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The fall of yet another government

THE TIMES REPORT

Democracy brings many advantages, but it also has its share of shortcomings. The downsides of democracy are often largely due to people distorting its precepts; they pick and choose aspects of democracy according to their needs and wants.

Democracy gives us freedom of choice, but it also enjoins us to make enlightened decisions; it allows for disagreements in debate over personal and provincial issues, but also for cooperation and compromises when it comes to greater national interests. Democracy grants us certain inalienable rights, but it also imposes on us specific responsibilities.

Cherry-picking what facets



of democracy to keep and what to ignore, leads to a deformed democracy that neither meets the aspiration of citizens nor realizes the welfare of the country.

Rights without responsibilities disfigures democracy and leads to situations such as the recent interpellation motion against the

prime minister, and its subsequent consequences for the country.

On 13 January, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Hamad Al-Khaled Al-Sabah tendered the resignation of his government to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

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France keen to work closely with Kuwait

STAFF REPORT

France is eager to participate in Kuwait's national celebrations, specifically the 30th anniversary of Kuwait's liberation from the Iraqi invasion. French Ambassador to Kuwait H.E. Anne-Claire Legendre, disclosed this at a recently held press conference at her residence.

Speaking to the media, Ambassador Legendre pointed at France's contributions to the liberation of the country from Iraqi aggressors.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



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PACI announces new version of Finder app



Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) last week announced the launch of a new version of the Kuwait Finder app for smart devices and computers.

The latest version includes several new features and functions.

In a press statement on the launch of the new version of Finder app, the Director-General of PACI, Musaed Al-Asousi, said the revamped version came at the request of the app's users and their feedback on features of the current app. Many of the existing functions on the app have been improved while several new features have been added, said Al-Asousi, including linking with the global messaging app, Whatsapp so that addresses that are shared through the messaging app can be directly opened in the Finder app.

Other new features include picture-in-picture that allow users to find various

routes available in navigation mode; improved performance and lower battery consumption; the ability to add the work and home site more easily; locating and accessing the parked cars, and supporting the latest versions of operating systems.

The director-general also noted that there had been a huge surge in the number of users and usage of the app over the past year. There were more 1.5 million downloads of the app in 2020, with average daily active users surpassing 170,000.

More than 25 million searches were also executed each month using the app. In addition, there was a huge demand for the StreetView feature with over eight million

uses of the feature each month.

He added that the StreetView feature, which covers all the roads in Kuwait, is currently being updated with new images, as more than 4,500 kilometers of streets have been modernized. Al-Asousi noted that so far Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governorate and most of the Ahmadi Governorate have been completed and Sabah Al-Ahmad City is currently being completed. He stated that the authority seeks to complete the updating of the pictures of the streets of the State of Kuwait completely by the end of July 2021 in order to provide and establish a historical record of the development of roads and construction in the country through images.

KSE to strengthen coordination with KPC



Chairperson of Kuwait Society of Engineers (KSE) Eng. Faisal Al-Atal recently held discussions with the Vice-Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Eng. Hashem Hashem, on ways to strengthen cooperation and coordination between KSE and KPC, and its subsidiaries.

Also attending the meeting were KSE Treasurer Eng. Ali Al-Failakawi and CEO of Kuwait

National Petroleum Company (KNPC) Eng. Walid Al-Badr were also present at the meeting.

The discussions centered on the problems of Kuwaiti engineers in the private oil sector who were terminated by KPC's contractors and its subsidiaries during the pandemic. The CEO of KPC assured that the matter was being discussed with the Minister of Oil and Minister of Electricity and Water, Dr. Muhammad Al-Faris in the bid to support the retrenched engineers.

The talks also tackled the development of a mechanism for accrediting non-Kuwaiti engineers under oil sector contracts, keeping in mind the oil sector's need for global engineering expertise. Other topics tackled in the meeting included ways to expand the oil sector's participation in scientific training programs conducted by the Training Center of KSE as part of its commitment to open the way for colleagues in the oil sector to benefit from the programs, workshops, conferences and engineering events organized by the society, in coordination with a number of international and Arab entities.

Full Kuwaitization of computer departments in public sector



Civil Service Commission (CSC) has directed all government entities to ensure that their computer departments are staffed only by Kuwaitis, and that any expatriate working in these departments should be terminated and replaced by nationals before the start of the next fiscal year that begins in April 2021.

Communicated with various government agencies regarding the 100 percent Kuwaitization of computer departments in all sectors, in compliance with the directive of the Council of Ministers on the implementation of the replacement policy before the next fiscal year which starts in April, Al-Anba daily reported quoting sources. The CSC stated that it was determined to ensure compliance of all public sector bodies with the directive issued by Council of Ministers, which seeks to implement the replacement policy by the current fiscal year. In this regard it was expected that a number of foreigners working in these departments in administrative and technical jobs could lose their jobs before March.

Meanwhile, Huawei, a leading global provider of information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure and smart devices, has partnered with Kuwait's Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT) to play a key role in powering the country's digital transformation through training local IT talent within the public sector. The cooperation aims to provide an online training platform and free exam opportunities to participants. The cooperation will also provide Arabic based training on cloud computing, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other advanced technologies and issue professional certifications to attest that employees within the public sector's IT divisions have the knowledge, skillset, and understanding to develop and implement next-generation intelligent solutions that will elevate Kuwait's society and propel its digitalization journey.

Hundreds of employees in the IT departments of more than 29 government entities in Kuwait are reported to have already joined this initiative, including participants from CAIT, Ministry of Education (MOE), and Public Authority for Sport (PAS), who have passed the exams and been awarded with Huawei certificates.

Digital transformation was recently recognized by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah as a key focus area for Kuwait's government. Advanced ICT infrastructure has also been recognized for its supportive role in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and supporting business and government continuity.

BelSalamah app facilitates smooth return of domestic workers

BelSalamah, the e-platform that facilitates the return of domestic workers from high-risk countries in a safe and smooth process, is helping sponsors to ensure the quick and safe return of their domestic workers.

The app and website which was developed for the Directorate-General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) in Kuwait, was prepared and built by the National Aviation Services (NAS) company, which operates at Kuwait International Airport.

The app is aimed at decreasing the total cost to sponsors in bringing back their domestic helpers who are stranded in high-risk countries from where direct flights are suspended. The program facilitates the booking of flight tickets, in addition to arranging a 14-day quarantine in Kuwait with boarding and lodging, as well as the mandated PCR tests on arrival at the airport and a second one at the end of the quarantine period.

The program costs KD270 for each domestic worker, with the price of airline tickets excluded as this depends on from where the worker is coming from. In a recent interview, the Director General of NAS, Mansour Al-Khozaym, said all domestic workers' passengers must hold a document from a laboratory accredited by their countries showing he/she is negative from the coronavirus, before boarding the flight to Kuwait.

On arriving in Kuwait, the passengers will be subjected to another PCR test at the airport and if the results are negative, the workers will be transferred directly to the designated places for a 14-day quarantine, in line with the health requirements. By end of the 14-day quarantine,



the workers will undergo a third PCR test, and if the results are negative they can resume work at their sponsors' homes.

Those who are identified as positive for the coronavirus at the airport test will be transferred to another quarantine facility by the ministry of health. This program seeks to protect other travelers, airport employees and citizens, and helps meet travel requirements during the pandemic while reducing waiting times and travel restrictions, said Al-Khozaym. He added that the platform also seeks to help sponsors bring back their workers rapidly and safely at a relatively low cost.

He said that thousands of domestic workers and their sponsors are expected to avail of the services provided by the app in the coming weeks and months. Al-Khozaym noted that the company would follow up the passengers in the country of their departure, guide them to the laboratories close to them, and also help them to book flights.

Flight resumption improves travel, tourism business

The Cabinet's decision to resume commercial flights at Kuwait International Airport (KIA) from 2 January and the launch of the BelSalamah online platform by the Directorate-General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has led to a slight improvement in business for travel and tourism offices in the country.

