stories inspired by Indian literature and Hindi grammar, as well as rendering impressive dance performances.

The event was also notable for the Kuwaiti participation in the celebrations, with several Kuwaiti nationals being honored by the ambassador for their participation in an open social media competition held specifically for Kuwaiti citizens who spoke the language.

Kuwaiti singer Mubarak Al-Azmi, known among the Indian community for his love of Indian music and culture, ignited the enthusiasm of the audience when he sang the timeless Indian national song "Mere Desh Ki Dharti", and some of them participated in singing with him. Two Kuwaiti citizens spoke fluently in Hindi on the stage, and shared with the audience laughter



and applause with them. Another Kuwaiti citizen who attended the ceremony said: "I always had a desire to go to India, so I started listening to the Indian language at night and learned it, I also learned to wear Indian clothes and everything related to India that I carry in my heart, and I always want to go to India during the holidays."

She added: "India is different, with its weather, people and food, so I love it very much and always want to visit it, I have a lot of Indian

friends, they are honest and their hearts are good, they are also very nice."

Director of the 'New Gulf Indian School', Anoop Sharma, spoke on alphabets and their use in the Hindi language, highlighting the rich linguistic heritage of Hindi.

Members of Radio Kuwait which recently began a Hindi language broadcast were also felicitated by the Indian ambassador for popularizing the language.



LuLu Hypermarket hostes 'Shopping Skills Program' for special needs students

LuLu Hypermarket, in collaboration with the Conductive Education School Kuwait for Special Needs, successfully conducted a Shopping Skills Training Program on 6th January 2025 at LuLu Hypermarket Alrai Outlet, designed to empower differently abled students by equipping them with essential life skills.

The program provided students hands-on exposure to a real-world shopping environment, fostering independence, confidence, and practical learning. Under the guidance of experienced instructors and LuLu Happiness volunteers, the participants learned to navigate the hypermarket, purchase items, manage a shopping list, and understand the basics of financial transactions.

The Conductive School, renowned for its

focus on holistic development for special students, emphasized the significance of such programs.

The Shopping Skill Training Program exemplifies the potential of community partnerships in making a positive difference. This initiative is a testament to the belief that inclusivity and practical education can transform lives.



Kuwait Economy 2025, a Door to Opportunities

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Support for attracting and employing highly-skilled expatriate workers should be introduced through targeted visa programs and reforming job sponsorship frameworks. Higher female labor force participation should also be encouraged by improving the working environment for women, including by fully implementing the legal requirements for childcare in the private sector.

Other recommendations in the Article IV Consultation statement include regulating the compensation of state employees, which surged in the past decade and is now the highest among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. A wage setting mechanism should be introduced to gradually reduce the 41 percent premium that public sector employees have over the private sector. Additionally, a hiring cap should be used to steadily lower the public sector employment share in the labor market and bring it down to the level of other high-income countries.

Hydrocarbon consumption subsidies, which are also the highest in the GCC, should be phased out by gradually raising retail fuel and electricity prices to the level of cost-recovery, while providing targeted transfers to vulnerable groups. Budgetary public investment, which plummeted over the past decade to near the bottom of the GCC, should also be raised to build up the quantity and quality of infrastructure to high-income country levels.

Additionally, the hydrocarbon share of government revenue, which remains the highest in the GCC, needs to be significantly brought down through boosting non-oil revenue mobilization.

In the context of the global minimum corporate tax agreement, the Fund welcomed the government's decision to introduce 15 percent tax on revenues of multinational firms and also urged Kuwait to introduce the GCC-wide VAT and excise tax.

Political turmoil, which had gripped Kuwait

over the past several years, had stalled much-needed reforms, crippling the country's potential economic growth. Since taking office in May 2024, the new government has prioritized economic development and diversification of revenue sources, rationalized spending, expedited the implementation of vital projects, and enacted policies to improve business environment, support growth and attract investments.

The cabinet headed by His Highness the Prime Minister has been implementing a series of plans and policies aimed to revive the economy and boost growth. With the primary focus on accelerating and awarding project execution, the government is reportedly in the final phase of awarding projects worth around KD8 billion this year, mainly in water and energy sectors, to address chronic power shortages that occur in summers.

The cabinet's commitment to a moderate and gradual reform path has already created a positive atmosphere in the country's stock market, which, after years of weak performance, recorded the second best performance in the region in 2024.

The imposition of a corporate tax of 15 percent on multinational firms with revenues over KD240 million from January 2025, and the possible enlargement of the tax base to include all firms with turnover of more than KD1.5 million annually by January 2027 could support the country's budget and boost non-oil GDP.

The announcement of the general-budget for the 2025/2026 fiscal year, expected in the second quarter of 2025, will further indicate the government's other focus areas and key policies going forward.

The government's actions since taking office and its commitments to welfare of citizens have built trust and support among the public. Analysts believe that this public support will be key to enacting other far-reaching financial and economic reforms that the country needs to ensure a sustained and sustainable future.



Exploring heritage and legacy

A Journey to Konark, Puri, and 'Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas'

By Kaizar T Shakir
IBPC Chairman, Kuwait

A high-profile delegation consisting of the Indian Business and Professional Council (IBPC) Kuwait, the Indian Doctors Forum (IDF-Kuwait), and ICAI (Institute of Chartered Accountants of India-Kuwait Chapter), recently participated in the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) 2025, which was held in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India.

