



DIPLOMAT
*Expo 2027: Serbia's
Global Stage for
Innovation, Culture*

3



LOCAL
*Retail pioneer
Remesh bids farewell to
Kuwait after 35 Years*

8

WORLD
*World Trade Organization
Gateway to Resolve Disputes,
Raise Living Standards,
Develop Economies*

7



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Rationalizing water use to ensure sustainable future

THE TIMES KUWAIT REPORT

In recent years, uncharacteristically high summer temperatures have decreased availability of freshwater in many places, with disastrous impact on the lives and livelihood of people there. In Kuwait, record high temperatures over the past many summers have only worsened the country's limited natural water supplies, even as unsustainable water consumption patterns, growing population, and rapid rates of urbanization and industrialization have increased water usage.

Kuwait is among the most water-stressed countries in the world, characterized by an arid climate, scant rainfall, no surface water, and dwindling groundwater resources. Despite the scarce natural freshwater resources, the per capita daily water consumption in Kuwait, estimated at 450 liters per person, is not only among the highest in the world but also nearly three times the global average of around 150 liters per person per day.



More than 90 percent of the potable water needs in the country are met by eight desalination plants, while the limited agricultural areas are irrigated by groundwater, treated waste-water, and desalinated water mixed with brackish water. Globally, agriculture accounts for roughly 70 percent of global freshwater

withdrawals, followed by industry at 20 percent, and municipality (domestic) withdrawals at 10 percent.

Contrary to the global trend, studies on water consumption reveal that more than 44 percent of freshwater withdrawals in Kuwait are for domestic use. One major reason for this excessive

consumption is government subsidies that cover over 90 percent of water production costs, resulting in one of the lowest global water tariffs. This encourages unbridled water consumption and strains water supplies.

Records from the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy (MEWRE) shows that in 2023, during peak summer in mid-August, consumption of water at 507 million imperial gallons or 2.3 million cubic meters per day (MCM/d) exceeded the total production of 478 million imperial gallons (2.2 MCM/d). The shortfall was met from the strategic reserves, which stood at 3,767 million imperial gallons (17 MCM). Predicted higher temperatures in future are only likely to exacerbate and repeat such shortages.

While the combined installed capacity of Kuwait's desalination plants is around 3.1 MCM/d, the actual output is far short of this installed capacity. Any extended plant-maintenance shutdowns or other major production disruptions could further imbalance the fragile water supply mechanism.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13



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Czech Embassy hosts event to enhance travel, trade with Kuwait

Embassy of the Czech Republic, in collaboration with Visit Czechia and Jazeera Airways, hosted a reception on 8 April, to announce the relaunch of direct flights to Prague starting 5 June.

Speaking at the reception, Chargé d'Affaires at the Czech Embassy and Head of the Economic and Commercial Department, Dr. Tereza Valášková, emphasized the Czech Republic's global reputation as a top-tier tourist destination. Highlighting her country's rich natural, cultural, and historical diversity, advanced infrastructure, and 16 UNESCO World Heritage sites, she said that the Czech Republic enjoyed strong popularity in Kuwait, especially in medical and wellness tourism, with thousands of Kuwaitis visiting annually for its renowned health resorts.

Noting that the Czech Tourism Promotion Agency (CzechTourism) promotes all Czech regions, showcasing their traditions, culture, cuisine, and landmarks, the diplomat said that a Czech tourism promotional event at the Jumeirah Hotel, would be the third of its kind since her arrival in Kuwait. She added that the event aims to strengthen tourism ties, and includes business meetings with representatives of Czech resorts,



hotels, travel agencies, and airlines to foster cooperation.

She also disclosed that the embassy issues about 7,500 visas annually, though actual tourist numbers are higher due to Kuwaitis using multi-entry Schengen visas from other countries. She advised early visa applications before peak summer season and stressed the importance of

accurate documentation and communication with the embassy for smooth processing.

Underscoring that sustainable tourism is a Czech government priority, Valášková noted that this includes preserving natural resources, promoting eco- and rural tourism, and reducing 'over-tourism' in cities like Prague. Strategies involve partnerships with local governments and

funding for environmental tourism projects.

She highlighted growing cultural exchange between Kuwait and the Czech Republic via university partnerships, cultural events, and artistic collaborations, supported by the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Regarding investment, the Chargé d'Affaires said the Czech Republic offers a strategic location, open economy, EU market access, a skilled, cost-effective workforce, and strong research-industry links. In addition, the country is highly industrialized, leading the EU with 27.7 percent of GDP in manufacturing, and ranks 30th globally in innovation.

Pointing out that currently Kuwaiti investments are mainly focused on real-estate, particularly in spa towns such as Teplice, where Kuwaiti investors have bought land and homes, she noted that there were other lucrative investment sectors for Kuwaitis, including in industrial real estate, strategic industrial production, software and information technology, data centers, cyber-security and defense industries. She added that the embassy fully supports investors by connecting them with Czech partners and agencies like CzechInvest.

Cabinet lauds efforts to combat money laundering

Council of Ministers during its weekly session presided over by Acting Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Yusuf Al-Sabah lauded the diligent efforts by state entities to combat money laundering and terror financing, and expressed its firm support for these initiatives.

The Cabinet in particular praised the actions taken in this regard by Minister of Finance and State Minister for Economic and Investment Affairs Nora Al-Fassam, and the Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Askar, noting that the measures introduced by the ministers serve to bolster Kuwait's reputation as an active participant in the fight against money laundering.

Detailing the efforts by the ministry of finance to combat money-laundering, Minister Al-Fassam presented a visual display highlighting Kuwait's compliance with the objectives of global financial crime watchdog, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), citing a monthly report by an ad hoc committee to clamp down on money laundering and terror financing. In a similar presentation, the Commerce and Industry Minister Al-Askar outlined his ministry's commitment towards a Cabinet decision that shifted the inspection of currency exchange outlets from the ministry to Kuwait's Central Bank, which would from



now on regulate the local currency exchange market.

During the weekly session, the cabinet was also informed that His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, along with His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled A-Hamad Al-Sabah sponsored the opening of a new maternity hospital in Al-Sabah medical zone on 9 April.

The Cabinet also approved a decision to strip Kuwaiti citizenship off a number of individuals, based on the works and findings of a national committee formed to investigate the matter.

GCC countries aim to boost security media cooperation

GCC countries are keen on a unified security media strategy that would boost regional security cooperation, said Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yusuf Saud Al-Sabah. This came in an Interior Ministry press statement after Sheikh Fahad Al-Yusuf received participants in the 19th GCC Security Media Departments' meeting hosted in Kuwait on 10 April, which aimed to boost cooperation among GCC security media departments.

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yusuf affirmed that security media was one of the most important components of the security apparatus, saying that the current GCC meeting would contribute to a safe and more secure region.

Using the latest in technology to spread security

awareness amongst the public was a paramount issue, he noted, adding that media campaigns helped create societies that were well informed and likely to take the right decision that would protect people and help them feel safe. He asserted that security media campaigns must be used to combat social ills, including the spread of narcotics and illegal substances.

The meeting was headed by Director General of Public Relations and Security Media Brigadier Nasser Abu Sulaib, who stressed in the opening statement the importance of security media in the stability of countries.

Welcoming delegates and appreciating their willingness to explore venues of cooperation, Abu Sulaib stressed that integration and cooperation amongst security departments of GCC would lead to reducing crime, holding wrongdoers responsible, and boosting safety for all.

The meeting focused on implementing a unified security campaign, in addition to a number of paramount issues such as countering rumors and misinformation, as well as exploring various tools to deliver security messages to the public via digital or



LuLu Hypermarket ranked among Top-10 brands in Kuwait

LuLu Hypermarket, the leading retail chain in the region, has earned top honors at the prestigious Service Hero Customer Satisfaction Index Awards, securing the Top 10 Brands 2024 award. The recognition highlights LuLu's excellence in customer service and underlines its commitment to exceeding shopper expectations across all touchpoints.

LuLu Hypermarket, which has consistently been honored by the Service Hero platform, underscores the brand's ongoing dedication to service excellence and customer satisfaction. In a media statement issued following the award, LuLu Hypermarket's senior management in Kuwait extended heartfelt gratitude to customers, partners, vendors, and all stakeholders for their trust and continued support. The statement emphasized the brand's pride in receiving an award that stands out as the Arab world's only customer satisfaction index based entirely on consumer perception.

The Service Hero Award is highly esteemed within Kuwait's retail industry, offering a credible benchmark for service excellence based on real customer feedback. The recognition underscores LuLu Hypermarket's strong customer loyalty and its prominent position in the Kuwaiti retail market.

To secure the 2024 award, LuLu Hypermarket underwent a comprehensive evaluation across various service metrics. These included product quality and variety, efficiency of service, staff professionalism, convenience of store locations, hygiene standards, value for money, and the overall shopping experience. Furthermore, the functionality and user-friendliness of LuLu's online platforms were rigorously assessed.

Established in 2010, the Service Hero Awards serve as Kuwait's only national index for customer satisfaction. The awards are independently overseen by an advisory council to ensure transparency, impartiality, and credibility in the evaluation process. LuLu Hypermarket's repeated recognition by Service Hero reaffirms its leadership in the retail sector and highlights its unwavering dedication to customer service excellence.

Expo 2027

Serbia's Global Stage for Innovation, Culture

In a recent interview with The Times Kuwait, Filip Katić, the head of mission at the Serbian Embassy in Kuwait, said that the Expo represented a historic moment for the Republic of Serbia. EXPO 2027, recognized as a Specialized Exposition by the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE), will be the first time such an event is held in Southeast Europe, and only the second time in the history of the BIE that a Specialized Expo is hosted by a country in this region.

The Times Kuwait Report

In 2027, the world will turn its eyes to Belgrade, Serbia, as it hosts Expo 2027. To be held under the theme of 'Play for Humanity – Sport and Music for All', the event aims to celebrate the power of play, creativity, and human connections, through sports and music.

In a recent interview with The Times Kuwait, Filip Katić, the head of mission at the Serbian Embassy in Kuwait, said that the Expo represented a historic moment for the Republic of Serbia. EXPO 2027, recognized as a Specialized Exposition by the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE), will be the first time such an event is held in Southeast Europe, and only the second time in the history of the BIE that a Specialized Expo is hosted by a country in this region.

Bureau International des Expositions (BIE), known in English as the International Exhibitions Bureau, is the intergovernmental organization created in 1928 in Paris, France to supervise

which are values that Serbia proudly supports and seeks to share with the rest of the world."