Shortly after the DGCA launched the BelSalamah.com website to facilitate the safe return of domestic workers stranded abroad, the authorities again suspended all flights at KIA on 23 December, as a precaution following the emergence of a new strain of coronavirus in Europe and elsewhere.

The decision to reopen the airport will now allow sponsors and travel agencies to once again begin using the online platform to book airline tickets and organize quarantine and PCR tests in Kuwait for domestic workers from the 35 countries that are on a ban list from where passengers cannot arrive directly to Kuwait.

Some travel and tourism agencies said that their business had gone up about 10 percent following the resumption of flights as many sponsors of domestic workers were relying on



their offices to do the necessary bookings and follow-up through the BelSalamah website.

However, they complained that travel agencies outside Kuwait in the banned countries now have the lion's share of the business as many domestic workers are booking from their own countries. In addition, the offices in Kuwait have only a limited number of seats on each flight, and they are mostly in the business class and a few in the economy class. They added that many travel offices continue to bear heavy losses due to travel restrictions imposed by Kuwait and that some of them have closed down or become bankrupt.



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Thought “ for the week

Freedom is not worth having
if it does not include the freedom
to make mistakes.

– Mahatma Gandhi



Cook Perfectly Fluffy Quinoa

Learn how to cook quinoa to fluffy perfection, and you will open the door to a world of wholesome, delicious recipes that call for this nutrient-rich seed. If you can cook rice, you can cook quinoa. Here are a few tips to whipping up a pot of quinoa that is as welcome in a salad or soup as it is in cookies, meatballs, or burgers.

Rinse Quinoa: Quinoa seeds are coated with a small amount of a bitter, soapy-tasting substance called saponin that is commonly rinsed off before cooking. Many cooks choose to wash quinoa before preparing it. To do this, place the quinoa in a sieve, place it under the tap, and run water over it until all the seeds have been thoroughly saturated. Alternately, place the quinoa in a large bowl of water, swish around with your hands, and drain off the water.

Toast Quinoa: For a firm, fluffy texture (rather than soggy or mushy) it is best to toast quinoa after rinsing it, and before cooking. Drain the rinsed quinoa until no more water comes out of the sieve, and transfer to a pre-heated pan over a medium flame. Allow any remaining water to evaporate, then watch closely as the quinoa goes from dry to lightly golden-brown.

This will add a toasty, slightly nutty flavor and sturdier texture that holds up well in salads, soups, and patties.

Cook Quinoa: Once the quinoa is dry and toasted (or just rinsed or straight out of the box, depending on how much time you have), add the cooking liquid. Use water, stock, or a half-and-half mixture of water and coconut milk. For every cup of quinoa, use about 1 1/2 to 1 3/4 cups of liquid—slightly more if it is right out of the package and slightly less if it's been rinsed or soaked. If using water, add a generous pinch of salt to the pot. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer, cover with a tight-fitting lid, and cook for 15 minutes or until the liquid has been completely absorbed. Remove from heat and let the cooked quinoa sit covered in the pot for about 15 minutes, then fluff by gently raking through the pot with a fork.



If the quinoa's texture is cooked through (with some bite remaining) before the liquid has been absorbed, strain off the remainder in the sieve and allow the quinoa to cool, or return the quinoa to the pot to keep warm if serving hot.

Refrigerate cooked, cooled quinoa in a container with a tight-fitting lid or zip-top bag for up to a week, or freeze for up to six months and defrost on the counter before using.

What to Do with Leftover Quinoa

- Use that extra grain to bulk up a salad. Combine black quinoa with couscous over frisée lettuce with vinaigrette, and top with a poached egg.
- Mix with a vinaigrette, add some fresh fruit and roasted nuts, plus maybe some goat cheese.
- Turn it into bread as quinoa skillet bread is filling and delicious.
- Give it the oatmeal treatment and have it for breakfast. The night before, add cinnamon, nutmeg, dried fruit of choice, sweetener of choice, and enough almond milk to make a thick slurry. Let it sit in the fridge overnight. In the morning, heat it in the microwave or on the stovetop, add nuts/fruit, and enjoy as a hot breakfast cereal.
- Fold it into cake batter for the most protein-packed dessert around.

RECIPE

Pumpkin-Pear Soup



This Pumpkin-Pear Soup recipe is made with a secret ingredient and is perfect to start out a cozy dinner. The flavorsome and comforting soup is especially ideal for those chilly fall evenings when you want something simple, warm and healthy. Even without added cream, it has a creamy, velvety texture and the right balance of savory, sweet, and spicy.

Total preparation time :30 min.
3-4 servings

Ingredients

200 gm pumpkin (Peeled and diced)
2 pears (Peeled and sliced)
1 onion (peeled and sliced)
1, 1/2 tsp butter
Salt to taste
2-3 leaves mint
2 tsp fresh cream
1 tsp sugar
1 tsp vinegar
1/2 tsp black pepper powder
1/2 tsp nutmeg powder

For Garnishing:

1 tbsp. hot chili sauce
1 tbsp roasted Peanuts (roughly crushed)
1/2 pear (Finely Chopped) Sautéed

Directions

- In a hot pan, add 1 tsp butter, pumpkin slices, 1,1/2 pear slices, onion slices and mint leaves, season with salt and pepper and sauté well.
- In another saucepan, take pumpkin, onion, pears peel (washed), add 1 glass of water to make a vegetable stock. Let it boil for 5 minutes, and turn off the flame. Strain this water to use in soup as stock.
- In a mixing jar, take the sautéed pumpkin-pear mixture and add 1/2 tsp. of nutmeg powder, 1 tsp fresh cream and make a smooth paste and then add the prepared stock.
- Strain this mixture and heat it in a pan, add sugar, vinegar and black pepper powder, salt as per taste.
- Garnish with sautéed pears (small cubes) in butter, half crushed roasted peanuts and hot chili sauce. Serve with toast, bread or nachos.



Chef Chhaya Thakker

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

Take Your Cakes From Good to Great

Check that your leavening agents are fresh: Make sure that baking soda or baking powder are at optimal potency with this simple test. Otherwise, your cake likely will not rise to the occasion.

Take the time to preheat the oven: Some ovens preheat in just minutes. Some take a ridiculous 30 minutes. Know your oven. Know it even better by dangling an oven thermometer from one of your baking racks. Finally, you will know for sure that the temperature on the oven dial matches the temperature inside. While you are at it, make sure your oven rack is centered for even baking.

Actually wait for your ingredients to come to room temperature: You know those recipes that call for room temperature eggs and butter? Stop ignoring them. You will be glad later when that smooth batter becomes a moist cake with a tender crumb.



Do not overmix your batter: You wanted to be thorough, you say. Well, sadly, your cake can easily fall victim to your good intentions. Overmixing the batter (easy to do with a stand mixer, especially) can incorporate too much air and result in a fallen cake as it cools later on. It is

all about a light hand. Think gentle.

Do not undermix your batter: Not enough of a good thing can also cause drama: unintentional swirls of flour or sugar, nuts and raisins playing refusing to play with the wet ingredients, butter blobs. You will know your batter's in a good place when nearly all the flour is absorbed.

Do not fill your pan to the brim: Fill your cake pan(s) no more than halfway (unless the recipe says otherwise). Why? This helps ensure your cake will rise evenly rather than overflow into your oven like a cake batter volcano.

Smooth the top and tap the pan: Take your spatula and smooth the batter for your best shot at an even cake. Tap the pan against your countertop to scare away any last few little air bubbles trapped within.

Resist the urge to open the oven and check your masterpiece every five minutes: You

know why? You are letting out all the hot air and temperature fluctuations make for an unhappy, uneven cake (or, worse, total cake collapse). Resist until the last few minutes of baking when you should...

Remember to check for doneness: Poke a wooden toothpick into the center of your cake about five minutes before its suggested baking time comes to an end. If it comes out clean or with just a few crumbs stuck to it, it's time to pull your cake from the oven. Batter on the toothpick? Let it keep baking.