Our journey to Bhubaneswar for the "PBD 2025" celebrations has been nothing short of remarkable as we were warmly welcomed with open arms. Leading a delegation of over 50 members from Kuwait has brought countless moments of pride and connection as we celebrated our shared heritage and India's progress.

Amid the busy schedule, we took a moment to explore two of Odisha's most revered landmarks—the majestic Konark Sun Temple and the sacred Jagannath Temple in Puri. The visit was an inspiring experience, leaving us with a renewed sense of cultural pride and spiritual fulfillment.

Konark: Where the Sun Rides a Chariot

The Sun Temple at Konark rises in majestic solitude, its 13th-century ruins echoing tales of devotion, artistry, and architectural brilliance. Shaped like a colossal chariot pulled by seven galloping horses, the temple symbolizes the journey of the sun across the heavens.

The temple's 24 intricately carved wheels, each a marvel of craftsmanship, capture the essence of time itself, functioning as sundials with astonishing precision. This masterpiece stands as a tribute to the ingenuity and vision of our forebears, blending spirituality with science in a way that continues to inspire awe.

As we strolled through the temple grounds, the tale of Samba, Lord Krishna's son, unfolded vividly in our minds. Cursed with leprosy and ultimately healed by the grace of the Sun God, his story seemed to resonate in the very air around us. We could almost envision his penance and the unwavering faith of countless devotees who sought solace here over the centuries.

The Natya Mandap, or dancing hall, standing gracefully before the temple, further captivated us. Its intricate carvings and timeless beauty was a powerful reminder of how art and spirituality have long been intertwined in our traditions, creating spaces that inspire both devotion and wonder.

Puri: The Call of Jagannath

From Konark, our journey took us to Puri, one of Hinduism's most revered pilgrimage sites. Though I could not enter the sacred Jagannath Temple as a non-Hindu, the temple's spiritual significance was unmistakable even from the outside.

The temple's towering structure and vibrant atmosphere seemed to radiate a divine energy that drew devotees from all corners of the world. As one of the Char Dham pilgrimage sites, Jagannath Puri holds a cherished place in the hearts of countless worshippers, symbolizing devotion, faith, and the timeless connection between the divine and humanity.

Lord Jagannath, revered as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, is worshipped alongside his siblings, Balabhadra and Subhadra, in traditions that trace back centuries.

The grandeur of the annual Rath Yatra, where the deities are paraded in colossal chariots,

draws millions of pilgrims, embodying the vibrant spirit of devotion.

The temple is also renowned for its mahaprasad, a sacred offering prepared in earthen pots, reflecting the simplicity and sanctity of its rituals. Together, these elements form a timeless tapestry of faith and devotion, creating an atmosphere of profound reverence that lingers in the heart long after the visit.

The rich history and deep faith surrounding Jagannath Puri left our group profoundly moved. For some, it was their first encounter with the sacred site; for others, it was a cherished return after years of longing.

Yet, for everyone, it was a shared moment of introspection, a chance to connect with the enduring essence of our culture and the unyielding spirit of faith that has withstood the test of time.

At Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas

Returning to Bhubaneswar, the Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas unfolded as an inspiring celebration of unity and vision. The Prime Minister's address struck a powerful chord with every NRI present, eloquently blending the aspirations of a billion Indians with the impactful contributions of the global diaspora.

The PM's articulation of Vision 2047—a



transformative blueprint for India's future—was both ambitious and inclusive, urging each of us to actively contribute to the nation's progress while cherishing and preserving our cultural heritage.

The day was alive with engaging conversations as our delegation explored ways to deepen the ties between India and Kuwait. The atmosphere buzzed with a sense of purpose and boundless optimism, as ideas and initiatives were exchanged with fervor. It was truly inspiring to witness so many individuals, united by their passion, eager to contribute to India's growth and success on the global stage.

Leaving with Memories

As the Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas Awards Ceremony draws near tomorrow, there's a bittersweet feeling that lingers. This journey has offered us much more than memories; it has strengthened our connection to India, deepening our sense of belonging even as we reside far from home.

From the ancient stones of Konark to the sacred halls of Jagannath Puri, and now to the modern halls of Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas, this journey has been a profound reminder of who we are and where we come from.

As we prepare to return to Kuwait, we carry more than just memories with us; we carry a renewed sense of responsibility—to honor our heritage, stay connected to our roots, and contribute, in whatever small way we can, to the ongoing story of India.

The journey transcended mere sightseeing, becoming a heartfelt exploration of identity, belonging, and the enduring power of culture.



EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Climate Justice for Latin America and the Caribbean



Thiago Barral and Woochong Um

Thiago Barral is Secretary of the Energy Transition and Planning in the Ministry of Mines and Energy of Brazil.

Woochong Um is CEO of the Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet.

November's United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29) in Baku, dubbed the 'Finance COP', left many deeply disappointed, and for good reason. While the pledge to mobilize \$300 billion in climate finance by 2035 is a good start, it falls far short of what is needed to accelerate the development of low-carbon energy systems in low- and middle-income countries.

Improving access to renewable energy is particularly urgent in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), where 60 million people live without reliable power and 16 million lack even basic access to electricity. This energy gap underscores the need for sustainable and inclusive solutions.

Accelerating the global energy transition depends on advancing economic and social development. One way to achieve this is to integrate modern, sustainable energy into every industry, community, and household across the

region, ensuring that the benefits of long-term development are widely shared.