Noting that the event will bring together nations, businesses, and innovators to showcase advancements in technology, culture, and sustainability, Mr. Katic added that the three-month long expo is expected to attract millions of visitors, and witness the participation of more than 120 countries. "With 87 nations having already officially confirmed their participation, the high level of engagement reflects the strong global interest and trust in Serbia's organizational capabilities," said the Serbian diplomat.

Highlighting the extensive infrastructure work being undertaken by the government of Serbia ahead of the expo, Mr. Katic disclosed, "In preparation for EXPO 2027, Serbia is undertaking extensive infrastructure projects, including the construction of a modern, multifunctional exhibition space, with national pavilions, conference and exhibition halls, cultural venues, and public spaces spread over a 100-hectare area.

"A new national stadium is being built in close proximity to the site, along with a modern residential complex with over 1,500 residential units, which will initially serve as the EXPO Village and later be converted into sustainable housing. Significant investments are also being made in transportation, including new road connections, railway infrastructure, and the expansion of Belgrade Nikola Tesla Airport to accommodate the anticipated rise in international arrivals."

Emphasizing the cultural aspect of the exhibition, the Serbian diplomats said "Expo 2027 is set to be a melting pot of cultures, where nations come together to showcase their traditions, music, dance, and artistic expressions. Serbia, with its rich Balkan heritage, will contribute to this global festival of ideas by blending local customs with international creativity.

"Visitors can expect cultural pavilions, interactive exhibits, and live performances that celebrate the diversity of human expression. Imagine a world stage where Japanese Taiko drumming meets Brazilian Samba, where Uzbek embroidery is displayed alongside Norwegian folk art—all in one place.

"One of the most exciting aspects of the Expo will be the fusion of sports and music, allowing nations to demonstrate how cultural traditions shape athleticism and artistic movements. Whether it's the Serbian Kolo dance, the Argentinian Tango, or the Turkish Whirling Dervishes, this Expo will be a spectacle of unity and exchange.

Expanding on the economic benefits that the expo will bring to the Serbian economy, Mr. Katic said, "Expo 2027 is expected to bring significant economic benefits, with projections estimating €6 billion in revenue from tourism, business deals, and investments. The government has emphasized that the event will boost the economy, with investments in infrastructure, tourism, and urban development aimed at transforming the area into a modern hub for international collaboration.

"With millions of international and domestic visitors predicted to arrive, the event will further boost sectors like hospitality, infrastructure, transport, retail, and services. Additionally hosting the Expo will place Serbia in the global spotlight, attracting foreign direct investments (FDI) and increasing international trade opportunities. The construction of new infrastructure, including state-of-the-art pavilions, exhibition spaces, and transport upgrades, will also lead to the creation of thousands of jobs and stimulate local businesses.

While short-term gains such as increased visitor numbers



and infrastructure investments are clear, experts suggest that long-term benefits depend on Serbia's ability to capitalize on the event's momentum. Some past Expo host cities have seen sustained economic growth, while others have struggled to maintain positive impacts. They opined that Serbia will need to focus on export growth, foreign investments, and long-term utilization of Expo-built infrastructure to ensure lasting success.

Expo 2027 is predicted to become a key marketplace for global trade and investment, presenting a golden opportunity for businesses, startups, and entrepreneurs, both locally and globally to expand their networks, showcase innovations, and secure international partnerships.

"International businesses attending Expo 2027 can also explore market expansion opportunities in Southeastern Europe, with Serbia's strategic location and rapid economic development making it an attractive gateway to both European and Balkan markets.

Following discussions with the concerned officials in Kuwait, Mr. Katić expressed his sincere hope that Kuwait will join the community of nations participating in EXPO 2027. He added, "Serbia would be truly honored to host Kuwait and showcase its unique cultural, technological, and economic contributions at this global event. We look forward to receiving a response from the Kuwaiti side this month and remain optimistic about their participation."

He concluded by noting that EXPO 2027 will not only position Serbia as a hub of innovation, cooperation, and cultural dialogue but also contribute to long-term economic growth, tourism development, and international visibility of the country. Serbia is committed to making this event inclusive, impactful, and representative of a shared global vision for a better future, said Mr. Katić.



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International businesses attending Expo 2027 can also explore market expansion opportunities in Southeastern Europe, with Serbia's strategic location and rapid economic development making it an attractive gateway to both European and Balkan markets.

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international exhibitions, under the Convention Relating to International Exhibitions (1928 Paris Convention).

Under the original protocol of the 1928 Paris Convention, and its latest amendment ratified in 1996, the BIE recognised two types of Expos—International Registered Exhibitions (commonly referred to as World Expos), and International Recognised Exhibitions (commonly referred to as Specialised Expos). The next World Expo will run from 13 April to 13 October 2025 in Osaka, Japan, while the next Specialized Expo is slated to take place in Surčin, Serbia from 15 May to 15 August in 2027.

The BIE selected Belgrade as the host city in June 2023, during its 172nd General Assembly, as it surpassed proposals from other cities, including Bloomington in the United States, Phuket in Thailand, Málaga in Spain, and San Carlos de Bariloche in Argentina.

Elaborating on the exhibition Mr. Katic noted "The theme of EXPO 2027 emphasizes the universal power of sport and music to unite people, promote inclusion, and inspire progress; all of



Farewell reception hosted for Ambassador of Benin



Deanship of the Diplomatic Corps hosted a farewell reception for Ambassador of Benin H.E. Moudjaidou Soumanou Issoufou on the end of his tenure in Kuwait.

The event was attended by several heads and representatives of diplomatic missions accredited to Kuwait, along with a representative from the Protocol Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Speaking on the occasion, Ambassador Issoufou praised the growing ties between Benin and Kuwait across various fields, including media, communications, anti-corruption efforts, education, and cultural exchange. Describing bilateral ties as strong and steadily progressing, he noted that mutual high-level diplomatic visits were a key milestone in this relationship and commended Kuwait's humanitarian efforts in

Africa through its active charitable organizations.

Ambassador Issoufou added, "Important agreements have been initiated and are nearing completion, including a memorandum of understanding on domestic workers and an agreement on the mutual exemption of visa requirements for holders of diplomatic, official, and special passports. Notable progress has also been made in economic and development cooperation."

He pointed to "intensified cooperation with the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development," and noted that this has supported major infrastructure investments in Benin, including the drinking water supply projects in Koufé, Zagnadou, Bokoumbi, Bassila, and Alada, agricultural service initiatives, and the construction of the Chaourou Central Hospital

and six additional health centers.

Ambassador Issoufou also highlighted a comprehensive agriculture, livestock, and fisheries project that is "in its final stages." He noted that the initiative—jointly undertaken by Benin's Ministry of Agriculture and Kuwait's Public Authority for Agriculture—aims to boost food security and expand exports of halal meat, food products, and other goods to Kuwait.

Highlighting that the Beninese nationals in Kuwait increased from 900 in 2017 to more than 8,800 today, the ambassador added, "Over the past years, I have worked to facilitate the employment of Beninese citizens in Kuwait and to defend their rights and well-being."

Reflecting on his tenure in Kuwait, the Beninese envoy said, "Kuwait was an important and distinguished milestone in my diplomatic

career, and it was a wonderful experience." He described Kuwait as "a hospitable and safe country, with people known for their warm welcome." He added, "I will greatly miss this wonderful atmosphere, especially during the celebration of Ramadan."

For his part, Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and Ambassador of Tajikistan H.E. Zubaydullo Zubaydzoda, praised the Beninese ambassador's achievements during his eight-year tenure. He also highlighted Ambassador Issoufou's role in enhancing bilateral relations and raising the level of cooperation in various fields. He noted that Ambassador Issoufou "played a key role in establishing partnerships between Kuwaiti charitable organizations and their Beninese counterparts, facilitating the opening of several NGO branches in Benin."



Kuwait–Prague direct flights on Jazeera Airways from June

Jazeera Airways, Kuwait's leading low-cost carrier, announced the relaunch of its direct flights to Prague, capital of the Czech Republic, starting from 5 June. One of Europe's most breath-taking destinations, Prague promises an unforgettable escape into old-world charm, stunning architecture, vibrant culture, and fairy tale romance



The Jazeera Airways announcement came during an event hosted by the airline in cooperation with the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Kuwait and the Czech tourism authority, Visit Czechia, Starting 5 June travelers can fly non-stop from Kuwait to Prague with Jazeera Airways three times a week, enjoying unbeatable value and warm hospitality.

Now more accessible and affordable

for travelers from Kuwait, Prague has a lot to offer visitors, from wandering along cobbled streets of the Old Town, crossing the iconic Charles Bridge, and gazing at the majestic Prague Castle. From its buzzing cafés and historic landmarks to tranquil parks and riverside views, to amazing displays of Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque architecture, Prague is the perfect getaway for families, couples, adventurers, and culture seekers alike.

Whether it is a summer holiday, romantic retreat, or cultural city break, Prague delivers an unforgettable experience. Travelers can also explore Jazeera's other European destinations such as Budapest, Tivat, Krakow or Sarajevo and choose to fly back on an alternative route.

Speaking on the occasion, Chief Executive Officer of Jazeera Airways Barathan Pasupathi, said: "As we grow our summer offerings with 700,000 direct seats across the network with affordable air fares, we are pleased to relaunch our summer flights to the magical city of Prague."

Travelers are encouraged to book earlier to get the most affordable fares and choose from a whole list of travel options to enjoy including priority services, seat selection, extra luggage or pre-ordered in-flight meals and on-board shopping.

MoH marks World Health Day, prioritizing maternal, child health

Dr. Abdullah Al-Sanad said the Ministry of Health remains committed to safeguarding the health of mothers and children, recognizing that the earliest moments of life form the foundation for a healthy individual and society.



Kuwait joined the global celebration of World Health Day on 7 March as part of the World Health Organization's (WHO) year-long campaign to promote quality care for mothers, newborns, and children, under the banner, 'A Healthy Start for a Promising Future'.

A recent study by WHO estimates that approximately 300,000 women die each year due to pregnancy or childbirth, more than two million newborns die within their first month, and about two million others are stillborn.

Regarding the Kuwaiti Ministry of Health's efforts to promote maternal and child health, the ministry's official spokesperson, Dr. Abdullah Al-Sanad, stated that the ministry remains committed to safeguarding maternal and child health, recognizing that the earliest moments of life form the foundation for a healthy individual and society.

He explained that this national approach aligns with Kuwait Vision 2035, which prioritizes high-quality healthcare as a core pillar, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals—particularly Goal 3 on health and well-being.

For her part, Chairperson of the Obstetrics and Gynecology Departments at the Ministry of Health, Dr. Amal Khader, reaffirmed the department's commitment to providing world-class healthcare services to ensure a healthier future for women in Kuwait.