Wait until your cake cools before you frost it: Build adequate time in your day for this by counting backward from when you want to slice into the cake. Allow for at least one hour for your cake to completely cool before you frost it so that it goes on smoothly and does not tear blobs of cake along with it.

Sushyanth Sridhar

opens with a crime novel

BY RUBAB HASSAN
STAFF WRITER

From the young budding engineer, musician, and Model United Nations (MUN) delegate, Sushyanth Sridhar, comes a captivating crime novel that grabs your attention with its twists and turns, as well as its focus into the realm of psychosis.



The storyline revolves around Jonathan Rhodes (Jon) living in the year 2018 and his alter ego, Gin Oliver, the protagonist of the novel living in a period immediately after the Great War. It is a time when the only thing that soldiers who almost died protecting their country in World War I found worth living for was their country's survival amidst political upheavals. Gin Oliver assembles a militia of veterans to curb a rising fascist movement, but things end up unraveling quite differently.

Sushyanth Sridhar, a young Indian expatriate born in Kuwait and a second-year mechanical engineering student at the National Institute of Technology, Warangal in the southern Indian state of Telangana, is

penning his debut novel. Though the genre of the novel is a crime thriller, it also delves into psychosis and emotional traumas. As the young author puts it, "The story of this novel is a juxtaposition of the way people of different eras deal with mental stability".

Speaking exclusively to The Times Kuwait about the core inspiration behind writing a psychological crime novel, Sushyanth said he was intrigued and at the same time appalled, by the way people easily fall prey to psychosis disorder and other mental illnesses.

"Unlike a vice such as alcohol, the psychosis disorder is beyond our grasp and it sticks on to our subconscious mind. A psychosis disorder destroys the mind's ability to separate the real from the unreal." Before writing his book Sushyanth spoke to many psychiatrists for gaining a better understanding of mental illnesses. He learned that psychosis if left untreated could be quite menacing to the individual as well as to those around them.

Through his book, Sushyanth attempts to start a dialog about the importance of mental fitness, "Our mind is an interesting machine. It is something like a perpetual motion machine; our thoughts propel further thoughts," he says.

"This pandemic, in particular, has made



our minds fatigued and longing for the return to normalcy. This prompted me during the lockdown to base my storyline on mental wellness," he said, adding that it is important to maintain a proper balance in one's mental health.

Sushyanth (19) is still a teenager and

when he is not studying or writing he takes pleasure in playing music on his guitar or 'mridangam'. An avid fan of English rock guitarist Eric Clapton, Sushyanth himself learned to play the guitar at a very young age. He has also been involved in co-curricular activities throughout his school and college days, and has authored several background guides and papers on MUN conferences.

Asked about how he manages to find time to write in the middle of his college studies and assignments, he said, "It is easier than you think. When you are passionate about an activity, you subconsciously begin to prioritize it and eventually begin to make time for it too." Books and music, he said, help him to unwind at the end of each day.

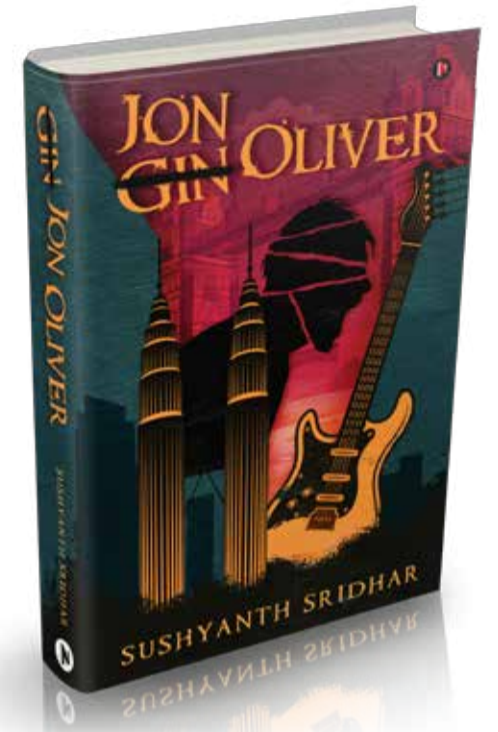
But he also agrees that the engineering



curriculum is very competitive and he cannot write books when he has assignments and tests due in college. "I often need to employ my maximum focus to secure a high grade and to be on par with my peers in college. I find it difficult to muster adequate attention and gather time to research for my book."

Being a mechanical engineering student, he aspires to pursue a master's degree at a reputed university upon completion of his under-graduation. "I have not set my eyes on a specific university or field in mechanical engineering yet, but I would love to see myself contributing to the automotive industry," he says. He also wants to write more books and perhaps indulge deeper into music as well, and has already started work on his second novel, a historical thriller.

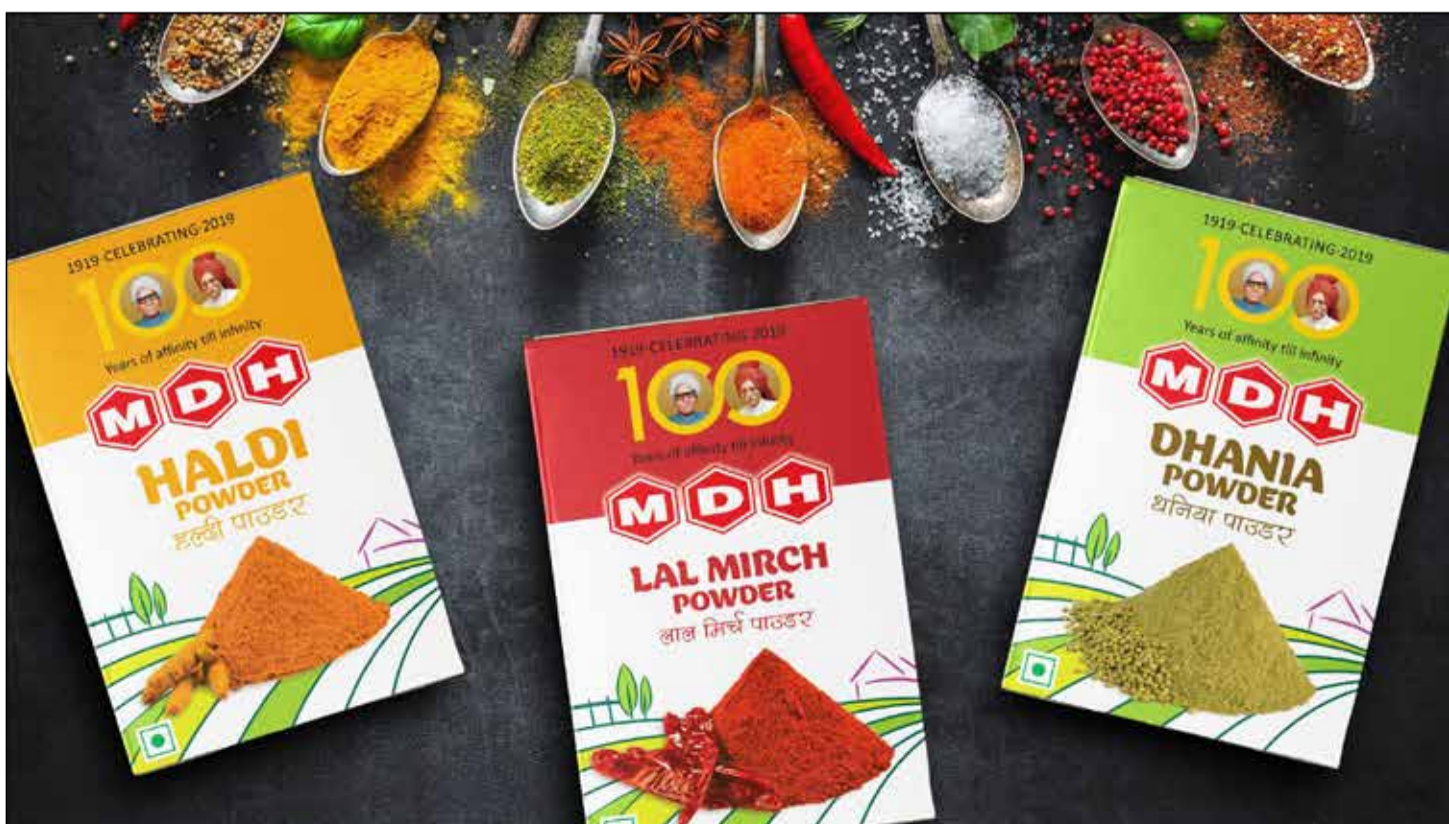
"I am a butterfly by nature," he says, before elaborating. "A caterpillar creeps forward on earth hoping one day to grow wings and fly free. I have crawled my way



“ Unlike a vice such as alcohol, the psychosis disorder is beyond our grasp and it sticks on to our subconscious mind. A psychosis disorder destroys the mind's ability to separate the real from the unreal. ”

through my childhood in bliss, with no hurry to ambulate to the next stage of my pupal life. And, much like an ambitious pupa comfortably hiding in the safety of its cocoon, I am living with my family in Kuwait and hope to spread my wings and fly away some day."