To be sure, LAC countries have made major strides toward universal energy access, with 60 percent of their power coming from renewables and more than 98 percent of the region's population connected to electricity grids. But progress has slowed to a crawl. Since 2010, electrification rates have increased by only three percentage points, a clear sign that conventional approaches are not enough to close the remaining access gaps.

Consider Haiti, where just 47 percent of the population has access to electricity, and communities in many remote areas rely on expensive and polluting fossil-fuel generators. Similarly, vast areas in countries like Guatemala and Bolivia still lack reliable power infrastructure. This has profound consequences for economic

particularly for the countries most affected by climate change. These challenges are compounded by high financing costs, political and regulatory instability, and limited domestic credit capacity, all of which impede energy investment across the region.

To tackle this daunting challenge, policymakers must adopt a new strategy that focuses on improving stakeholder coordination, increasing efficiency, and enabling lower-income countries and communities to take the lead. Testing and scaling new technologies and implementing financial mechanisms that channel increased resources are also vital for effective, multisector government programs.

The Universal Access Coalition (UAC), launched at the Energies of the Amazon Conference in Belém, Brazil, following November's G20 summit, is a prime example of this approach. By bringing

the UAC aims to promote innovative technological solutions. For example, distributed renewable energy, such as mini-grids and solar home systems, represents a faster, more cost-effective alternative to traditional grid expansion in remote regions with low population density. The Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet, in partnership with the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, is also investing in mesh grids—decentralized networks designed to deliver reliable electricity to underserved areas.

LAC countries' efforts must advance the broader goal of revitalizing global efforts to achieve UN Sustainable Development Goal 7, which calls for universal access to clean, affordable energy by 2030. Targeted government programs in Brazil, such as Energies of the Amazon and Light for All (Luz para Todos), demonstrate how multi-stakeholder approaches can facilitate community-led, equitable initiatives.

Ahead of COP30 in Belém this year, policymakers must reassess the effectiveness of the global response to the existential threat of climate change and commit to bold, decisive action. By harnessing the collective power of governments, civil society, and the private sector, we can unlock LAC countries' immense renewable-energy potential, transforming the region into a model for sustainable development.

But success cannot be measured in megawatts alone. Energy solutions must actively engage local and indigenous communities and ensure they play a meaningful role in planning and decision-making. A just energy transition is more than a moral imperative, it is the only way to meet global climate goals, build climate resilience, and deliver equitable growth.

“One way to accelerate global energy transition is to integrate modern, sustainable energy into every industry, community, and household across the region, ensuring that the benefits of long-term development are widely shared.”

development, as reliable electricity is needed to deliver clean water, improve health care and education, and enable small businesses to grow.

Despite efforts by governments and the private sector, achieving universal energy access remains costly and technically challenging,

together governments, private companies, multilateral organizations, development-finance institutions, and civil-society groups, the UAC seeks to mobilize resources, drive innovation, and advocate for universal energy access.

By fostering cooperation among stakeholders,

Year 2024 goes down as warmest on record

In a statement issued on 10 January, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) confirmed that 2024 was the warmest year on record since the organization began publishing its annual weather reports in 1927. The WMO added that based on six independent international datasets, the past ten years have all been in the Top Ten in terms of temperatures, in what the organization said was “an extraordinary streak of world-record-breaking temperatures.

A consolidated analysis of the six datasets also showed that the global average surface temperature in 2024 was 1.55 °C above the 1850-1900 average. This means that we have likely just experienced the first calendar year with a global mean temperature of more than 1.5°C above the 1850-1900 average, breaching the target that the Paris Climate Agreement of 2015 is seeking to avoid.

In a statement issued against the backdrop of the latest WMO assessment, United Nations

Secretary-General António Guterres said: “Today's assessment from the World Meteorological Organization is clear: Global heating is a cold, hard fact.

We have just endured the hottest decade on record – with 2024 topping the list, and likely to be the first calendar year with a global mean temperature of more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

Individual years pushing past the 1.5 degree limit do not mean the long-term goal is shot. It means we need to fight even harder to get on track. Blazing temperatures in 2024 require trail-blazing climate action in 2025.

Specifically, governments must deliver new national climate action plans this year to limit long-term global temperature rise to 1.5°C, and support the most vulnerable and deal with devastating climate impacts.” He added, “There's still time to avoid the worst of the climate catastrophe. But leaders must act – now.

The WMO provides a temperature assessment based on multiple sources of data to support international climate monitoring and to provide authoritative information for the UN Climate Change negotiating process. The six datasets were sourced from the European Center for Medium Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF), Japan Meteorological Agency, the US Space



Agency (NASA), the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the UK's Met Office in collaboration with the Climatic Research Unit at the University of East Anglia (HadCRUT), and Berkeley Earth.

The WMO also uses reanalysis datasets from the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts and its Copernicus Climate Change Service, and the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA). Reanalysis combines millions of meteorological and marine observations, including from satellites, using a weather model to produce a complete three-dimensional and

global dataset that provides a globally complete or near-globally complete picture of near surface temperatures using statistical methods to fill gaps in data sparse areas such as the polar regions.