She also highlighted the significant advancements made in obstetrics and gynecology in Kuwait, reflecting the ministry's commitment to strengthening the healthcare infrastructure, expanding medical expertise, and adopting the latest technologies to deliver the highest standards of care for women at every stage of life.



Ghanaian Embassy celebrates 68th anniversary of country's independence

Embassy of Ghana hosted a reception last week to mark the 68th anniversary of the country's independence. The event was attended by members of the diplomatic corps, senior government officials and distinguished guests, with the guest of honor on the occasion being the Minister of Justice, Nasser Al-Sumait.



Speaking on the occasion Al-Sumait praised the long-standing bilateral ties between Kuwait and Ghana, which date back more than fifty years. He recalled Ghana's support during the brutal Iraqi invasion and its contribution of troops to Kuwait's liberation.

In his address to the gathering, Ambassador of Ghana H.E. Mohammed Habib Idris, said Ghana and Kuwait share fundamental values in promoting peace, stability, and sustainable development worldwide.

He noted that, like Kuwait, Ghana advocates for a rules-based global order and expressed deep concern over ongoing conflicts in the region and elsewhere, which lead to widespread destruction of lives and property.

The Ghanaian envoy added, "Ghana urges all parties involved in these conflicts to immediately cease hostilities and pursue peaceful solutions in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law. We believe that words are mightier than weapons."

Elaborating on bilateral economic ties, Ambassador Idris noted that his country serves as a market for Kuwaiti products such as refined petroleum derivatives and industrial chemicals. In return, Kuwait imports a range of Ghanaian products, including gold, lumber, cocoa products, tropical fruits, edible nuts, and aromatic oils. He emphasized that global economic fluctuations provide strong motivation to deepen economic cooperation between Ghana and Kuwait to better shield their economies from external shocks.

He added, "We are working diligently with Kuwait to sign and implement a number of bilateral agreements and initiatives—most notably, an agreement to protect and encourage investments, and the activation of the strategic partnership agreement signed between Ghana and Kuwait in July 2022. This agreement aims

to finance projects in agriculture, education, health, and entrepreneurship, with a value of KD20 million through the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED). Political consultations between the foreign ministries of both countries will also take place in the coming days," said the ambassador.

He also highlighted bilateral cooperation in the field of development, noting that Ghana has benefited from grants and loans provided by the KFAED since 1977. These total US\$177 million and have supported projects in power generation, hospital construction, and road infrastructure.

On the humanitarian side, the ambassador noted the presence of 14 Kuwaiti charitable organizations currently active in underprivileged Ghanaian communities—in areas such as health, education, access to clean drinking water, and mosque construction—further reflecting the depth of friendship between the two countries and their peoples.

He expressed his deep gratitude to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, as well as to the government and people of Kuwait, for the valuable support they have extended to Ghana in its development journey.

Belgian Ambassador to Kuwait reaffirms endeavor to increase cooperation

Belgian Ambassador to Kuwait Christian Dooms affirmed on Monday his endeavor to increase bilateral relations with Kuwait in several fields, especially medical, health, and tourism, reports KUNA.



This came in a press conference by Dooms to announce a collection of Francophone cultural and artistic events early next week, which will include classical musical evenings, poetry, and art, in cooperation between French speaking countries' embassies all throughout Kuwait for two weeks.

He added that he seeks to increase visits to discuss ways of cooperation in various fields, explaining that the embassy will attract a number of Belgian companies to encourage trade between both countries.

Dooms stated that despite there being a direct flight between Kuwait and Belgium, he would still market Belgium as a tourist destination for Kuwaitis because of the many unique sights and experiences in Belgium, as well as many of its famous products.

He said that Belgium and Kuwait celebrated 60 years of diplomatic relations last year through many events held by the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL).

He indicated that this year the Belgian embassy would participate with the La Francophonie organization to celebrate French language around the world, especially in Kuwait, where French is taught at many academic levels.

Dooms explained that nearly more than half a million people in Kuwait are learning French, half of which are Kuwaitis, pointing out that the upcoming events seek to marry both French and Arabic, next week.

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My Weapon of Peace

Ever since I was a child, I have used my smile as the only weapon to fight the chaos around me. In the middle of life's battles, smiling became my shield, and my gift.



By **Nada Yasser**
Exclusive to The Times Kuwait

For the past few years, I have been smiling, giving, caring, and sharing.

It started with Facebook—my happy little corner where I shared joy on people's news feeds. Then came spontaneous conversations with strangers, each one touched by a simple smile that somehow made their day better. Volunteering with love for years—listening, caring, simply being there—has always fulfilled my soul. There is something truly special about helping others and choosing goodness in every phase of life.

Later on in my career, I was honored with the Best Smile Award at one of my previous jobs—a beautiful reminder that wherever I go, I leave behind a little sparkle. Smiling became my magic. And guess what? You have that magic too.

People always tell me I carry a special, positive, joyful vibe. That when they are around me, they feel happy and accepted. And God, that feeling—knowing I can make someone feel that way—reminds me that this is my purpose. Every step I have taken, every path I have walked, has been leading me closer to a dream that has been glowing in my heart since I was a child: to inspire.

To speak out loud. To bring people's stories to life. To shine a light where it is needed most.

As an International Coaching Federation coach-to-be—currently on my journey to becoming certified in relationship coaching—I have come to believe even more deeply in the power of connection. I chose relationship coaching because I truly believe that everything begins with the relationship you have with yourself.

That inner bond sets the tone for how you show up in every other relationship—whether it is in marriage, family, work, or life in general. And sometimes, a smile is the very first step in nurturing that relationship with yourself. Before the words, before the solutions—a simple smile can open the door.

Because a smile can be powerful. Even in the middle of tears, when your heart is heavy, if you find it in you to smile—even just a little—you are being kind to yourself. It is a way of whispering, "I'll stand again. There is still hope."

Smiles begin stories. They become memories. People remember your smile long after they forget your words. A smile can stop a war—inside you or around you. It spreads peace. It's shareable. Like the butterfly effect, a small smile can create a beautiful storm of goodness.

I truly believe that a smile is the only universal language—one that even people who cannot express themselves or speak can use. A simple smile, and a smile in return, is like a warm handshake without ever touching hands. It can be the start of a story you never knew was waiting.

So today, do not forget to smile. Smile for the small achievements. Smile not just with your lips—but with your heart. Open your window to life. We all deserve a little happiness, a small act of kindness, and a warm feeling of acceptance.



Here is an easy equation to smile:
Be present + Focus on something positive
= A Genuine Smile 🌟
You deserve a happy capture 📸

The attached photo of me, taken when I was five years old, was captured by my dearest school principal—the first person who ever taught me how to stand still and how to smile. Even now, 25 years later, I can still remember her fingers gently guiding us, making sure we were all opening the genuine window for happiness. She would draw smiles on her face with her fingers to teach us how to embrace joy, and her warmth and kindness still stay with me today.

My dear Ms. Rachel, this article is for you.

With love,
- **Nada**
I&D at Acico group
Light-Spreader & Storyteller

NCCAL holds exhibition of Kuwaiti, Canadian artists



National Council for Culture Arts and Literature (NCCAL) organized on 7 April an art exhibition by Kuwaiti and Canadian artists, Thuraya Al-Baqsam and Reda Dost, highlighting 60 years of Kuwait-Canada cultural partnership.

In her address to the gathering Ambassador of Canada, H.E. Aliya Mawani said art is an international language that could unify nations and cultures. Pointing out that the exhibition sheds light on human innovation and shows arts as a bridge between the two countries, she praised Kuwaiti artist Al-Baqsam as an inspiring and pioneering personality on Kuwait's cultural arena.

The exhibition's coordinator Sara Khalaf said Kuwait and Canada have had robust diplomatic ties since the 1970s. Elaborating on cultural relations between the two countries over the past six decades, she said that diplomatic relations between the two countries are a key part of this cultural collaboration.

She added that cultural activities and

programs between the two sides have featured artistic exhibitions, cultural days and workshops are organized to boost the mutual understanding among nations.



For her part, Al-Baqsam said that her artistic pieces stem from imaginative worlds based on female heroines and flying fish as well as childhood memories. Canadian artist Dost added that his portraits and collages are about human expressions, adding each piece shows a different human experiment.

Kuwait rail network projects get under steam



Minister of Public Works, Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan, signed on 7 April a contract with Turkish consulting firm Proyapi, in the presence of Ambassador of Turkey H.E. Tuba Nur Sönmez, for the study, design, and preparation of tender documents for the first phase of Kuwait's Gulf railway project, which is part of the wider regional Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) railway network.

Minister Al-Mashaan affirmed that the project aligns with the vision of GCC leaders to establish a railway network for the region that would enable the smooth transport of passengers and freight across the Gulf region. The proposed GCC rail network will, when completed, span a distance of 2,177 kilometers—from the State of Kuwait, through all GCC countries, to Muscat in the Sultanate of Oman.

She explained that the Kuwaiti section of the railway will extend 111 kilometers from the Shadadiya area, where the Kuwait Central Railway Station will be located on a two-million-square-meter site, to the Al-Nuwiseeb area on the border with Saudi Arabia.

Al-Mashaan added that "Following the project's award by the Central Agency for Public Tenders and approval by the Audit Bureau, we are signing today the detailed design contract for this section with the Turkish company Proyapi. The implementation tender will be issued once the design phase is completed."

World Trade Organization

Gateway to Resolve Disputes, Raise Living Standards, Develop Economies

WTO aims to facilitate trade in goods, services, and intellectual property among countries through negotiations, create a competitive position based on economic efficiency, and achieve full employment of the world's resources. It also seeks to address global challenges such as pandemics and climate change, enhance transparency, and reduce customs barriers.



By Tareq Yousef AlShumaimry

World Trade Organization (WTO), is an intergovernmental organization that aims to coordinate and facilitate international trade in goods, services, and intellectual property among participating countries by providing a framework for negotiating. Founded on 1 January 1995, it is the world's largest international economic organization, with 164 member countries representing more than 98 percent of world trade and global gross domestic product. It is worth noting that the current non-member states are: Somalia, Eritrea, Syria, Yemen, East Timor, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, the Vatican, and Palestine.

The WTO seeks to achieve the following objectives: establishing a prosperous and integrated economic world characterized by prosperity and peace; providing appropriate protection for the international market to accommodate different standards of living and development; creating an international competitive position based on economic efficiency in resource allocation; and achieving the full employment of the world's resources.

To achieve these goals, the organization carries out multiple tasks, the most important of which are: managing trade agreements, providing a forum for negotiations related to them, assisting developing countries with trade policies through technological assistance and training programs, and finally, cooperating with other international organizations.