Excited about his future, he feels that he has some way to go before transforming into the butterfly stage. "Very soon someday, I shall spread my wings and fly high," he exclaims.



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Over half of stranded teachers will not have visas renewed

A new report from the Ministry of Education (MoE) states that more than half of the expatriate teachers, currently stranded abroad due to a ban on direct flights from their countries to Kuwait, will not have their expired visas renewed.

Of the total 693 foreign teachers in various subjects and specializations whose visas have expired and are unable to return, only 321 (46%) will have their visas renewed, while 372 teachers (54%) will not have their visas renewed and will not be able to



return to work. The report, prepared by the public education sector at MoE is based on data received from school districts and the administrative affairs sector. The report has been submitted to the MoE Undersecretary for further additional overview and guidance.

The 321 teachers whose visas will be renewed work in 12 specialities needed by the ministry, and there is no replacement available for them from among Kuwaitis and children of Kuwaiti women. The remaining 372 teachers have been deemed to be unnecessary, as

there are sufficient replacements for their subjects from among national teaching cadre.

The report mentioned the names, specializations and details of the faculty members who could not be dispensed with, which includes 19 teachers in biology, 35 in physical education, 19 in music education, 4 in geology, 16 in decoration, and 91 in mathematics, 28 in science, 17 in philosophy, 6 in physics, 24 in chemistry, 53 in English, and 7 in French, in addition to technical mentors for music education and English.



IWG organizes Indonesian cultural day

International Women's Group (IWG) in coordination with the Indonesian Embassy in Kuwait organized the Indonesian Cultural Day on 10 January. The event was live-streamed to members and guests.

President of the IWG, Ambreen Mustafa, wife

of the Pakistan Ambassador, opened the event with a warm welcome and New Year wishes to all participants.

She noted that the IWG was honored to host the Indonesian Cultural Day in the presence of the Ambassador of Indonesia.

For his part, Ambassador of Indonesia H.E. Tri Tharyat, delivered an enlightening speech covering various aspects of Indonesia's magnificent natural beauty with its stunning landscapes and beaches, its rich culture, and unique artistic heritage. In closing, the

ambassador thanked Mrs. Mustafa and the IWG for their help and support in organizing the event. A celebration cake was cut by the ambassador and the IWG president, and a commemorative shield was presented to Ambassador Tharyat on behalf of IWG.

Irish archbishop appointed apostolic nuncio to Kuwait and Qatar

Pope Francis has appointed Archbishop Eugene M. Nugent as the new apostolic nuncio to Kuwait and Qatar. Archbishop Nugent, 62, originally from Ireland, who is currently the nuncio to Haiti is expected to travel to Kuwait and take up his new post in mid-February.

Apostolic nuncios serve as an envoy or a permanent diplomatic representative of the Holy See to a state or international organization. Archbishop Nuncio has studied diplomacy and international relations at the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy in Rome and was ordained in Scariff, Ireland in 1983, for Killaloe Diocese in mid-western Ireland.

Having entered the diplomatic service in 1992, at the age of 33, he has worked in Turkey, Israel, and the Palestinian Territories and subsequently at the Holy See study-mission in Hong Kong from 2000 until 2010.

Speaking about his role as the Apostolic Nuncio, the archbishop admitted that he knew very little about Kuwait and the region but that he was looking forward to learning and serving there. He added that his appointment is a "sign of the Holy Father's confidence in me, but also the importance that he has placed on dialogue with the world of Islam." He expressed his hope that his previous assignments in Haiti, where he served for the last six years, and elsewhere will help him carry out his new mission as papal nuncio to Kuwait and Qatar.



MPs once again revive plans to tax remittances

Parliamentarians have once again raked up the issue of taxing the remittances of expatriates, however, this time around the terms of reference have been broadened to include all remittances from Kuwait, with a provision to exclude some special cases of remittances.

Several MPs noted that billions of dinars were exiting the country each year in the form of remittances and transfers abroad. According to one estimate provided by the lawmakers, more than KD20 billion are estimated to have left the country through remittances in the past five years. They point out that by taxing this huge amount to the tune of just 2.5 percent would net the country more than KD100 million annually.

The MPs in favor of taxing remittances, including MPs Osama Al-Shaheen, Dr. Hamad Al-Matar, Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Saqabi, Khaled Al-Otaibi, and Shuaib Al-Muwaisari have decided to table a bill in parliament to impose fees on all remittances abroad, saying it would provide an added advantage to the local market, create new jobs and boost the economy.

MP Al-Shaheen noted that reports from the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN), including the leaked Panama Papers and Paradise

Papers, provide abundant proof that millions of dinars were smuggled out of Kuwait and invested in safe havens and bank accounts abroad. He called for tightening supervision and imposing fees that would benefit the local economy. This bill also levies criminal penalties on institutions and individuals who circumvent its provisions.

The MP explained that currently money exchange companies collect fees on remittances for expats, but there is no benefit to the State. The bill hopes to change this situation by amending law number 32/1968, which regulates the currency, Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) and banking procedures, by appending an additional two articles to the aforementioned law. The amendments included are Article 71 under which the Central Bank of Kuwait will be obligated to compel local banks, branches of foreign banks and money exchange companies to collect tax on remittances at the rate of 2.5 percent of the amount remitted regardless of the currency. This tax will be added to the State treasury.

There will be a tax-exemption on money transfers falling under agreements on investment protection and money transferred by the government. The Central Bank must also exempt from tax Kuwaitis studying abroad,



those undergoing overseas treatment, and if the transferred amount is less than KD10,000 per year, which incidentally, would exclude the majority of expatriate remittances.

Article 85 of the amended law will outline penalties for those caught violating the law with the levy of a fine equal to twice the amount transferred. In case of a repeat violation, the penalty is toughened to include the closure of the erring company. The executive regulations will be drafted as per the decision of the finance minister within six months of the law entering into force.

Bedouins, GCC nationals to be charged for visas, renewals

Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) has announced that it would start imposing a fee for renewing or issuing new visas to Bedouins and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) state citizens, as well as for several other services provided by the Authority. This follows a decision to this effect issued by Minister of Trade and Industry Faisal Al-Medlej this week.

The new fees, ranging from KD1 to KD10 are part of a new policy to streamline services and ensure better productivity in the authority. The

ministerial decision specifies a fee of KD10 for the issuance of new visas or renewal of existing work permits for Bedouins and citizens of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states.

Issuing a status statement certificate for the worker or a certificate of job title in employment will each cost KD1, while a signature approval certificate for an employers file will cost KD5.

The authority also indicated that it had decided to cancel the fees mentioned in clauses 8 and 10 regarding the final travel cancellation fee,



and the fee for amending and canceling any data, mentioned in Article 1 of Ministerial Resolution No. 109 of 1994 with regards to the amendment of the public fees on the forms for obtaining work permits, and computer statements.