“Climate history is playing out before our eyes. We've had not just one or two record-breaking years, but a full ten-year series. This has been accompanied by devastating and extreme weather, rising sea levels and melting ice, all powered by record-breaking greenhouse gas levels due to human activities,” said WMO Secretary-General Andrea Celeste Saulo

She added, “It is important to emphasize that a single year of more than 1.5°C for a year does not mean that we have failed to meet Paris Agreement long-term temperature goals, which are measured over decades rather than individual years. However, it is essential to recognize that every fraction of a degree of warming matters. Whether it is at a level below or above 1.5°C of warming, every increment of global warming increases the impacts on our lives, economies and our planet.”

A separate study conducted by the Institute of Atmospheric Physics at the Chinese Academy of Sciences—involving a team of 54 scientists from seven countries and 31 scientific institutes—found that ocean warming in 2024 played a key role in the record high temperatures.

Understanding Perimenopause:

A Crucial Transition in Women's Lives

“Perimenopause can last 10+ years and typically begins in your 40s...There are actually over 34 symptoms of menopause and perimenopause that are rarely talked about,” shares Fadal.



By Hermoine Macura-Noble
Special to The Times Kuwait

For many women, the word ‘menopause’ signals the end of their reproductive years, but few are as familiar with the transition that precedes it: perimenopause. This natural phase, which typically begins in a woman’s 40s but can start earlier, is a significant stage of life that deserves greater understanding and attention.

TV anchor and author of ‘How to Menopause’, Tamsen Fadal explains that you are technically in menopause when you have gone one full year without a period. The years leading up to menopause—when women start to experience symptoms, is called perimenopause.

“Perimenopause can last 10+ years and typically begins in your 40s...There are actually over 34 symptoms of menopause and perimenopause that are rarely talked about,” shares Fadal.

Experts say this phase can last anywhere from a few months to over a decade, with an average duration of about four years. During this time, hormonal fluctuations—particularly in estrogen and progesterone—can lead to a wide range of physical, emotional, and mental changes. Women’s bodies are affected by menopause thanks to the hormonal changes in estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone. Certain medications or surgeries can also kick-start the process.

Every woman experiences menopause differently. Some women may not experience any noticeable symptoms, while others may feel like they are experiencing every listed symptom by the doctors. The symptoms of perimenopause can vary widely in intensity and frequency. Some of the most common signs include: Irregular periods, hot flashes and night



sweats, mood swings, sleep disturbances, changes in libido, vaginal dryness and cognitive changes such as ‘brain fog’ or memory lapses.

“Other symptoms include loss of breast fullness, osteoporosis, urinary incontinence and weight gain, particularly around the abdomen,” adds Fadel. While perimenopause is a natural process, its symptoms can be challenging. Fortunately, experts say there are numerous ways to manage them effectively.



Dr. Maria Karakoulaki
Gynaecologist in the Gulf and Menopause Expert at Gyneco Middle East

Dr. Maria Karakoulaki, a leading functional gynaecologist in the Gulf and Menopause Expert at Gyneco Middle East, explains further: “I wish there was a magic pill that could help with all these issues and be safe at the same time, but there is not. And this is because perimenopause and menopause are very complex periods of our lives.

“This is the time that a woman has to consider seriously changing her lifestyle, if she has not done it so far...When you manage this season of your life, you need to

supplement the missing hormones but you also have to optimize the woman’s health.

“The best and safest hormones are the body- or bio-identical ones. They are both hormones with exactly the same chemical structure as the hormones that your body used to produce and there are many benefits using them rather than the synthetic ones. The treatment with the body- or bio-identical hormones is individualized as opposed to the synthetic Hormone Replacement Therapy, which is one pill, the same for all.”

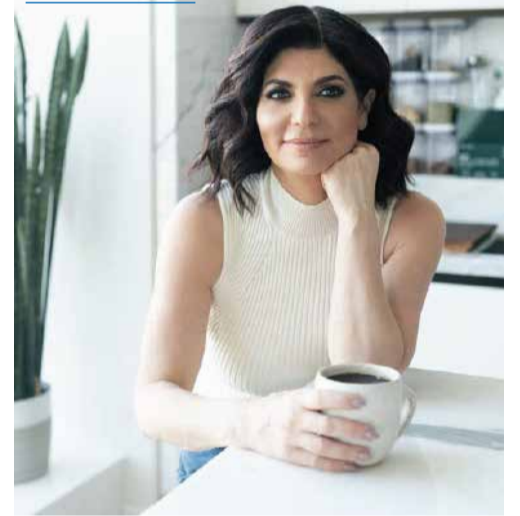
Dr. Maria Karakoulaki adds that diet, exercise, sleeping well, de-stressing, supplementation with vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, are also equally important. This is also where lifestyle medicine comes in with vitamin injections, intravenous drips, personalized supplements and behavioral tools that take care of your body in a holistic way.

While perimenopause is a normal part of life for all women, some symptoms may indicate underlying health issues which is why it is important to always consult with your doctor. Women experiencing excessively heavy periods, severe mood changes, or symptoms that disrupt daily life should also seek medical advice. Early

intervention can make a significant difference in managing the problem or the challenges of this transition.

Despite its prevalence, perimenopause remains an under-discussed topic, often shrouded in stigma or dismissed as ‘just part of aging’. Increasing awareness and education about this stage of life can empower women to seek help, make informed decisions, and embrace the changes with confidence. By understanding and addressing the realities of perimenopause, women can navigate this journey with strength and resilience.

TV anchor and author of ‘How to Menopause’, Tamsen Fadal



“Please don’t give up looking for solutions. There is nothing like, ‘you have to live with it’... In the majority of the cases I see, there is always something you can do about it, you just have to address your concerns to the right people and ask to be heard,” concludes Dr Karakoulaki.