The WTO consists of various structures:

- **Ministerial Conference:** This is the organization's supreme body, composed of the trade ministers of member states. The Ministerial Conference meets every two years to determine the organization's general policies.
- **General Council:** Consisting of representatives from all members, it works to implement the decisions taken by the Ministerial Conference. The General Council meets regularly to discuss issues related to international trade.
- **General Secretariat:** This Secretariat provides administrative, professional, and technical services to the organization. The General Secretariat is led by the Director-General, who is appointed by the Ministerial Conference.

The WTO works through its various structures to achieve its goals of facilitating international trade and promoting economic development. The working mechanisms include trade agreements, trade negotiations,



dispute resolution, and political review. The organization's primary roles toward member states are: facilitating international trade by reducing customs and regulatory barriers; promoting the economic development of member states, especially developing countries; and protecting intellectual property rights such as patents and trademarks.

The organization has a significant impact on global trade, working to facilitate trade and achieve the full employment of the world's resources. However, there are criticisms about the distribution of benefits between rich and poor countries. These can be summarized in criticisms related to the impact on the environment and labor; criticisms related to the impact on public health; and criticisms related to the impact on economic development.

The organization has witnessed many developments toward member states in response to global challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. The organization also works to strengthen cooperation with other international organizations, such as the United Nations and the World Bank. It also works to

enhance transparency and accountability in its operations and decisions.

The WTO is the primary body for resolving trade disputes between member states. In this regard, it has dealt with numerous trade disputes between member states and works to resolve them through arbitration procedures and investigative committees, and providing a framework for negotiation between the two parties. However, if the dispute is not resolved through arbitration procedures and investigative committees, the parties may resort to certain international or local courts, depending on their contractual agreement.

Among international courts that parties can resort to are:

- **International Court of Justice:** This is the principal judicial body of the United Nations. Parties may resort to the International Court of Justice to resolve disputes related to international trade.
- **Permanent Court of Arbitration:** This is an international arbitration body that provides arbitration services for

international disputes. Parties may resort to the Permanent Court of Arbitration to resolve disputes related to international trade.

- **Court of International Commercial Arbitration:** This is an international arbitration body that provides arbitration services for international commercial disputes. The parties may resort to the International Commercial Arbitration Court to resolve disputes related to international trade.
- **Courts of Member States:** The parties may resort to the courts of Member States to resolve disputes related to international trade, but this depends on the local laws and regulations of the country in question.

Reasons for resorting to international courts:

- Dissatisfaction with the ruling issued. Some countries may be dissatisfied with the ruling issued by the WTO and resort to international courts to achieve justice.
- Legal loopholes in the ruling issued
- The need to interpret the ruling
- A dispute over the application of the ruling
- The need to protect the rights of member states
- A dispute over the interpretation of trade agreements
- The need to enhance confidence in the international trading system
- A dispute over the application of international laws and regulations.

The WTO resolves trade disputes through:

- Investigative committees that rely on gathering information and data related to the dispute.
- Providing a legal framework for resolving trade disputes between member states, based on the trade agreements signed by member states.
- Resolving disputes through negotiation between member states before resorting to courts, based on the principles of fairness and equity.
- Providing arbitration services to resolve trade disputes between member states, based on neutral and specialized decisions.
- Providing technical support through expertise and resources to member states to resolve trade disputes.
- Providing information and data related to trade disputes between member states, based on transparency and accountability.
- Promoting international cooperation to resolve trade disputes between member states, by relying on the principles of trust and cooperation.



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

Retail pioneer Remesh bids farewell to Kuwait after 35 Years



After an incredible journey of over 35 years in Kuwait's retail industry, T.A. Remesh is preparing to take a well-deserved break from corporate life and enjoy an extended vacation in India. His highly successful career in retailing over the past three decades included transforming Gulfmart Supermarket into a destination of choice for shoppers in the country. Later, when Gulfmart was merged with Oncost, the leading family grocery and household supermarket in Kuwait, he served as the Chief Operating Officer of Oncost Group.

The Times Kuwait Report

With impressive experience and in-depth knowledge of the retail and wholesale industry in Kuwait, Remesh has been a dynamic figure in the country's retail environment, as well as in Indian community events. In a recent wide-ranging interview with The Times Kuwait, Remesh spoke about all things retail, his experiences and perspectives as a retailer in Kuwait, and about his future plans in India.

"Kuwait has been more than just a place I lived and worked; it's been a home that has shaped me into who I am today. I'm forever

grateful for the experiences, connections, and lessons learned here," said Remesh at the start of the interview.

Asked about some of the challenges he faced when starting out as a manager with Gulfmart /Oncost brands, he replied, "When I started off as a concept manager at Gulfmart, the key challenges were establishing the Gulfmart brand as a household name in Kuwait, and overcoming stiff competition from long-established retail brands in the country.

Although our initial focus was on establishing the brand, and not on becoming a one-stop supermarket for expat communities in the country, eventually we ended up becoming just that, a supermarket of choice for discerning shoppers. This was largely because we provided products that customers had enjoyed back in their own countries, but which were not readily available anywhere else in Kuwait. This also helped entrench our brand as a trusted supplier of products wanted by various expat communities here.

"The other challenge we faced in the early days of Gulfmart was the stiff competition from larger and more well-established retail brands at that time. Although the competition from the big-name brands was strong, this only made our management and sales team more determined than ever to make Gulfmart a success story.

"In this regard, a unique advantage that Gulfmart had at that time was our ability to cultivate several exclusive supply channels for fresh produce and products from countries with a large expat population in Kuwait, such as with India, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan. This helped us broaden and deepen our brand value among our customer base."

In response to what were his best experiences, and also what were the most difficult ones, while working as a retailer in

Kuwait, Remesh replied, "The best experience would definitely be the exposure I received not just into the retail industry within Kuwait but also into the daily lives of our customers, their buying habits, and products that made them want to return for more shopping at our stores. As a manager, and throughout my career, I have always paid strong attention to every aspect of customer satisfaction, from the experience we provided them in-store, to the satisfaction customers enjoyed from using the products they purchased from us.

"I was constantly engaging and interacting with our customers, understanding their needs and wants, and working to make sure that their every shopping experience at Gulfmart was a memorable one. These customer interactions also enabled me to lead my team in the right direction, and provided me with a broader view of the infrastructural and management changes that were needed in the long run. Eventually, this personal rapport helped us create a large and loyal base of customers, who developed a certain level of comfort and ease in shopping at Gulfmart.

"The most challenging experience at Gulfmart that comes to my mind now was the need to close our main branch, which was also our first outlet, in Shuwaikh, at very short notice due to some issues with the landlord. The unexpected closure meant that we had to find a new venue, shift everything, and set up shop in the new place in a very short span of time, so as to ensure that our temporary closure did not inconvenience or disrupt the shopping routine of our customers.

"More importantly, we wanted to make sure that the huge trust that we had built with customers, and the sense of reliability that customers had come to associate with the Gulfmart brand, were not lost by the closure.

Happily, through the concerted and diligent efforts of our amazing management team and staff, along with support from the owners, we were able to rapidly reestablish ourselves in a new, larger and more spacious venue in a very short time, with minimal disruption to the shopping needs of customers."

Asked about how the retail landscape in Kuwait had changed over the past three decades, Remesh said, "Contrary to the view held by many people, I think the retail scenario in Kuwait has gradually evolved, rather than drastically changed, over the past 30 years. I would also like to add that this slow transformation is not limited to the retail industry, but is seen in other industries, as well as, in life in Kuwait over the years. Some of these developments were welcome advancements, while there were others that were not so desirable.

"The good thing about retail evolution in the Kuwait market is that there are many people, especially among the older generation that continue to value the in-store shopping experience. They visit their favorite retail stores with their families and weekly shopping lists, and consider the weekly shopping a pleasant outing with the family, and an opportunity to experience quality time together.

It is this need of customers for a convenient and easily accessible offline store that provides them with their daily requirements that led us to open our latest brand, taiba market.

"Taiba market has ambitious plans to roll out the brand's outlets across all Kuwait governorates. Each store will be in a small format, with the purpose of making shopping convenient and easy for customers. Although by having small stores we may not have each and every product that shoppers need for their occasional needs, we assure customers that no matter what product they want, we will make

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sure that we get it for them. The brand also has a social commitment to promoting products that are organic and beneficial to the health of customers, and hence a focus on providing customers fresh and nutritional products that meet their daily nutritional needs and satisfy their desires.”

“Without doubt shopping preferences have changed over the years, in particular, with the increase in online shopping sites. Many people, especially among the younger crowd, now prefer the comfort and speed of ordering from their living room, and enjoy the convenience of having orders delivered right at their doorstep. Nevertheless, for many people the fundamental outlook on shopping continues to be an in-store buying experience. This is a social practice, which I personally hope does not completely fade with the current surge in ecommerce.

“However, as a business, we did not entirely ignore the idea of a certain portion of our target market wanting to shop online, especially once Gulfmart rebranded as oncost. We developed an easily accessible and intuitive web store and listed on various e-commerce marketplaces. Also, an online presence became essential in order not to lose customers to larger supermarket chains with a strong online presence and with branches all around Kuwait. This prompted us to open several Gulfmart/Oncost mini stores at various locations across Kuwait, serving as friendly neighborhood stores that catered to the immediate needs of our customers.

“If I could point to something that has really changed in Kuwait’s retail industry, it would

However, now we rarely see any flyers left at our doorsteps, as all this promotion work has shifted online. But, I do need to admit that we too have embraced the digital promotion format, and recognize that there are many benefits to online promotions, including lower costs, and a wider, more targeted reach, compared to the more expensive and ‘hit-or-miss’ approach of distributing printed flyers and brochures.”

Asked whether the latest shopping trends had impacted sales at retailers like oncost, and what were the prospects for brick-store retailers in the years ahead, Remesh noted, “To simply state the obvious, online shopping has undoubtedly impacted in-store businesses, but largely in a positive way, with, of course, some unforeseen challenges. Let me give you a simple example, most customers shopping online know exactly what they want, they then add the item to their virtual cart and proceed to checkout, the entire process takes just a few minutes. So if you are looking for shopping speed and saving time, then online shopping is definitely beneficial.

“On the other hand a customer who walks into a retail store is rarely going to come in, pick up a specific item, pay for it, and leave the shop. They invariably spend more time within the shop, they could pick up an additional item or two that were not on their shopping list, maybe because they saw it on our shelf, or because of an impressive in-store display, or a special price discount offered by the store, or for multiple other reasons. In short, they often buy more than what they would during online shopping.