Cost of hiring domestic labor to soar

Owners of several domestic labor recruitment offices in Kuwait have said that the price of hiring new maids and other household staff could rise exponentially, as the offices face several new challenges to recruiting new laborers, including increase in recruitment costs that are expected to jump by 50 percent to reach KD1400 to KD1500 dinars.

In this regard, Bassam Al-Shammari, an owner of several labor recruitment companies in the country said that 60 percent of the domestic workers brought to Kuwait come from the Philippines and they have the highest demand rate in the market.

Elaborating on this, he said that after the signing of the agreement between Kuwait

and the Philippines regarding regulating labor last year, the job agreements signed between the Philippines foreign office and Kuwaiti recruitment offices would need to be renewed due to the suspension of recruitment during the past year. This renewal process would require additional procedures and time, which would delay the recruitment process until the necessary procedures are completed.

Al-Shammari mentioned that another problem is related to the decision issued by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) which fixes the price of hiring domestic workers at a maximum of KD990 dinars. This price, he said, is difficult to adhere to in light of the current circumstances for

three main reasons: One is that the cost of recruiting and bringing workers to Kuwait have risen sharply due to new conditions and procedures involved.

Another factor adding to the cost of recruitment is related to new costs associated with the health requirements mandated by the Belsalah.com platform, in which the prices of PCR tests, the cost of institutional quarantine and travel tickets have to be borne by the recruiting offices.

In addition, with the Kuwait authorities fixing the maximum prices that can be charged for tickets, it has become imperative for recruitment offices to bear the additional charges that airlines have begun levying for the tickets.



He added that the MoCI and other relevant authorities need to urgently review and revise the prices they have fixed for hiring and bringing in domestic workers to the country.

Workers still on expired government contracts

Tens of thousands of workers who were working on government contracts are in limbo after the expiry of their visas following the end of their contract. Of the nearly 160,000 workers in this plight, the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) has addressed 85,000 cases either by ensuring they left Kuwait or allowing the transfer of their visas to other ongoing government contracts. However, the fate of around 74,000 workers have still not been resolved.

Speaking about the issue, the Deputy Director of PAM, Dr. Mubarak Al-Azmi, stated that there is coordination with all government agencies to take immediate action against contractors whose contracts have expired,



but have still not settled the residency visas of the workers hired for the project. The number of expired government contracts are said to exceed 850. He added that PAM has

been mandated by the Council of Ministers to follow-up with relevant government agencies on pursuing legal measures, so as to address the issue of workers with companies that have expired government contracts.

In this regard, Al-Azmi pointed out that PAM is coordinating with the Central Agency for Public Tenders to include a clause in the tender file that would require government tender bidders to submit a clearance certificate issued by PAM along with their bid documents. The clearance certificate would ensure that there are no pending issues in any government contracts that the bidder participated in previously. Bids without this clearance certificate from PAM would be excluded from new projects.

Gulf citizens who travel to Israel can enter Kuwait

Citizens of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states with an Israeli visa, or an entrance and exit stamp to show they visited Israel, will not be stopped from entering Kuwait. This follows the recent decision by two GCC states, the UAE and Bahrain, to sign peace agreements and open diplomatic relations with Israel.

Though Kuwait has previously prevented anyone holding an Israeli passport, as well as those having a stamp showing entry and exit from Israel or with an Israeli visa on their passport from entering the country. However, reports indicate that despite this ban many Americans and Europeans with passports showing such entries and visas to Israel have in the past been permitted entry to the country.

KPC to merge subsidiaries to four units

Last week, Deputy Chairman and CEO of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Hashem Hashem revealed that plans are underway to merge the eight subsidiaries of KPC into four units, in order to streamline operations and reduce costs.

The CEO was speaking following the first meeting of the Supreme Petroleum Council

for 2021, which was held last Sunday under the chairmanship of the Minister of Oil and Minister of Electricity and Water Dr. Muhammad Al-Faris.

During the meeting, the Supreme Council discussed various options taking into account the current scenario that requires optimal utilization of human resources.

A technical advisor team is expected to complete the study of the merger process and take official approvals from the Board of Directors in preparation for submitting them to the Supreme Petroleum Council by the end of 2021.

The COVID-19 crisis has accelerated the progress in the restructuring of the oil sector that was started in the current fiscal year by KPC with the aim of rationalizing expenditure and reducing budgets at the head office and at its various subsidiaries.

Be the First to Own the Samsung Galaxy S21 Series 5G in Kuwait

Samsung Gulf Electronics has announced that pre-orders for devices part of the next-generation Galaxy S21 Series 5G are now available for brand enthusiasts across Kuwait. Comprising the brand new Galaxy S21 5G, Galaxy S21+ 5G, and Galaxy S21 Ultra 5G, the ultimate flagships empower users to share their world, connect with the things and people that matter most, and express themselves like never before in the modern, digital world. With new, bold, and iconic design, pro-grade camera and video capabilities, and premium viewing and powerful connectivity experiences, the Galaxy S21 Series 5G promises to change everything and make every day epic.

"The pre-order phase of the Galaxy S21 Series 5G is our first milestone of 2021 and we are looking forward to delivering amazing technologies and capabilities to our customers," said Osman Alhora, Head of Mobile Division, Samsung Gulf Electronics. "As we all know, the past 12 months have witnessed unprecedented change – and technology kept us connected during this period. As such, with more of us working remotely and staying entertained at home, we accelerated our transition to a mobile-first world. Innovative next-generation devices are a necessity – and we are delighted that the official launch of our latest flagships is almost upon us. The flagships that came before the Galaxy S21



Series 5G have set demand levels higher than ever before, and we look forward to meeting and exceeding expectations over the coming period."

Galaxy lovers across Kuwait can now make their pre-orders for the Galaxy S21 Series 5G up until Thursday, 4 February in Samsung stores and authorized online channels. Furthermore, those who pre-order the Galaxy S21 5G and Galaxy S21+ 5G will receive Buds Live, Smart Tag, and 1 year Samsung Care+, while customers who purchase the Galaxy S21 Ultra 5G in advance will receive the Buds Pro, Smart Tag, and 1 year Samsung Care+.

Academic certificates needed for visa renewal

Expatriates seeking to renew their residency will now have to attach a copy of their approved university qualifications.

The Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) announced this stipulation after reviewing the new Ashal program system.

The authority has asked all business owners to apply through this program to request accreditation of the academic qualifications of their employees.

Engineers and medical staff will be exempt from this requirement, as they already have to obtain an accreditation certificate from the Kuwait Society of Engineers and the Medical Licensing Department of the Ministry of Health respectively.

PAM has urged business owners and companies to submit a true copy of the university qualifications through the Ashal system.

Operation DAGUET

30-year anniversary

BY COLONEL OLIVIER PASSOT
French Défense Attaché

The war to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi invasion started on 17 January, 1991: 30 years ago.

France contributed to the campaign to liberate Kuwait called Desert Storm, under the codename of Opération Daguet. The French provided an Army component (Division Daguet), whose mission was to protect the left flank of the coalition forces and to conquer Salman Airbase, a tactical hotspot in Iraq. The air component of Operation Daguet consisted of 40 Jaguar and 30 Mirage fighter aircraft, stationed at Al-Ahsa air base in Saudi Arabia. The naval component was part of international task forces in the Gulf waters.

Several French veterans wanted to commemorate this D-Day, 30 years later. They wrote testimonies of their war to liberate Kuwait. A Jaguar pilot, captain Mahagne remembers when he conducted an air raid over Kuwait, right on 17 January, 1991. He carried out his mission successfully, although he was fired at by Iraqi air defense.

Other veterans recall their experience as combat engineers, in air defense and electronic warfare. To celebrate this anniversary, some of these veterans also sent us original photos that they are happy to share with Kuwaitis and people of all friendly nations who took part in this historical campaign to liberate Kuwait.



General Michel Delion

From liberation of Kuwait to French Army military doctrine

What was your mission during Operation Daguet?