Hermoine Macura-Noble

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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Are High-Skill Immigrants a Problem?



Daron Acemoglu
A 2024 Nobel laureate in economics and Institute Professor of Economics at MIT, he is a co-author with MIT's Simon Johnson of *Power and Progress: Our Thousand-Year Struggle Over Technology and Prosperity*.

Frissures within US President-elect Donald Trump's 'Make America Great Again' coalition have appeared sooner than expected. By the end of December, the tech-billionaire wing was in open warfare with MAGA's nativist wing over America's H-1B visa program, which enables US businesses to employ some 600,000 skilled foreigners per year on a temporary basis.

Speaking for the billionaires, Elon Musk, the CEO of Tesla (a top H-1B employer), argues that, "There is a permanent shortage of excellent engineering talent. It is the fundamental limiting factor in Silicon Valley." Likewise, Vivek Ramaswamy, another tech billionaire advising Trump, claims that US companies need H-1B workers because, "Our American culture has venerated mediocrity over excellence for way too long (at least since the 90s and likely longer)." In response, MAGA activists like Laura Loomer and Steve Bannon—but also democratic socialists like Bernie Sanders—countered that the program helps large US corporations at the expense of American workers.



Who's right? While economic research makes clear that immigrants bring sought-after skills, creative dynamism, and useful knowledge that also helps domestic innovators, that does not mean there is no downside to heavy reliance on H-1B visas. For example, the argument that the H-1B program helps employers secure STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) skills ignores the fact that if there were no such program, US educational institutions would feel greater pressure from business to address this need.

The idea of elites pushing the education

system to produce workers with useful skills and attitudes goes back at least to Sam Bowles and Herb Gintis's influential 1976 book, *Schooling in Capitalist America*. Applying their argument to the present, one would expect corporate America's growing need for skilled STEM workers to translate into advocacy for, and investments in, STEM education. But an overreliance on the H-1B program may have broken this link and made American elites indifferent to the widely recognized failures of the US education system. Put differently, the problem may not be a cultural veneration of mediocrity, as Ramaswamy argued, but rather neglect on the part of business leaders, intellectual elites, and politicians.

This is just a possibility, of course. We cannot say for sure that the response from the education system would be adequate even if it did feel more pressure from the business community. But whatever the case, surely US policymakers should pay more attention to the program's potential secondary effects.

A similar argument applies to choices about technology. Even as H-1B workers boost innovation, their presence may affect the direction innovation takes. My own work shows (theoretically and empirically) that when the supply of skilled labor increases, technology choices start favoring such workers. Over the last several decades, businesses have increasingly adopted technologies that favor high-skill workers and automate tasks previously performed by lower-skill workers. While this trend may have been driven by other factors, too, the availability of affordable high-skill workers for the tech industry plausibly contributed to it.

Again, this effect reflects indifference on the part of business leaders and policymakers. It also suggests that if the US is going to rely on H-1B workers, policymakers should consider other adjustments to ensure that corporate strategies and the designs of new technologies seek to make use of workers without STEM skills or college degrees.

A final relevant question is whether programs such as H-1B could harm source countries by creating a brain drain. This, too, is open to debate. Such programs could be a win-win if destination economies have technologies, institutions, and other skilled workers that are especially complementary to high-skill immigrants. In this case, an Indian STEM worker would contribute more to global output or innovation from the United States than from India, and some of the additional scientific and technical knowledge produced would flow back home.

In fact, there is evidence suggesting that such knowledge exchanges already occur through cross-border ethnic networks. But this

win-win scenario would not take place if nearly all skilled, innovative workers departed the source country, because there would no longer be a critical mass of workers left to benefit from the knowledge flows.

Moreover, for this win-win scenario to become a reality, the sharing of knowledge about new innovations and technical expertise must not reach such a scale or pace that it undercuts America's own comparative advantage (which is rooted in innovation). In the economics literature, this issue is usually explored in the context of technology-product cycles. While we currently have little evidence about what constitutes a flow of information that is too fast, some believe that China has benefited unduly in this respect, improving its technologies rapidly at the expense of Western companies.

“ If the US is going to rely on H-1B workers, policymakers should consider other adjustments to ensure that corporate strategies and the designs of new technologies seek to make use of workers without STEM skills or college degrees. ”

Thus, a win-win scenario depends on sufficient numbers of skilled workers remaining in each source country, and on adequate international protections of intellectual property rights, so that innovators can reap the rewards from their contributions, at least for a while.

The H-1B debate within Trump's MAGA coalition raises some important questions for how the US should think about education and technology in an increasingly globalized knowledge economy. There are configurations that could ultimately benefit advanced economies and poorer countries alike. But whether they will be found over the next four years remains to be seen.

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Timeless elegance at Taschenbergpalais Kempinski

By Nourah Khan
Travel Writer
The Times Kuwait

Dresden, the capital of the German state of Saxony, also known as 'Florence on the Elbe', is a city that beautifully intertwines history, art, and culture. My recent trip to this exceptional destination was unforgettable, which was made even more special by my stay at the luxurious Taschenbergpalais Kempinski, which elevated the entire experience of my trip.

The allure of Dresden lies in its stunning baroque and rococo architecture, world-renowned art collections, and vibrant cultural scene. From the majestic Zwinger Palace to the awe-inspiring Frauenkirche, the city is a treasure trove of history. However, it is not just the past that makes Dresden special; its lively restaurants, charming cafes, and modern art galleries reflect a contemporary spirit that complements its historical grandeur.