“I am a strong proponent of establishing a brand or business the old-school way through first setting up a brick-and-mortar store and then expanding online. I do believe that having a strong online retail presence and using digital tools is essential for retailers to expand their businesses and to succeed in today’s increasingly digital world. Online presence also enables the brand to reach a wider customer base and offer their products anywhere in the country through an efficient distribution network.

“So, establishing a physical store the old school way and generating that initial traction and brand loyalty among customers is a must in my experience. The added benefit now is that with an online presence you can expand your reach without the costs of leasing expensive real estate space to open local outlets, or hiring additional employees. A strong online retail presence and an efficient distribution network can provide retailers with significant benefits, not least of which is reduced capex.”

Turning to the time he spent in Kuwait and how life has changed in the country over the past 30 years, Remesh said, “My story is very similar to that of millions of other expats who flew to the Middle-East hoping to make a better life for themselves and their families back home. In my case, I had an uncle in Kuwait, the late restaurateur, T.N. Surendra Nath, who invited me here. I was lucky in that when I first arrived, I already had family members in Kuwait, so my initial period in the country did not feel like living in a totally different world. But immediately after I moved here, the invasion happened, which put a lot of things in perspective for me, and that experience also really shaped my mindset towards life.

“I started from very humble beginnings, worked at my uncle’s restaurant for almost two years, and then fortuitously I was offered a job by one of the regular customers at our



restaurant. I took up this new job offer which provided me with my first exposure to the retail and wholesale environment. I worked my way up in the new place for the next eight to nine years, and then made my move to Gulfmart

“Another aspect of my life in Kuwait, that I feel extremely fortunate for, is the opportunity I had over the years to work with top quality management professionals. These retail stalwarts truly inspired me and led by example. I owe a lot of my growth and development to Arif Sheikh, Managing Director of BMA Group that owned Gulfmart, and to the CEO of Oncost, Saleh Al-Tunai, both of whom encouraged and inspired me in my growth as a retailer.

“Today, I look at Kuwait as the place that gave me everything I have, whether it is my professional achievements, my financial

schedule—is definitely going to take some time for me, as this work culture has become sort of ingrained in me. Also, enjoying an extended vacation, something I have not experienced for a very long time, will take time, as I have always been really passionate about my work, and did not consider it as a separate job, but rather as an extension of who I am as a person.

“I currently do not have specific future plans, but would like to take things as they come and see what India has in store for me. I have informed all my friends and family in Kuwait that they will be seeing me here again, as I am maintaining my residence permit so as to provide me with flexibility to visit Kuwait if I need to come for any business reason, or just to visit my daughter who is living and working in Kuwait.

Today, I look at Kuwait as the place that gave me everything I have, whether it is my professional achievements, my financial improvements, or the personal connections and strong friendships that I have developed over the years in this country. I will forever be indebted to everyone I met along my journey for providing the wonderful experiences that we shared.

be that many retailers are now beginning to understand the benefits of establishing reliable, dedicated and exclusive supply chains to deliver their produce and products. They are also allocating significant marketing budgets, and engaging in sophisticated promotion drives, all of these are initiatives that Gulfmart and oncost have been practising for years.

Finally, I think social media has significantly influenced the way shoppers buy products, and also changed the way that retailers communicate with their customers. I fondly remember the days when I used to be directly involved in the designing of flyers and brochures to market our products, and the massive response we received from a well-designed promotional flyer or brochure.

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Asked about his thoughts as he prepares for a new phase in life, Remesh said, “I have been a non-resident Indian since my early 20’s. All my visits to India during these years have lasted only a maximum of 10 or 15 days at a stretch. While I had the privilege to travel quite often over the last 15 years, I did not have the luxury of spending extended periods in India. So, my initial plan is to simply go back to India and relax for a while, and, among others, enjoy the smaller things in life, join my wife on her temple expeditions, catch up with friends, do some general health and wellbeing treatments. “Adjusting to no longer following a 9 to 5 daily routine—in the retail industry it is more like an ‘all-day long, every-day of the week’ work

My immediate intention is to take a well-deserved break from the daily hustle and bustle of worklife and slowly transition to a wholesome relaxed life in India. My kids are grown up and are leading their own fulfilling lives, so my wife and I plan to focus on our health more consciously.

I also have certain passion projects that have been brewing within me that I would like to approach with a clearer unpressured frame of mind. Hopefully, I will be able to lend my retail expertise to upcoming businesses serving as a consultant and lending them support in their retail journey to the extent of my abilities.

“In conclusion, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to each of you who have been part of my journey in Kuwait. Your support, collaboration, and friendship have made my career and my life in this country truly memorable, and an experience I will cherish all my life.”



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Vision of the Future, theme for Kuwait's pavilion at Osaka World Expo

Kuwait's pavilion, held under the banner 'Vision of the Future', draws inspiration from pearls—a powerful symbol of the country's maritime heritage and economic history, now reimagined as part of its forward-looking narrative.

Osaka World Expo 2025, which will open on Sunday, 13 April on the island of Yumeshima, in Osaka prefecture of Japan, will see the return of Kuwait's pavilion to this Japanese city after its first participation there during the 1970 Osaka World Expo.

World Expo held every five years is the largest global gathering of nations dedicated to finding solutions to pressing challenges of our time by highlighting a universal theme through engaging and immersive activities. Showcasing innovation and cultural exchange, the expo will run for the next six months until 13 October.

Kuwait's pavilion, held under the banner 'Vision of the Future', draws inspiration from pearls—a powerful symbol of the country's maritime heritage and economic history, now reimagined as part of its forward-looking narrative. The inspiration reflects the World Expo 2025 theme of 'Designing Future Society for Our Lives'.

Kuwait's message at the expo will highlight peace, partnership, and openness, reflecting its role as a unifying force in shaping a sustainable and inclusive future. The theme, 'Empowering and Sustaining Life' echoes this commitment.

Kuwait was among the participating nations at the 1970 World Expo held in Osaka, which welcomed over 65 million visitors under the theme 'Progress and Harmony for Humanity'. Kuwait's pavilion stood out with its modern Islamic architectural design, symbolizing the country's maritime heritage and its geographic



and cultural ties to Japan. Artifacts from Failaka Island, dating back to 1500 BC and the era of Alexander the Great, were among Kuwait's exhibits on that occasion.

Kuwait participated in the 1970 World Expo in Osaka, inaugurated by Emperor Hirohito on March 14 with a speech celebrating global cooperation. Kuwait's presence at the Osaka World Expo once again spotlights its heritage and commitment to global cooperation, and underlines the country's ongoing partnership

with Japan. Diplomatic and economic relations between Kuwait and Japan have deep roots, dating back to the late 19th century. Trade began in 1875, with Japanese goods reaching Kuwait via Bombay and Aden. In 1880, Japan's Masaharu Yoshida mission—sent by the Meiji government—visited the Arabian Gulf, including Kuwait, to explore commercial opportunities. By 1934, the Yamashita Kisen shipping company had established regular routes between Japan and the Gulf. A turning

point came in 1958 when Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah granted Japan's Arabian Oil Company (AOC) exploration rights in Kuwait's Neutral Zone. In 1960, the AOC discovered the Khafji oil field, and by 1961, the first shipment of crude oil was exported—cementing energy cooperation between the two nations.

Diplomatic relations were formally established on 8 December 1961, when Japan recognized Kuwait's independence. In 1962, Kuwait appointed Suleiman Al-Sanea as its first ambassador to Tokyo, and by 1963, the Japanese embassy opened in Kuwait. Cultural cooperation expanded through Japan's scholarship programs aimed at fostering mutual understanding.

From the inaugural Expo in London's Hyde Park in 1851 to the 2025 edition in Yumeshima, Osaka, international competition to host World Expos has intensified. Over the decades, these global events have been held in numerous cities and capitals around the world, culminating in Dubai's landmark Expo in 2020—which was postponed to 2021-22 due to COVID-19 pandemic—marking the first-ever World Expo hosted by an Arab country. Saudi Arabia will follow suit by hosting Expo 2030 in Riyadh.

Over its 174-year history, the World Expo has evolved into the world's largest platform for showcasing transformative innovations that have shaped modern society and offering unique opportunities for economic, cultural, and technological collaboration.

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Chilaquiles

A Classic Mexican Comfort Food

Chilaquiles are one of Mexico's most beloved dishes. Made with crispy tortilla chips soaked in a flavorful sauce and topped with shredded chicken, cream, cheese, and onion slices, this dish is a true comfort food. It is a favorite for breakfast but can be enjoyed at any time of the day.



The name Chilaquiles comes from the Nahuatl language, spoken by the Aztecs, and means 'chilies in sauce'. This dish has been a part of Mexican cuisine for centuries,

originating as a practical way to use leftover tortillas. Ancient Mesoamerican civilizations, including the Aztecs and Mayans, relied on corn as a staple food, and Chilaquiles became one of the many creative ways to prepare it.

During colonial times, Chilaquiles evolved as Spanish ingredients, such as dairy and cheese, were introduced into Mexican cuisine. Over time, the dish spread across the country, with each region adding its own variations. In some areas, Chilaquiles are served with fried eggs, while in others, they come with beans or avocado.

Today, Chilaquiles remain a staple in Mexican households, often served as a comforting breakfast or a satisfying meal after a long night. In many families, recipes are passed down through generations, making it a dish rich in both flavor and tradition.

Did you know that Mexican cuisine is recognized as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity? In 2010, UNESCO awarded this honor to Mexican food for its unique ingredients, ancient cooking techniques, and deep cultural significance. Mexican cuisine is not just about food—it is about history, tradition, and the blending of indigenous and Spanish influences over centuries.

Chilaquiles are a perfect example of why Mexican food is so special. They showcase the importance of corn, chiles, and fresh local ingredients, all of which are at the heart of Mexican gastronomy.

Chilaquiles can be made with either green sauce (salsa verde) or red sauce (salsa roja). Both versions are delicious, and the choice depends on personal preference:

Green Sauce is made with tomatillos, serrano chilies, garlic, onion, and coriander. It has a tangy and slightly spicy flavor. On the other hand, Red Sauce is made with tomatoes, guajillo or arbol chilies, garlic, and onion. It has a rich, smoky, and slightly sweet taste.

RECIPE

Banana Bhuna Bliss



This vegan banana curry with a strong North Indian flare is a spicy, flavorful, delicious popular vegetarian dish. It is a healthy and nutritious dish as it is low in fat and high in fiber and potassium. Raw bananas are also a good source of vitamins and minerals, making this dish not only tasty but also good for health. Sometimes, simplicity sings the loudest on a plate. A tribute to traditional Indian flavors, the humble raw banana is transformed through the deft use of roasted spices and goes well with roti, paratha, or as a dry side-dish with dal-rice.