I was executive officer of the 4th battery of the 35th Airborne Artillery Regiment of Tarbes, ground-to-air defense unit. We were equipped with the brand new MISTRAL missiles as well as short-range detection radar. Our mission was to defend units of the Daguet Division against any enemy air threat, plane or helicopter (drones were no threat then). We were engaged in the fall of 1990, by sea, then by road via Yambu, with two airborne firing platoons, gradually reinforced by our brothers in arms from other artillery regiments (11th RAMa and 68th RAA).

At the end of February 1991 we contributed to the liberation of Kuwait by attacking towards the North, covering the West flank of the Coalition. We even reached the Euphrates river.

Describe a highlight of this campaign?

For our generation, the duration of the campaign itself was unusual. I remember numerous highlights.

After several months living in the desert at a forward operating base on the Hafar-Al-Batin side, we rejoined our assault base in the far west of the Allied force. Our first target at the end of February, after crossing the border, was As-Salman Airport. I remember three particularly intense images:

- Mid-February, a heavy rain of bombs dropped by the American B-52s that we observed with our binoculars. We were on the south side of the border, at the foot of a rocky escarpment which at the time seemed difficult to us to cross because it was particularly favorable on the defensive for the benefit of our enemy;
- On February 24, the endless flow of combat vehicles on the few drivable lanes going north, which gave off an incredible sense of power and invincibility;
- Finally, in mid-March, when I arrived in Kuwait city, the image of the airport frozen in time, on 2 August, 1990, with planes destroyed on the runway and the flight schedule that I had the chance to take a picture of.

Did you enter Kuwait? What were your impressions?

I arrived by military flight in Kuwait shortly after the liberation on a short mission for the French Embassy. During the descent before landing, I felt an unprecedented atmosphere: the sky was obstructed by black clouds, which was amplified by thick smoke coming from the burning oil wells. On the road between the airport and the French embassy, traces of the fighting were still clearly visible, mixing soldiers and equipment, including battle tanks.

Upon arrival at the French Embassy, I felt like it was



'mission accomplished'. I looked back at these long months of waiting before the offensive, at this speed offensive, then at the memory of comrades from all nations who had fallen fighting to liberate Kuwait.

What did you learn from this campaign that proved useful takeaways for the rest of your career?

After two first experiences in Central Africa and in Chad, where I had had a first glimpse of life in the desert, then liberation of Kuwait, I was then engaged several times in the Balkans for peacekeeping operations or for combat missions. The large-scale campaign to liberate Kuwait impressed me considerably for the rest of my career, helping me understand the scale and complexity of large coalitions. It was particularly valuable for me when I completed the Staff College (Ecole de Guerre), and when I had commanding positions or when I was in charge of teaching senior officers of the Army, including those of friendly and allied countries.

I had also discovered the Arabic world and culture. In subsequent contacts with officers from various countries of the Arabian Peninsula, I have always enjoyed talking to those who wore the commemorative medals of this campaign.

What are your current responsibilities?

A major general, I am Director of the French Army Command Doctrine and Education Center. As such, I am in charge of developing future studies and doctrine studies related to air-land combat, which amounts to training approximately 2,000 officers students per year. I am devoted to disseminate French military thinking. I am in charge of Army military history and lessons learned. I have a special interest in strategic studies as I wrote a doctoral thesis (PhD) dealing with 'the history of tactical military thinking'. I am going to take part with great pleasure in the various conferences organized in France to commemorate the 30 years of this campaign.



Général François

The desert experience

What were you doing within the Daguet division?

I was then a young lieutenant, reconnaissance team leader in the 11th Marine Artillery Regiment. In 1990, Europe was in high spirits because of the fall of the Berlin Wall: there was talk of the "peace dividends", and it was thought that there would be no more major war. Like many French people, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait stunned me. With my regimental comrades, we began to prepare to intervene in this distant desert, which stimulated our imaginations. As the holiday season approached, the order fell on a Monday evening, and a few days later the entire regiment embarked in Toulon. As soon as I landed in Yanbu (Saudi Arabia), I joined as a precursor to the French forces already present in Saudi Arabia in order to prepare under the best conditions for the deployment of the 11th RAMa.



What were the main challenges?

Topography! For the first time, we had been equipped with GPS. Artillery requires great topographic precision, and under the conditions we encountered, the challenge to be met was significant, and intellectually stimulating. The aforementioned GPS was not always reliable, and you had to be able to do without it, if necessary. We had therefore implemented navigation techniques similar to those of sailors. We practiced during the rare free time. Fortunately, it all worked out well. My regiment fulfilled its mission perfectly. The phase of land combat was short, and intense. Our soldiers were awesome: motivated, professional, and united in difficult times. The training we received paid off. But the most striking thing for me remains the bond that existed between the members of my reconnaissance team. The mails were hit and miss, and the Internet didn't exist yet. Fortunately, the links between the staff were stronger...

Why did you mention the desert?

I didn't have the chance to go to Kuwait, and only made a few trips to Saudi towns near our deployment areas. So during Operation Daguet, I spent five months in the desert. A desert of sand, rocks, pebbles; cold when we arrived, then hot when we approached summer. The desert is a fascinating environment for a European. Many poets and reporters (Arabs and also Europeans) wrote it before me. My mother mailed me a book called Arabian Sands, written by Wilfred Thesiger. I then read T. E. Lawrence's Seven Pillars of Wisdom upon my return. Yes, the desert is a fascinating place, certainly harsh and ruthless for those who live there, but fascinating.



Colonel Eric NACHEZ

Combat engineers on the field

What was your mission during Operation Daguet?

In 1990, I was 25 years old and a platoon leader, 1st Combat Engineer Platoon of the 2nd Company, 6th Foreign Engineer Regiment. This regiment is the 'youngest' of the Foreign Legion, because it was created in 1984. I spent seven months in the middle of the desert of the Arabian Peninsula from October 1990 to April 1991. First in the region of Hafar Al Batin (Saudi Arabia), then in the area of As Salman (Iraq).

Please describe a highlight of the campaign?

The assault on As-Salman Airport: My platoon, in a VAB (armored vehicle), was at the forefront of the regiment to cross the southern fence of the airport. We had to operate nice and quick to enable the infantry to enter the area safely, and then to conquer the airport held by the Iraqi military. To secure the point of penetration, the engineering section implemented a demining device: the Mine Clearance Line Charge - MCLIC (500 kg explosive bag fired by a rocket). A beautiful and enormous ball of fire cleared the whole area. The infantrymen were able to rush into the breach. It was the 2nd Company of the 2nd Foreign Infantry Regiment that stormed and drove the Iraqi soldiers from the airport.



Did you enter Kuwait? What impacted you

Fabien RICHARD

Air campaign with Kuwait fighter pilots

What was your mission during Operation Daguet?

I was responsible for planning Electronic Warfare missions within the Kuwaiti Air Force in Taef (Saudi Arabia) in October 1990. Then, I was transferred to Dhahran (also in Saudi Arabia) in February 1991. There, I helped Kuwaiti fighter pilots planning and preparing for electronic warfare missions. I was then working on the Mirage F1 CK2, equipped with countermeasures.



Did you enter Kuwait, what were your impressions?

I arrived in Kuwait one week after the liberation. It was a surreal experience. The border between Arabia and Kuwait no longer existed. All you could see in the sky was black smoke from

oil well fires. The beaches were mined, the buildings had been looted, the shops vandalized. The streets were cluttered with wrecks of vehicles and even dismantled boats. Even more horrifying, there were corpses of Iraqi soldiers on the ground, on what was called the 'highway of death'.

What did you learn from this campaign, and what were the takeaways for the rest of your career?

Oh yes! This campaign has left a mark on me forever. Afterwards, I realized that these few weeks transformed the bond that attached me to Kuwait and made it unwavering. I feel like I was directly involved in the liberation of this country that I knew very little at the time. These fights almost made me become Kuwaiti! Since 1990, I have not stopped working in Kuwait, and have many Kuwaiti friends. Today I commemorate my 30 years of cooperation with the Kuwaiti armed forces! It wouldn't have been possible if I hadn't been in this war.