For my stay, I sought a hotel that embodied the elegance of Dresden itself—rooted in history while offering modern luxury, which is why the Taschenbergpalais Kempinski caught my attention.

This hotel is not just one of Dresden's most luxurious accommodations, it is a landmark in its own right. Originally built in the 18th century by Augustus the Strong as a palace for his mistress, Countess Cosel, Taschenbergpalais Kempinski is a tale of passion, history, and impeccable design.

Taschenbergpalais Kempinski is perfectly situated in the heart of Dresden's Old Town, surrounded by the city's most iconic attractions. From the hotel, I could stroll to the Semper Opera

My stay at the Taschenbergpalais Kempinski was more than just a place to rest—it became an integral part of my Dresden experience, blending historical grandeur, modern luxury, and exceptional service, making it the perfect gateway to Saxony's rich cultural heritage.



House, the Royal Palace, and the famed Green Vault within minutes. This central location allowed me to explore Dresden's treasures with ease, knowing I had a luxurious retreat waiting for me.

Walking into the hotel felt like stepping into a different era. The grand staircases, high ceilings, and baroque details beautifully preserved the building's heritage, while modern touches ensured absolute comfort. It felt as though the hotel was not just hosting me but narrating a story about Dresden's rich past.

My suite offered breathtaking views of the city's landmarks, a spacious layout, and every amenity I could ask for. The opulent yet tasteful décor struck the perfect balance between luxury and warmth, making my stay unforgettable.

After a day of sightseeing, the hotel's spa became my sanctuary. The heated indoor pool and rejuvenating treatments provided the perfect way to unwind, offering a much-needed escape from the bustle of exploring the city.

Among the highlights of my visit to Dresden were:

The Zwinger Palace: Walking through its manicured gardens and exploring the galleries was a dream come true for an art lover like me.

The Frauenkirche: Climbing to the dome's observation platform provided me with breathtaking panoramic views of Dresden.

The Green Vault: The dazzling collection of treasures left me speechless and is a must-visit for anyone visiting Dresden.

Evening Strolls: Dresden's illuminated landmarks at night are magical, and staying at Taschenbergpalais Kempinski meant I could enjoy these sights just steps away from the hotel.

The Taschenbergpalais Kempinski offers 213 opulent rooms and suites that seamlessly blend classic design elements with modern comforts, featuring plush furnishings, high ceilings, and views of the historic cityscape. The suites, particularly the Presidential Suite, provide a luxurious retreat with bespoke amenities, perfect for discerning travelers. My stay at the Taschenbergpalais Kempinski was more than just a place to rest—it became an integral part of my Dresden experience. The seamless combination of historical grandeur, modern luxury, and world-class service turned it into an unforgettable experience.



If you are planning a visit to Dresden and want to experience the city in the most refined way possible, I wholeheartedly recommend this hotel. It is not just a place to stay; it is a destination in itself, reflecting everything that makes Dresden so special.

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.



High Fructose consumption linked to obesity

The guidelines include recommendations for people and doctors that reflect a better understanding of who gets strokes and why, along with new drugs that can help reduce this risk.

A new study now suggests that due to an evolutionary 'survival switch', which causes people to store energy from fructose, rather than use it, during adverse conditions, could be a factor behind the obesity epidemic around the world.

Obesity is a major risk factor for a number of chronic diseases, including cardiovascular diseases such as heart disease and stroke, which are the leading causes of death worldwide. Being overweight can also lead to diabetes and its associated conditions. Although many of the causes of overweight and obesity are preventable and reversible, no country has so far managed to reverse the growth of this epidemic.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), around 13 percent of adults worldwide have obesity, with the rates of overweight and obesity continuing to grow in adults and children. From 1975 to 2016, the prevalence of overweight or obese children and adolescents aged 5–19 years increased more than four-fold from 4 to 18 percent globally. Overweight and obesity among children under 5 years of age, increased from 33 million children in 2000 to 37 million by 2022.

Even though recent studies have identified several other factors are involved in the onset of obesity, the fundamental cause of this condition remains an imbalance of calories consumed and calories expended. As global diets have changed in recent decades, there has been an increase in the consumption of energy-dense foods high in fat and free sugars. At the same time there has been a decrease in physical activity due to shifts in the nature of work, increased time spent sitting, more use of transportation and urbanization.

Lowering the risk of overweight and obesity includes taking food at regular times and



reducing the number of calories consumed from fats and sugars, increasing the portion of daily intake of fruit, vegetables, legumes, whole grains and nuts. It also involves engaging in regular physical activity of 60 minutes per day for children and 150 minutes per week for adults.

A new study now suggests that fructose may drive obesity due to an evolutionary 'survival switch' in the body that causes people to store energy from fructose, rather than use it. The new study proposes that obesity and metabolic disorders may have developed from overstimulation of an evolutionary-based biological response (survival switch) that aims to protect animals before a crisis, such as hibernation.

Where and when people have plenty of access to food, this 'survival switch' may do more harm than good. Constant supplies of high-fructose foods lead people to lay down fat stores leading to obesity and related health problems.