This nourishing dish brings warmth and nostalgia in every bite, and is perfect for a light sattvic lunch or dinner that is big on flavor and comfort.

Total Time: 25-30 minutes

Serving: 3-4

Ingredients:

- 3 raw bananas, peeled and cut into slices
- 3 tbsp oil
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- 1 tsp urad dal (black gram)
- A pinch of asafoetida
- 8-10 curry leaves
- 1 green chili slit
- 1 tsp ginger, finely chopped
- 1 medium tomato, finely sliced
- 1/4 tsp turmeric powder
- 1/2 tsp red chili powder
- 1 tsp coriander powder
- 1/2 tsp cumin powder
- 1/2 tsp sambar powder
- Salt – to taste
- Fresh coriander, chopped, for garnish
- Water, as needed

Instructions:

- Boil, peel, and slice the raw bananas in lightly salted water for 5-6 minutes until just tender. Drain and set aside
- Heat oil in a pan, add the cumin seeds, black gram, hing, curry leaves, green chili, ginger and saute for a few seconds.
- Add the finely sliced tomatoes and sauté until the oil separates
- Add turmeric, red chili, coriander and cumin powder, along with salt and mix well, Gently fold in the boiled raw banana slices, stir to coat them well with the spices
- Sprinkle sambar powder and cook on low heat for five minutes, stirring occasionally while taking care not to mash the banana slices
- Garnish with chopped fresh coriander and serve hot with soft roti, a glass of chilled laban, and a spoonful of tangy pickle.



Chef Chhaya Thakker

Chilaquiles recipe

Ingredients: (Serves 4-6)

- 12 corn tortillas (or store-bought corn tortilla chips)
- 500 g chicken breast
- 2 cups sauce (choose between a green sauce made with tomatillos, serrano chilies, garlic, onion, and cilantro, or a red sauce made with tomatoes, dried chiles, garlic, and onion) (You can also buy pre-made Mexican salsa



casera (red) or guacamole salsa (green) at most supermarkets. Just make sure to get an authentic Mexican brand for the best flavor.)

- 1/2 cup Mexican cream (or sour cream)
- 1 cup fresh cheese, crumbled
- 1 teaspoon salt
- Vegetable oil for frying
- 1/4 red onion, sliced (optional, for garnish)
- Fresh coriander leaves (optional, for garnish)

Instructions:

- Boil the chicken breast in salted water until fully cooked. Let it cool, then shred it into small pieces.
- If making your own sauce, heat a little oil in a pan and cook the sauce ingredients (for green sauce: tomatillos, serrano chiles, garlic, and onion; for red sauce: tomatoes, dried chiles, garlic, and onion) until soft. Blend them with a bit of water and fresh coriander (if using green sauce) until smooth. (For a quicker option use store-bought Mexican salsa casera (red) or guacamole salsa (green) at most supermarkets. Just make sure to get an authentic Mexican brand for the best flavor.)
- Cut the tortillas into triangles and fry them in hot oil until crispy. Drain on paper towels. (Or use pre-made corn tortilla chips to save time.)
- In a large pan, heat the sauce and bring it to a simmer. Add the crispy tortilla chips and stir gently so they soak up the sauce but stay slightly crunchy. Let them cook for about 3-4 minutes.
- Plate the Chilaquiles and top with shredded chicken. Drizzle with cream, sprinkle with cheese, and garnish with red onion and coriander for extra flavor.
- Chilaquiles are more than just food, they are a reflection of Mexican culture and history. Whether you choose a tangy green sauce or a robust red sauce, the crispy tortillas, tender chicken, and creamy toppings create a perfect balance of flavors.

For an extra treat, top them with a fried egg or some mashed brown beans on the side. Either way, every bite of chilaquiles is a reminder of Mexico's rich culinary heritage, which has earned recognition and admiration around the world.

Thought
for the
week

Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy.

- Thich Nhat Hanh

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



New Otani Osaka

The Perfect Retreat Near Expo 2025

By Nourah Khan
Travel Writer
The Times Kuwait

With the launch of Expo 2025 in Osaka, Japan on 13 April, the world's attention has turned to this vibrant city that beautifully blends modern innovation with timeless tradition. During my earlier visit to Osaka, I had the pleasure of staying at the New Otani Osaka, which I consider one of the city's top accommodation choices, especially for travelers seeking comfort, luxury, and a prime location.



One of the most memorable parts of my journey to Japan was my stay at this exceptional hotel. I chose New Otani Osaka for its reputation and spectacular views—and the experience far exceeded my expectations. From the moment I stepped into the elegant lobby, I felt a warm welcome that truly reflected the grace of Japanese hospitality. The service was refined, thoughtful, and detail-oriented from start to finish.

I stayed in a Luxury Junior Suite with Castle View, which turned out to be one of the most beautiful suites I've experienced during my

travels. Spacious and elegantly designed with a blend of modern comfort and traditional Japanese aesthetics, the suite offered a stunning view of Osaka Castle. By day, the park surrounding the castle looked like a living painting, and at night, the illuminated castle became a magical sight. I found myself returning to the window time and again to



enjoy this peaceful moment.

Located in Chuo-ku, just steps from Osaka Castle and its surrounding gardens, the hotel enjoys a convenient spot close to major public transportation. Whether you are shopping in Shinsaibashi, exploring traditional markets, or planning to attend Expo 2025 on Yumeshima



Island, everything is within easy reach. Thanks to nearby subway access, the Expo venue can be reached in approximately 35 minutes with just one transfer—making the hotel an excellent base for Expo visitors.

New Otani Osaka offers a diverse selection of restaurants that celebrate both Japanese and international cuisine. One standout is Teppanyaki Grill Keyaki, which serves premium grilled dishes with a stunning panoramic view of Osaka Castle—a true feast for both the eyes and palate.



For those seeking authentic local flavor, Kushi & Wine Mikan presents Naniwa-style cuisine—with a focus on Kushiyaki (grilled skewers)—served in a modern and refined setting. The hotel also features a generous international buffet and a serene café, perfect for unwinding with tea or coffee after a long day.

Another standout feature of the hotel is its variety of retail shops, offering everything from traditional crafts and souvenirs to upscale fashion. Several stylish cafés are located throughout the property, creating comfortable spaces to relax or meet with friends.



The hotel's wellness facilities include a modern fitness center, an indoor swimming pool, and a sauna, along with a Japanese-style spa offering relaxing and rejuvenating treatments. However, what makes New Otani Osaka truly unique is its spirit—a graceful fusion of traditional Japanese aesthetics and contemporary sophistication.

Also you cannot be in Osaka without considering a visit to Universal Studios Japan, one of the city's top entertainment attractions. And one of the great perks of staying at Hotel New Otani Osaka is how easy it is to get to this



theme park. In just about 25 minutes by train, you can go from the calm elegance of the hotel to the excitement of movie magic. A short walk takes you to Osaka-jo Koen Station, and from there, it is a smooth ride straight to Universal City Station.

Whether you are visiting Osaka for Expo 2025 or to explore its rich culture and history, New Otani Osaka offers a seamless and luxurious stay in the heart of the city. For me, it was much more than just a hotel, it was a refined and restorative experience that added lasting value to my journey.

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.



EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Driving the Post-American Global Economy



Jim O'Neill

Jim O'Neill is a former chairman of Goldman Sachs Asset Management and a former UK Treasury minister.



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An analysis of annual nominal GDP figures from 2000 to 2024 shows that the US, China, the eurozone, and India collectively contributed nearly 70 percent of all growth, with the US and China accounting for almost 50 percent between them.

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Since the US presidential election last year, I have been commenting regularly on various aspects of Donald Trump's agenda and what it might mean for America, financial markets, and the rest of the world. There has been no shortage of chaos, but that was largely expected, given the president's ham-handed, erratic 'method' of policymaking.

As I noted in February, and again in March, other economies may respond to Trump's aggression by boosting their own domestic demand and reducing their dependency on US consumers and financial markets. If there is a positive spin to the current mess, it is that Europeans and the Chinese have already started to pursue such changes. Germany is loosening its 'debt brake' and allowing for sorely needed investment, and China is said to be studying its options for stimulating domestic consumption.

For any country that depends on international trade and markets, it is abundantly obvious that, even if the United States can be persuaded to rein in its trade-war policies, new trading arrangements will be necessary. Many are already seeking ways to increase trade among themselves and to forge new agreements to lower non-tariff barriers in the rapidly growing services trade.

As a bloc, the rest of the G7 (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the United Kingdom) is nearly as large as the US. Add the other participants in UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer's "coalition of the willing," and America's erstwhile allies could offset much of the damage that Trump has inflicted. By the same token, if China could refashion its Belt and Road Initiative in close coordination with India and other larger emerging economies,

that might prove transformational.

Such moves would mitigate the effects of US tariff policies and threats. But they will not be easy to pull off; if they were, they already would have happened. Today's trading and financial arrangements reflect a variety of political, cultural, and historical factors, and the Trump administration will try to derail any changes to the status quo that could benefit China.

What matters, then, is precisely how other large economies go about stimulating domestic demand, mobilizing investment, and forging new trade ties. At a recent conference on 'globalization and geo-economic fragmentation', hosted by the think tank Bruegel and the Dutch central bank, I was reminded just how skewed global GDP growth has been since the turn of the century. A simple analysis of annual nominal GDP figures from 2000 to 2024 shows that the US, China, the eurozone, and India collectively contributed nearly 70 percent of all growth, with the US and China accounting for almost 50 percent between them.

This finding further underscores the fact

that US tariff threats must be met with higher domestic demand elsewhere. But here is a reality check: The only other country that could single-handedly boost its demand and imports by enough to compensate for America's declining share of the global economy is China.

But what if China is not operating single-handedly? As we have seen, Europeans are already taking steps to increase investment and defense spending in ways that will benefit both the EU economy and others, like the UK. And, of course, India's economy has been growing faster than many others in recent years, suggesting that it could have some scope to pursue more domestic stimulus. What if all these other economies were coordinating their own policies?

Such coordination probably might not have the same global impact as the 2009 London G20 agreement, which introduced wide-ranging global reforms and new institutions to address the causes of the global financial crisis and its fallout. But if these countries signaled to the rest of the world that they were engaged in some kind of consultation to harmonize

their economic policies and advance shared objectives, that could have quite a positive impact.

Finally, something else from the Bruegel conference has been nagging away at me. It was a chart (see below), presented by Bruegel Senior Fellow André Sapir, highlighting the similarities between Japan's rise, when its GDP grew to around 70 percent that of the US in the 1990s, and China's today. Then as now, the great fear in America was that it would be 'surpassed'. But what does America really want? Does it want to be able to say that it is the largest economy in nominal terms, or does it want to provide wealth and prosperity for its citizens?