What are your current responsibilities?

I am a consultant in a defense consulting company. I work with several international companies.



COLONEL ALAIN MAHAGNE

Ahmad Al-Jaber Airbase attack 17 January, 1991

Which unit were you in when Operation Daguet launched?

I was posted at the 11th wing, at the 2/11 'Vosges' squadron based at Toul Rosières. This squadron was equipped with single-seat Jaguars.

How long did it take to prepare for the war?

The deployment had been prepared since October 1990, it took two months to be completed.

Aircraft (Jaguar, Mirage 2000 RDI, Mirage F1 CR) and personnel gradually arrived at Al Ahsa (Saudi Arabia). I was deployed on 1 January 1991.

When the Air operations started, 24 French Jaguars were on-site.

How many French airmen were there at Al Ahsa?

We were roughly 600 people there, renewed every two months.

Can you highlight a key event during your stay?

The strongest event of my military campaign is - and will always be - the first mission that

was executed by French airmen over Kuwaiti territory. It took place on 17 January 1991. I was number 11 out of a 12-Jaguar-strong patrol. The target that had been assigned to us was Ahmad Al Jaber Airbase, where Saddam Hussein was stationing 'Scud' missile batteries and fighter jets. Chemical weapons were also stored there. Divided

in two groups of six, we took off early in the morning to first join with three tankers at high altitude, near the Kuwaiti border.

After refuelling, we headed to our target, we were quickly caught under enemy fire. As we were approaching, the danger considerably intensified, bullets and missiles were now raining on us.

In extreme conditions, I managed to drop my four bombs on Iraqi tanks that were half-covered by sand. Soon after, I heard a terrible sound and I felt a terrible blow to my head. Simultaneously, I was violently



pushed backwards. A bullet had pierced my canopy, I got blind for interminable seconds, which inevitably scared me. As our loyal Jaguars were flying out from hell, a warm sticky liquid poured down my neck, I was undoubtedly injured.

Alone, more and more severely affected by a terrible pain, and facing a navigation system failure, I saw one aircraft flying to me. I identified a Jaguar, then got confirmation this was my leader's.

Instinctively, I kept position around him. He perfectly guided me back to Al-Ahsa Air base where, despite my unsustainable headache, I managed to land my plane. Once controlled, I shut down the engines and I fell unconscious.

My skull was fractured, and I finally had ten stitches. I was the first French military personnel to be wounded in the first Gulf War. Do you remember something special on arrival at Al-Ahsa?



Vaccinating campaign draws ire of citizens



Kuwait which began its vaccination drive on 24 December has yet to achieve any significant speedup in the rate of vaccinations being administered. Despite three weeks of vaccination, the country's plan to vaccinate the entire 4.8 million population is nowhere near its mark, with only around 12,000 people re-

ceiving the vaccination since the start of the campaign three weeks ago.

Understandably, citizens are annoyed at the slow pace of progress in administering the vaccine — on average only 1,000 vaccinations are being administered daily. They say at this rate it could take as long as a decade to vaccinate the entire population. Hopes that the rate of vaccinations will pick up speed over the weeks have been dashed by the few number of vaccines currently being delivered to the country. Many people grouse that a wealthy country like Kuwait should have the wherewithal to buy more vaccines from various manufacturers approved by international health bodies and not necessarily from just one vaccine producer.

People worry that the target of achieving herd immunity, which happens when a significant percentage of the population

becomes immune to the disease due to vaccinations or exposure to previous infection from the virus, is still a long way off. While the herd immunity rate for COVID-19 is not yet established it is estimated that at least 70 percent of the population would need to be vaccinated in order to achieve this target.

Globally, so far, Israel has achieved the highest rate in vaccinating its people, with nearly 21 percent of the population vaccinated. This is followed by the UAE where 11 percent have been vaccinated, and Bahrain with 5 percent. By contrast, Kuwait has vaccinated only 0.25 percent of the population.

Meanwhile, people have also complained that there is a lack of transparency in the vaccination drive and the absence of an efficient mechanism to administer the COVID vaccinations. They

point out that there have been several instances where the Ministry of Health has disregarded the online registration system and administered vaccinations to those who had not registered online, while the majority of those who did register online were ignored.

Some citizens claimed to be among the first to register online, but they had yet to receive a message from the ministry about their vaccination, while certain celebrities, well-known personalities and even media photographers have received the vaccination even if they had not registered online.

The citizens urged the authorities to intervene immediately and ensure that the vaccination campaign is transparent and neutral such that rules should be applied to everyone, especially since the State spent millions of dinars to procure the vaccine.



PCR test validity period reduced to 72 hours prior to arrival

New arrivals to the country will have to present a PCR certificate showing they were tested 72 hours prior to boarding the flight for Kuwait, instead of the 96 hours stipulated earlier.

The Council of Ministers passed this decision during its weekly session and also mandated that starting from 17 January, airlines should include in the ticket price levied from passengers the cost of conducting two PCR tests — one for conducting a test at Kuwait airport and the other at the end of the quarantine period.

The council also gave the green signal for the recruitment of new domestic workers through the Directorate-General of Civil Aviation's (DGCA) Belsalamah.com app, while adhering to all health regulations and requirements. The domestic worker's PCR certificates will be examined before her arrival to the country and new tests would be conducted at the airport, as well as after the end of the stipulated institutional quarantine, particularly when they arrive from the 35 high-risk countries.

PAM cancels residency of those stranded abroad with expired visas

The Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) has revoked the residency permits of 33,414 expatriates whose residency expired while they are stranded outside the country.

The total work permits reached 91,854, in addition to 44,264 licenses, while 30,700 files were removed that have expired or passed the date of their expiration to a full year, Al Rai reported.

In this regard, the Director of Public Relations and Media at the Public Authority for Manpower, Asil Al-Mezyed, stated that PAM has launched a new automated system, which will provide various services for a large segment of users and facilitate their procedures smoothly.

She indicated that the Information Systems Department has deleted some of the old details to improve the work of the automated system and save time and effort on entering the information in a way that guarantees speed and ease of procedures, so all old files whose details are deemed unnecessary related to employment and expired licences and work permits were erased, as the employer did not make a request to remove his files and details, and some employees ended their residency and left the country.

Meanwhile, PAM in coordination with the Public Authority for Civil Information and the Ministry of Interior have renewed the residency permits of over 300,000 expatriates stranded abroad, whose stay overseas was beyond the six months stipulated by law. This was done in view of the emergency situation arising from the



coronavirus pandemic which shut down airport operations and banned passengers arriving directly from 34 countries.

PAM said that it had completed the renewal procedures through the online joint automated systems that had been set up in coordination with the other two entities.

In a related context, PAM has said that it has begun applying new procedures to ensure business owners guarantee workers' rights and paying financial dues. The new procedures will allow workers to register their complaints even when they are outside the country by submitting information through the automated systems, which will then assign them registration numbers. The Employment Protection Sector at PAM is reported to be examining thousands of complaints registered against business owners regarding the payment of financial dues and monthly salaries.

Cooling roads coming up

The Environment Public Authority (EPA) in cooperation with a Japanese company is to paint several test roads in Kuwait with a therm-paint that reduces the temperature reflected from these surfaces.

An agreement to this effect was signed by the two entities recently. In a statement following the signing, Director-General of EPA Sheikh Abdullah Al-Ahmad said the experiment could help reduce road surface temperatures by as much as 10 degrees centigrade.

He added that the coating process will start in April 2020 and the full extent of its success will be measured during the peak summer months. This will allow for a proper evaluation to be made and for subsequent action in this regard.

France keen to work closely with Kuwait

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"As you know, 14,000 French soldiers were involved in the liberation of Kuwait 30 years ago and 10 were killed, so this is something that will be commemorated by combatants back in France as well," she added.