However, experts opine that high intake of fructose could be one component that leads to obesity, but it is not the only factor. Obesity is considered a multifactorial condition—it is never just one variable. Important risk factors include lack of physical activity, poor lifestyle (smoking, alcohol, addictions), poor nutrition intakes, vitamin deficiencies, socio-economic causes, and even genetic and ethnicity risk factors.

Although many fruits are high in fructose, most people do not consume large quantities of fruits for the fructose content in them to become a health risk. The real risk is when fructose is added in highly concentrated form to other foods that already contain high fat, high sugar, and low nutrients such as foods with high fructose corn syrup, and other sugary snacks. So, to help reduce your risk of developing obesity, perhaps it would

be a good idea to avoid that highly processed snack—it is likely to be loaded with fructose.

Researchers behind the new study state that the global epidemics of obesity and diabetes correlate with the rise in sugar intake, particularly in the form of fructose-sweetened drinks, processed foods, and high glycemic index (GI) carbohydrates. A simplistic definition of overweight and obesity is the abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that presents a risk to health.

The measure used to identify and categorize individuals as underweight, normal, overweight or obese is the Body Mass Index (BMI). The index is determined by dividing the body mass by the square of the body height, and is expressed in units of kg/m², resulting from mass in kilograms and height in meters. A body mass of over 25 is considered overweight, and over 30 is obese.

However, when used to predict an individual's health, rather than as a statistical measurement for groups, the BMI has limitations, especially when applied to individuals with abdominal obesity, short stature, or with high muscle mass. But nevertheless, BMI and a newer version, Body Roundness Index (BRI) serve as basic indicators of overweight and obesity.

Obesity, which is linked to poor diet quality and unbalanced energy intake, as well as a having a genetic component, increases the risk of many health conditions, including type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, sleep apnea, metabolic, syndrome, osteoarthritis, some cancers and mental health problems. Researchers and health experts are still exploring how to safely and effectively treat obesity. Understanding the mechanisms driving the condition, such as the role played by fructose intake, may lead to better therapies and treatments.

Scientists create mouse from unicellular organism

An international team of researchers recently reported achieving an unprecedented scientific milestone, with the creation of mouse stem cells capable of generating a fully developed mouse using genetic tools from a unicellular (single-celled) organism which predates the origin of animals, but with which all animals share common ancestry. The breakthrough achievement reshapes our understanding of the genetic origins of stem cells, offering a new perspective on the evolutionary ties between animals and their ancient single-celled relatives.

In their groundbreaking experiment, the research team at the Queen Mary University of London, in collaboration with researchers from the University of Hong Kong, used a gene found in the unicellular choanoflagellates that are related to animals, to create stem cells which they then used to create a living, breathing mouse.

Choanoflagellates are the closest living relatives of animals, and their genomes contain versions of the genes Sox and POU, known for driving pluripotency—the cellular potential to develop into any cell type—within mammalian stem cells. This unexpected discovery challenges

a longstanding belief that these genes evolved exclusively within animals.

By successfully creating a mouse using molecular tools derived from our single-celled relatives, we are witnessing an extraordinary continuity of function across nearly a billion years of evolution, said the team in their report on the experiment. They added that their study implies that key genes involved in stem cell formation might have originated far earlier than the stem cells themselves, perhaps helping pave the way for the multicellular life we see today.

The 2012 Nobel Laureate in Physiology and Medicine, Shinya Yamanaka showed that it is possible to obtain stem cells from 'differentiated' cells just by expressing four factors, including a Sox (Sox2) and a POU (Oct4) gene. For their new study, the research team replaced the native Sox2 gene from a mouse and introduced in its place Sox genes from choanoflagellate, and achieved reprogramming towards the pluripotent stem cell state.

To validate the efficacy of these reprogrammed cells, the researchers then injected the reprogrammed cells into a developing mouse embryo. The resulting chimeric mouse displayed physical traits from both the donor embryo and

the lab induced stem cells, such as black fur patches and dark eyes. The study also traced how early versions of Sox and POU proteins, which bind DNA and regulate other genes, were used by unicellular ancestors for functions that would later become integral to stem cell formation and animal development.



The researchers noted that choanoflagellates, being unicellular organisms, do not have stem cells, but they have the genes—probably to control their basic cellular processes—which possibly multicellular animals later repurposed to build complex bodies. The new findings further confirm that ancient choanoflagellate genes played a crucial role in making stem cells compatible with the development of all animal

forms we see today.

This novel insight also emphasises the evolutionary versatility of genetic tools and offers a glimpse into how early life forms might have harnessed similar mechanisms to drive cellular specialisation, long before true multicellular organisms came into being, and into the importance of recycling in evolution, said the team. The new discovery has implications beyond evolutionary biology, potentially

informing new advances in regenerative medicine.

By deepening our understanding of how stem cell machinery evolved, scientists may identify new ways to optimize stem cell therapies and improve cell reprogramming techniques for treating diseases or repairing damaged tissue. Advancements could also arise from experimenting with synthetic versions of these genes that might perform even better than native animal genes in certain contexts.



What Happens When You Stop Eating Carbohydrates

.....
Ask Mira: Eating Right to Live Happy & Healthy
.....

If you are thinking of losing a couple of kilos by dropping your intake of carbohydrates, then you might want to reconsider it. Here are six things that happen when you stop eating carbohydrates:

- **You lose water mass:** I know you all get excited to start a zero carb diet and see your weight dropping on the scale. Well



do not be too excited because you did not lose the fat, you only lost the water inside your body. Actually you start using the stored glycogen which is formed by carbohydrates.