These are not necessarily the same thing. What the current US administration fails to understand is that other countries' growth and development can make Americans themselves even wealthier. Perhaps, someday, Americans will elect leaders who can comprehend this basic economic insight. For now, though, they seem destined for many years of turmoil and persistent uncertainty.

Rationalizing water use to ensure sustainable future

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

A study in 2022 by the civil-society organization, Kuwait Water Association (KCA), showed that demand for water could surge 20 to 30 percent by 2030, due to an increase in per capita usage and a rise in gross demand for water.

The KCA estimated that this would necessitate the building of a new desalination plant with a capacity of 100 million gallons every five years at a then projected cost of KD450 million each. Without significantly curbing individual consumption, the policy of building more desalination plants to meet freshwater demand is fraught with risks, not least of which is higher costs.

In addition to increased expenditures on production and transmission infrastructure, there are also higher expenses associated with energy (mainly oil and gas) needed to operate the desalination plants. Currently, nearly 55 percent of total energy consumption in the country goes towards desalination and power production processes. Costs associated with operating, transmitting, and distributing water are also projected to increase in future.

In addition, when computing expenses involved in expanding the desalination process, we need to factor the negative impact to the marine environment from the thermal brine discharged by desalination plants, as well as the deleterious effect on human health from the air pollution related to burning fossil fuels to

desalinate water. We clearly need to switch to more sustainable forms of desalination.

On a positive note, there is growing awareness among the public in Kuwait about the fragility of the water ecosystem, and the need to sustain water resources by tackling environmental degradation and rationalizing consumption. Recently, the Swiss Embassy in Kuwait, in partnership with UN-Habitat, hosted an interactive discussion on sustainable water.

The event brought together representatives from Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), Kuwait Foundation for Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), academia, government bodies, private sector, diplomats, and civil-society organizations, to discuss critical water challenges and explore solutions for sustainable water management.

Considering sustainable use of water is pivotal to Kuwait's future, the discussions centered on the importance of integrated water resource management, innovative technologies, and cross-sector collaboration. The event also provided stakeholders with a platform to exchange perspectives, foster partnerships, and examine solutions tailored to the region's water challenges.

A recent report from the US-based Center for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) warns of increased economic and human costs from more frequent, intense and destructive floods and droughts as a result of global warming and climate change in future. Given the financial, economic and

environmental costs linked to building new desalination plants, and rising repercussions from climate change, it is evident that Kuwait's water woes are only likely to intensify in future.

According to the latest report from the global non-profit organization, World Resources Institute (WRI), Kuwait is among 25 countries that face high water stress each year. High water stressed nations are those withdrawing 40 to 80 percent of their renewable water supplies annually. The WRI report reveals that the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region remains the most water-stressed area on Earth, with 12 out of 17 most water-stressed countries, including Bahrain, Qatar, Oman and Kuwait, located in this region.

Experts categorize regions as water stressed when annual renewable water per person is below 1700 m³; when available water drops below 1000 m³, the region is said to be experiencing water scarcity; and when water availability falls below 500 m³, the area is said to be in absolute water scarcity. The WRI findings on MENA are corroborated by a new study by the World Bank, which projects that annual water availability per capita in MENA will decrease by 2030 to around 500 cubic meters (m³) per person per year.

The World Bank noted that by 2050, an additional 25 billion cubic meters of water will be needed annually to meet the needs of MENA region. "This is equivalent to establishing another 65 desalination plants, each the size of Ras Al-Khair plant in Saudi Arabia, which is

currently the world's largest plant," said the Bank, indicating the infeasibility of such a prospect. Globally, around four billion people, or half the world's population, are currently exposed to water stress for at least one month a year; by 2050, that number could be closer to 60 percent of the global population.

The Bank emphasized that growing risks from environmental repercussions of climate change further underscore the urgent need for long-term strategies to safeguard ecosystems, secure resources, and build resilience. "Water management is not just about scarcity, pollution, or infrastructure, but about governance and cooperation. The challenge is not only to ensure water access but to manage it effectively, by aligning efforts of users, providers, and regulators," said the Bank.

Safe drinking water is a human right and a major socio-economic driver for billions of people worldwide, water is also pivotal to progress on the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Through efficient interventions, including more investment in water infrastructure and resources, better water governance, and rationalized use, we can ensure sustained freshwater availability and accessibility in the years ahead.

In Kuwait, it is becoming increasingly imperative that we implement sustainable water production methods, as well as conserve water and rationalize its usage so as to ensure continued prosperity and stability of the nation and welfare of its people.

Chewing gum sheds microplastics into saliva

Most of the microplastics detached from gum within two minutes of first chewing the gum. And they were not released because of enzymes in saliva breaking them down, rather by the very action of chewing on them. The study also found that after eight minutes of chewing, 94 percent of the plastic particles collected during the tests had been released.



In today's world avoiding interaction with plastics is well-nigh impossible; they are ubiquitous and present everywhere in our daily lives. Plastics are now even within our bodies in the form of micro- and nano-plastics that come from the clothing we wear, the food we eat, the water we drink, and even from the air we breathe.

Now a new study shows that chewing gum is yet another way that these micrometer sized plastic particles enter our body. Researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in the United States found that chewing gum can release hundreds to thousands of microplastics per piece into our saliva and potentially into our body.

Although animal studies and studies with human cells show that microplastics could cause harm, scientists have yet to categorically identify the exact harm that microplastics cause to the human body. While we wait for more definitive answers from the scientific community, individuals can take several steps to reduce their exposure to microplastics.

Scientists estimate that humans consume tens of thousands of microplastics that range in size between 1 micrometer (1/1000 of a millimeter) and 5 mm-wide every year through foods, drinks, plastic packaging, coatings, and production or manufacturing processes. Yet, chewing gum as a potential source of microplastics has not been widely studied, despite the candy's worldwide popularity. The research team at UCLA wanted to identify how many microplastics a person could potentially ingest from chewing natural and synthetic gums.

Chewing gums are made from a rubbery base, sweetener, flavorings and other ingredients. Natural gum products use a plant-based polymer, such as chicle or other tree sap, to achieve the right chewiness, while synthetic gum products use rubber bases from petroleum-based polymers.

The researchers tested five brands of synthetic gum and five brands of natural gum, all of which are commercially available. To reduce the human factor of varied chewing patterns and saliva, they had seven pieces from each brand all chewed by one person.

In the lab, the person chewed the piece of gum for four minutes, producing samples of saliva every 30 seconds, then a final mouth rinse with clean water, all of which got combined into a single sample. In another experiment, saliva samples were collected periodically over 20 minutes

to look at the release rate of microplastics from each piece of gum. Then, the researchers measured the number of microplastics present in each saliva sample.

Plastic particles were either stained red and counted under a microscope or analyzed by Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy, which also provided the polymer composition. The team found an average of 100 microplastics released per gram of gum, though some individual gum pieces released as many as 600 microplastics per gram.

A typical piece of gum weighs between 2 and 6 grams, meaning a large piece of gum could release up to 3,000 plastic particles. If the average person chews 160 to 180 small sticks of gum per year, the researchers estimated that could result in the ingestion of around 30,000 microplastics.

The initial hypothesis of the researchers was that the synthetic gums would have a lot more microplastics because the base is a type of plastic. Surprisingly, both synthetic and natural gums were found to have similar amounts of microplastics released when chewed upon. And they also contained the same polymers: polyolefins, polyethylene terephthalates, polyacrylamides and polystyrenes. The most abundant polymers for both types of gum were polyolefins, a group of plastics that includes polyethylene and polypropylene.

Most of the microplastics detached from gum within two minutes of first chewing the gum. And they were not released because of enzymes in saliva breaking them down, rather by the very action of chewing on them. The study also found that after eight minutes of chewing, 94 percent of the plastic particles collected during the tests had been released.

To reduce the potential exposure to microplastics from chewing gum, people who are habituated to chewing this product would be better advised to chew one piece of gum for a longer period, rather than pop a new gum into their mouth more frequently.

The study was limited to identifying microplastics 20-micrometers-wide or larger because the instruments and techniques used were able to detect only up to those sizes. The researchers pointed out that it is very likely that smaller plastic particles were present in the saliva but were not detected, and that additional research would be needed to assess the potential release of nano-sized (one-billionth of a meter) plastics from chewing gum.



New insights in brain activity sheds light on learning

Neuroscience has made great progress on how the brain processes sight and sound, as well as in how it decodes motor activity—the use of muscles to perform functions. But one area that has eluded explanation in this line of work is 'thought'—what comes between the sensing and the doing, which is 'thought' to be foundational to higher-order cognitive processes.

New studies by researchers at the John Hopkins University in the United States aim to take knowledge of the thinking and learning process in the brain further ahead. In a groundbreaking new study, the scientists have revealed what happens in the brain when a mouse makes a mistake and the learning process involved in it.

By observing the activity of individual neurons, the team pinpointed the exact moment that mice learned a new skill. This confirmed earlier work that suggested animals are fast learners that purposely test the boundaries of new knowledge, and upended assumptions about the speed of learning and the role of the sensory cortex. The researchers believe their finding in the mice will hold true across animal species including humans.

Through their new perspectives on how the brain learns, the researchers were able to make predictions about how the human brain might work. Although the ability to learn quickly would benefit any animal in the wild, animals studied in labs seem to learn slowly and methodically. It typically takes mice, for instance, thousands of tries to learn a task, several hundred at best.

Earlier studies had found that the performance of animals does not necessarily sync with their knowledge. In other words, animals might know a lot more than they demonstrate in tests. Those studies also showed that animals that seem to be slow learners might be testing their new knowledge. But by merely watching animals struggle at tasks, the researchers could not tell a slow learner from a strategic tester of boundaries.

The core question the scientists sought to answer was, what is the neural basis of this distinction between learning and performance. For this, they taught mice to lick when they heard a certain tone, but not to lick when they heard a different sound. From the moment training began, the team recorded the activity of neurons in the auditory cortex, an area of the brain associated with hearing and perception.

There were two major surprises from the experiments. First, the mice learned in 20 to 40 tries, which was considered 'extraordinarily fast', by the team. The second surprise was that this learning activity happened in the sensory cortex, something that has typically been associated with non-sensory brain areas.

The new study highlighted the importance of assessing how brain activity impacts behavior at different stages of the learning process and in different conditions. Additionally, the study revealed that besides processing sensory inputs, the sensory cortex also plays a vital role in forming associations between sensory cues and reinforced actions.

When the mice continued to make errors, licking at the wrong times long after their neural activity showed they had learned the task, their brain activity confirmed to the researchers that the mice knew the rules of the game, but that they were just experimenting.