- **Fatigue:** When you cut down on carbs, that results in tiredness, weakness, insomnia, dizziness and nausea. This happens because the brain's main source of energy is carbohydrate, so when you cut down on that, the glycogen stored gets low or depleted which results in lack of energy..And did you know that whole grains (carbs) are a great source of vitamin B, iron, magnesium, which are critical in maintaining energy levels.
- **Sugar Cravings:** As I mentioned previously, when glycogen stored gets low, our body gets weak. Also, more sugar cravings start to happen. So intake of fiber-rich whole grains, can prevent blood-sugar levels from fluctuating and so prevent cravings..
- Risk of cardiovascular diseases rises: A diet rich in high fiber food, vegetables, fresh fruits and whole grains can lower your risk of heart disease, stroke, obesity, and type 2 diabetes and improves blood-cholesterol levels. So imagine what happens when cutting that off completely and replacing it with high protein food.
- **Constipation:** High fiber foods are the first remedy for our colon health. Those foods



prevent constipation and help maintain a healthy digestive system.. A diet high in proteins will be fiber-free and impair proper digestive functioning.

- **Mood Swings:** I know we are all moody. But carbs, no matter if they are whole grain or refined, increase the brain's levels of the feel-good neurotransmitter 'serotonin'. High serotonin levels make us feel happy and relaxed.

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Australia's Great Social-Media Experiment



Peter Singer

Emeritus Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University and Visiting Professor at the Centre for Biomedical Ethics at the National University of Singapore, is co-founder of the charity The Life You Can Save, and the author of Animal Liberation, Practical Ethics, The Life You Can Save, and, most recently, Consider the Turkey.



“Australia may therefore be doing the world a service by effectively running a national experiment. This assumes, of course, that Australia does substantially reduce the time young teenagers spend on social media.”

Late last year, Australia's parliament, reacting to concerns about the effect of social media on children's mental health, amended the Online Safety Act to require users to be at least 16 years old to open an account on social-media platforms such as TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram, and X. The amendment is expected to come into effect by the end of 2025.

The law received widespread support in Australia, both in parliament and among the public, but it has also been criticized. Some dispute the link between social-media use and mental-health problems in teenagers. Others see a violation of the right to freedom of expression. Even those who support the effort wonder how it can be enforced.

There is little doubt that the mental health of teenagers, especially girls, has deteriorated sharply since the introduction of smartphones and the emergence of social media. The digital platforms targeted by the law design algorithms to keep people on their sites, because more clicks mean more advertising revenue. The result? A Gallup survey showed that US teenagers spend an average of 4.8 hours per day on social media.

That is a big slice of a teenager's free time, which could otherwise be spent interacting with friends in person and with places and objects in the real world. Jonathan Haidt, a social psychologist and the author of *The Anxious*

Generation, has said that social-media platforms have “rewired childhood and changed human development on an almost unimaginable scale.”

Heavy teenage social-media use and higher levels of depression and anxiety clearly go together; what is disputed is whether this is merely a correlation or a causal relationship. Good studies that test whether sufficiently long periods of reduction in social-media use reduce depression and anxiety are difficult to carry out, because trials in which individual teenagers leave a platform while their friends remain on it can be expected to produce less benefit—and could even cause harm to the children who are now isolated from their friends.

It is important that groups of teenagers all go off social media together, so that social media use is replaced by real-world interaction. In addition, one would need other, randomly selected control groups whose members do not reduce social-media use. In the absence of such rigorous trials, the evidence we have does suggest that heavy social-media use causes anxiety and depression, but it is not conclusive.

Australia may therefore be doing the world a service by effectively running a national experiment. This assumes, of course, that Australia

does substantially reduce the time young teenagers spend on social media. Policymakers plan to achieve their goal by imposing heavy fines on companies that operate the newly age-restricted social-media platforms if they fail to take ‘reasonable steps’ to prevent those under 16 from opening accounts. The law assigns the task of outlining what counts as ‘reasonable steps’ to Australia's eSafety Commissioner, an independent statutory office.

WhatsApp and similar messaging apps, as well as some online health and educational services, will be exempted from the legislation. Young people will continue to be able to view YouTube videos or pages on social media, such as business landing pages on Facebook, without an account. On the other hand, the government has announced its intention to introduce further legislation creating a ‘Digital Duty of Care’ that will put the onus on digital platforms to prevent known or foreseeable harms.

Paradoxically, the Australian law may benefit social-media executives and programmers who are sufficiently aware of what they may be doing to children's mental health to be uneasy about it. Given the current lack of regulation, any social-media platform that gets serious about ensuring

that children are not opening accounts will simply lose business to less scrupulous rivals. The law creates a level playing field for all platforms, thus overcoming the collective-action problem.

The Australian constitution does not make sweeping statements about basic rights. In general, and in contrast to the United States, courts accept the supremacy of the elected legislature. The High Court of Australia has, however, ruled that the provisions of the constitution establishing representative and responsible government imply that parliament should not place an undue burden on political communication.

One possible response to those who have suggested that Australia's legislation violates this principle is that children under 16 do not vote and hence have less need for political communication. Moreover, it could be argued that the burden is not disproportionate, because the harm caused by social media is sufficiently serious to justify the modest restriction contained in the legislation. The Australian government could also exempt social-media platforms that are limited to political communications, although that would require someone in government to determine which communications are political and which are not.

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