The study enabled the team to decode the cognitive driver of an error, and recognize when the animal was making a mistake or was just seeking to give the other option a try. They found that once the mice had mastered the task and ceased their exploratory behavior, this higher-order activity started to diminish, and the sensory cortex was no longer involved in the task.

Condensing their study the researchers said, "Animals are smarter than we think, and there are distinct brain dynamics related to learning. You might know something, but there is a parallel process related to how you use it. The brain seems wired to do that well, to allow us to toggle between performance and learning as we get better and better at something."



EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Dumping Biomass in the Ocean Is Not a Climate Solution



James Kerry, Lisa Levin

James Kerry, Senior Marine and Climate Scientist at OceanCare, is Adjunct Senior Research Fellow at James Cook University.

Lisa Levin is Distinguished Professor Emerita at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at the University of California, San Diego.



Puro.earth, a self-appointed 'carbon-removal certifier', is seeking to establish a new accredited means of carbon sequestration: dumping bundled biomass (wood or crop waste) into the ocean. At least two companies are already selling carbon credits based on plans to dump biomass in the Black Sea. But "ocean storage of biomass" (OSB) lacks scientific verification and highlights the risks of commercializing unproven climate interventions.

The idea is that "degradation-resistant biomass" would be dumped into the Black Sea basin, where anoxic (oxygen-free) conditions would further slow, or even halt, degradation. As a result, the approach's proponents claim, the carbon would effectively be removed from the biological cycle for over 1,000 years, with minimal environmental impact. But there is no scientific evidence that this is true.

While anoxic zones might appear barren, they are by no means devoid of life. And the tiny organisms found there – such as the Synechococcus bacteria, which was recently discovered in the Black Sea's anoxic basin, break down organic matter and release trapped carbon. They simply use chemosynthesis, rather than photosynthesis, to do it. Since carbon can migrate across the 'chemocline' (chemical transition zone) that separates anoxic zones

not only of carbon, but also hydrogen sulfide (which is toxic) and methane (a highly potent greenhouse gas).

The seabed disturbance, together with the erosion of the chemocline, could cause these gases, in addition to carbon dioxide, to penetrate the oxygen-rich areas of the Black Sea, which support a diverse array of marine life, including dolphins, porpoises, and many species of fish, some of which can be found nowhere else. Any expansion of the anoxic zone or intrusion of toxic gases into this habitat could severely harm its ecosystem, which is already under intensifying pressure from overfishing, pollution (including chemical, plastic, and noise pollution), habitat destruction, and rising temperatures.

But that is not all. The gases released as a result of OSB could ultimately make their way into the atmosphere, with potentially catastrophic consequences. This is not without precedent. When the stratification of Lake Nyos in Cameroon collapsed in 1986, large clouds of CO₂ gas were released, killing an estimated 1,700 people.

Puro.earth insists that OSB is safe. But these claims are based on modeling and short-term laboratory experiments, which cannot possibly replicate the unique and complex conditions of the Black Sea's anoxic basin. For one thing, these experiments tend to underestimate rates of organic degradation, by failing to account for the possibility that they will increase over time, for example, as microbial communities adapt, or due to a breakdown in the structural integrity of the biomass.

Moreover, while Puro.earth promises strict requirements for monitoring, environmental, and social safeguards, it plans to observe the effects of its activities for only 15 years after the last biomass bundle is dumped—a far cry from the 1,000 years of carbon sequestration being claimed. Without long-term observational data, it cannot credibly claim that OSB is a legitimate, let alone benign, means of carbon removal, especially because the carbon permanency and ecological consequences of such activities are difficult to predict and even harder to monitor in such remote and poorly studied environments.

Land considerations further challenge the logic of OSB. Terrestrial biomass has value in itself, both in terms of the nutrients it contains and because there may be better uses for it, such as in the synthesis of biofuels. A complete life-cycle analysis of the OSB process suggests it involves significant energy consumption in the harvesting, processing, transportation, and monitoring of the biomass. Puro.earth rightly asserts that any biomass used in the process "must be free from harmful impurities and compounds," such as toxins and pesticides. Yet that requirement would necessitate chemical testing of entire batches, which would likely impose significant costs.

Even if OSB were safe and efficient,

with dumped biomass remaining durably sequestered in anoxic waters, its promise as a climate intervention would be dubious. The problem is one of scale. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, we should be removing 6-10 gigatons of CO₂ from the atmosphere each year until 2050. Even assuming that only crop waste was used, locking

up just one gigaton of CO₂ would require around 500 million tons of dry biomass, an amount comparable to the entire annual US corn harvest. This is not the only significant constraint on the proposed method; another is the paucity of anoxic zones on our planet to dispose of the biomass.

Companies that stand to gain financially from such projects should not be the arbiters of carbon-crediting mechanisms, nor are they qualified to make objective judgements about environmental safety. Under the Law of the Sea Convention, the standard has been, and always should be, one of precaution. A genuinely careful and conservative approach would be to conduct smaller-scale, multiyear controlled experiments before any large-scale, commercialized deployment were even to be considered.

The fact that OSB represents a low-tech approach to neutralizing CO₂ emissions does not exempt it from the precautionary principle and dumping regulations under the London Convention and London Protocol. The burden of proof is on the proponents of the intervention to demonstrate that their actions would not violate these standards. This should be reflected in any permitting decisions about OSB that countries bordering the Black Sea, such as Georgia and Turkey, might have to make in the coming years.

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Seabed disturbance, together with erosion of the chemocline, could cause carbon dioxide and other harmful gases to penetrate the oxygen-rich areas of the Black Sea, which support a diverse array of marine life found nowhere else.

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from oxygen-rich waters, whatever is released within the Black Sea's anoxic basin can return to the ocean's carbon cycle and, ultimately, the atmosphere.

Two more processes could accelerate the release of carbon: dumping large quantities of baled biomass could, and likely would, induce turbulent chemical mixing in the chemocline, while the heat generated by decomposing biomass could further weaken the Black Sea's stratification. Moreover, as the ballast makes contact with the seafloor, it will likely resuspend sediment that currently acts as a reservoir



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Quality Transmission, Lynchpin to African Electrification



Fatih Birol, Alain Ebobissé

Fatih Birol is Executive Director of the International Energy Agency.

Alain Ebobissé is CEO of Africa50

Too often, the conversation about Africa's energy challenge focuses only on connecting end users. With around half of the people living in Sub-Saharan Africa lacking access to electricity, and with four out of five in need of clean cooking solutions, extending electricity connections is indeed an urgent priority. But connecting households and

businesses to power sources is only part of the solution. The other part is to ensure that energy supply is both dependable and affordable.

Among Africans who do have access to an electricity grid, not even half can count on a reliable supply. Yet without dependable electricity, households and businesses cannot adopt lighting, stoves, computers, irrigation, farming equipment, sewing machines, and other devices that could boost prosperity and improve living standards. This is one of the main reasons why electricity demand remains low across the continent.

One of the keys to resolving Africa's electricity reliability and affordability challenges is greater investment in grids. The right investments in transmission can help stabilize the grid, reduce outages, improve efficiency, and make better use of the lowest-cost sources of energy wherever they are on the continent.



EXCLUSIVE TO THE TIMES KUWAIT

Without transmission, all other investments in electricity generation and household connections will likely end up underused.

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Without dependable electricity, households and businesses cannot adopt lighting, stoves, computers, irrigation, farming equipment, sewing machines, and other devices that could boost prosperity and improve living standards.

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The cost of developing transmission projects is only a small part of the total outlays needed to deliver universal electricity access. The International Energy Agency (IEA) estimates that Sub-Saharan Africa needs annual energy-access investments exceeding \$30 billion per year between now and 2030—more than eight times the \$3.7 billion invested annually today.

To mobilize higher investment in grids, African governments must engage the private sector. That means establishing clear, long-term regulatory and policy frameworks that will attract investors and reduce the cost of financing for new projects. As matters stand, nearly all transmission networks on the continent are operated and financed by state-owned utilities with limited financial resources. We know that this can work. In 2024, Africa's power sector achieved another year of double-digit growth, largely owing to rising private-sector participation. Now, the transmission buildout can follow the same recipe for success.

African countries can also look to other developing and emerging-market economies for serviceable models. In Brazil, policy and regulatory reforms initiated in the 1990s opened the country's power networks to private investment. Since then, according to the IEA, transmission and distribution capacity has more than quadrupled, allowing Brazil to achieve universal electricity access.

Similar models will soon make their debut in Africa. For example, Africa50, a multilateral infrastructure investor and asset manager created by African governments and the African Development Bank, and Power Grid Corporation of India, one of the world's largest transmission infrastructure developers and operators, have co-developed the Kenya Transmission Public-Private Partnership. In collaboration with the Kenyan government, the partnership aims to construct approximately 250 kilometers (155 miles) of new transmission lines to channel renewable energy generated in northern regions to industrial hubs and demand centers in the country's west.

Such public-private partnerships are crucial for closing the massive gaps that persist in energy infrastructure funding and implementation. Through regulatory reforms and risk-sharing mechanisms, private capital can help to advance

projects that would be challenging to finance otherwise. India has benefited from such models ever since it started deregulation of its power sector in 1998. The Tala Transmission project—a partnership between the state-owned Power Grid Corporation of India and Tata Power—is a prime example. Closer regional coordination is also essential. Investing in modern grid interconnectors allows electricity to be traded from countries with excess supply to those with not enough. Such networks can play a major role under emergency conditions, such as the devastating drought crippling Zambia's hydropower output. Already, 12 African countries in the West African Power Pool have permanently synchronized their grids, and the South African Power Pool is developing several interconnector transmission lines to support greater integration.

Still, Africa will need more dispatchers and planners to make full use of existing regional grid interconnections and lay the groundwork to commission new ones. Greater regional integration also will help investors derisk their projects, by expanding their potential pool of customers.

Africa will not achieve universal access to reliable electricity without significant investment in transmission infrastructure; but such investment will not materialize without fostering greater private-sector participation. Globally, investment in the energy sector is growing, particularly in renewables, electrification, and resilient grid infrastructure. But to capitalize on this trend, governments must lead with meaningful policy and regulatory changes. Countries like South Africa, Kenya, and Morocco offer clear examples, having successfully attracted private-sector energy investment by establishing long-term energy plans and targets, encouraging public-private partnerships, and streamlining administrative processes.

Developing and emerging-market economies can learn from one another. Those that have delivered near-universal access to electricity have done so by unlocking the necessary capital flows. This should be policymakers' top priority. Once you have secured reliable power, you can pursue economic development and start to improve hundreds of millions of lives.





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