Ambassador Legendre indicated that she expected more high-level visits to Kuwait this year and noted that strategic dialogue was upgraded last November from the administrative to ministerial level, which shows "how much we want to deepen our dialogue and political relations." She went on to say that both countries were seeking more cooperation within the health sector in light of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, as well as seeking partnership in a variety of fields including defense, where France is very eager on protecting its interests in addition to the interests and security of its allies such as Kuwait.

The ambassador affirmed that her country was keen on providing assistance, whether in training or equipment, to the Kuwait Defence Ministry, citing numerous deals and training courses as an example of France eagerness to boost Kuwait's security and defense.

On cultural, educational, health and business cooperation, the ambassador affirmed that both countries had displayed interest in finding more ways and means to take ties forward.

On medical cooperation, Ambassador Legendre stressed the importance of health care especially during the time of COVID-19, saying, "We think there is room to be involved in training more health professionals here in Kuwait." She added that France and Kuwait had signed an agreement to train medical doctors that was implemented in 2012, but affirmed that her country was eager to bolster ties going "further and beyond."

"There are leading institutions in France

that are in discussions at the moment with the Ministry of Health here in Kuwait to develop the training capacity both in terms of medical doctors such as in oncology but also in nursing and management of hospitals," she stated.

The French embassy is working closely with the Ministry of Education to enhance the teaching of the French language in Kuwait, helping teachers and students to excel in the language both in teaching and learning capacities, Ambassador Legendre added.

Cultural cooperation will highly benefit from the upcoming celebration of the 60th anniversary of ties between Kuwait and France, she affirmed, hoping that this year includes various cultural functions to commemorate this historical event.

Ambassador Legendre believed that Kuwait and France enjoyed strong business and economic relations with room to reinforce ties on both sides. In 2019, bilateral trade amounted

to around 800 million euros (US\$977.9 million), said the Ambassador who expressed eagerness to continue to boost the numbers this year, with French companies eager to contribute more to business diversification of Kuwait, especially within the mainframe of 2035 vision. Ambassador Legendre also affirmed that France was eager to welcome more investments from the Kuwaiti side, finding more strategies to bring further direct foreign investments.

Speaking about the French-Kuwaiti relations, she said that the ties were deeply grounded in history and good partnership within the political domain and beyond. In 2021, both countries are eager to pursue ways to further bolster relations, affirmed the ambassador who indicated that this year was very important due to commemorating the 60th anniversary of French-Kuwaiti relationship.

Vaccination certificate not in lieu of PCR test



Many countries, including Kuwait, have begun or are preparing to issue certificates to those who complete the full-course of anti-COVID-19 vaccinations. The certificate was expected to facilitate travel between countries, however the process has been delayed due to lack of approved international standards in vaccination and a common accreditation process accepted worldwide.

Moreover, on Friday, the World Health Organization (WHO) discouraged countries requiring proof of vaccination from international travelers saying, "Given that the impact of vaccines in reducing transmission is yet unknown, and the current availability of vaccines is too limited, it is recommended

that countries do not require proof of vaccination from international travelers." The certificate thus remains valid for use only within the countries issuing them.

In this regard, Kuwait has made clear that vaccination certificates from other countries do not exempt travelers from carrying a valid PCR test certificate or the requisite quarantine period after arriving in the country.

The health authorities are still awaiting the approval of an international online vaccination passport approved by all international bodies, and an online platform agreed upon by all countries to verify the certificate. But this process could take time, as much as year, before being rolled out, said medical sources. In the meantime Kuwait would use the certificates issued locally for internal movement of people, before probably extending it to other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states.

Meanwhile, the pace of administering vaccines is expected to pick up and the number of vaccinations conducted per day could double with the opening of a new Hall for this purpose at the Mishref Fairgrounds. The approval for import and use of another vaccine, alongside the currently administered Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, is expected to depend on its approval by international health organizations.

Badr Al Sama Medical Center launches Badr Health Card



Badr Al Sama Medical Center has launched a special Badr Health Card to members of social organizations in Kuwait.

During the launch event, the Branch Manager of Badr al Sama Medical Center, Abdul Razak, offered the first special Health Card to members of Thrissur Association of Kuwait (TRASK).

The Health Card provides holders to benefit from various discounts in all departments and

services of the medical center, including doctor consultations, X-rays, and for services and products in the laboratory and pharmacy. The event was held in the presence of Preema Marketing Coordinator, the PRO of Badr Al Sama Medical Center Thamer Abbas and TRASK Executive committee members Babu Parayil, Lyppu Lanachan, Prathibha Shibu, Silja Antony and Seema Jiju. This health card will be issued free of cost to all of their members.

Expat drivers to begin receiving smart licenses

Ministry of Interior (Moi), which began distributing the new smart licenses to citizen drivers from August 2020, is to extend that facility to expatriates starting from 17 January.

Announcing this, the ministry clarified the next phase is that traffic departments in all governorates will receive expats and bedoons, to accept and replace their old driving licenses with smart modern ones that allow them to

travel, and drive their vehicles in any country in the world. The new driving licenses are distinguished by first-rate security specifications, which employ the latest technology in the world and make fraud difficult. It also contains a smart chip that stores all owner's data. The fees for the smart licenses will be the same as that charged for existing licenses.

The smart driving licences were previously restricted only to the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, as travel to all other countries required the issuance of an international driving licence for a specific period. This compelled the traffic sector to seek out quick and better solutions to alleviate the burdens and problems facing citizens and expats abroad who wish to drive to their destinations.

Trauma among nursing staff worldwide increases



With the number of deaths among nurses due to coronavirus on the rise, the world's nurses are experiencing what could be called a 'mass trauma'.

New report from the International Council of Nurses (ICN) published last week suggests that with more than 2,200 confirmed deaths and high levels of infection among nursing staff worldwide, overstretched staff are experiencing increasing psychological distress in the face of ever-increasing workloads, continued abuse, and protests, said the ICN in a press release from its headquarters in Geneva.

Preliminary findings from ICN's new survey of its 130-plus National Nurses Associations (NNAs), coupled with studies by its NNAs and other sources, suggest that the COVID-19 Effect is a unique and complex form of trauma with

potentially devastating consequences in both the short- and long-term for individual nurses and healthcare systems.

The world is already short of six million nurses, with another four million due to reach retirement age in the next ten years. Furthermore, with the COVID-19 Effect potentially leading to even more nurses leaving the profession, governments must act now to protect the nursing profession and the fragile healthcare systems or jeopardize the health of their nations and the World Health Organization's goal of Universal Health Care.

ICN's data shows that, since the first wave of the pandemic, the proportion of nurses reporting mental health distress has risen from 60 to 80 percent in many countries. It has also gathered together studies from every region of the world, which confirm rising trauma, anxiety and burnout

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Ambassador applauds Indian community in Kuwait

The Indian Embassy hosted National Youth Day celebrations on 12 January, which was attended by members of the Indian diaspora and friends of India. National Youth Day falls on the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda.

Praising the relationship between India and Kuwait, Ambassador Sibi George said in his opening remarks, "The relationship between India and Kuwait is historic and deep-rooted by civilizational affinities tracing back to centuries. At the heart of this relationship are the people-to-people exchanges which have sustained and nurtured this close relationship over centuries. These vibrant exchanges have transformed the relationship substantially into a mutually beneficial long-standing dynamic partnership."



Lauding the vibrant Indian community in Kuwait, he said, "The admiration and affection garnered by our community is not a mere coincidence, rather it is the result



of the hard work put in by generations of our people living and working here. It is a testimony to our values and ethos of peaceful and harmonious coexistence

that we as Indians stand for."

Emphasizing that Swami Vivekananda was a colossal figure in his nation's history, he stated, "I am happy that we are unveiling this portrait of Swamiji today at the Embassy. His teachings will continue to influence the lives of every Indian, whether in India or abroad."

This portrait will serve as a reminder to us and also to all visitors to our Mission on the contributions of Swamiji who energized the young people, made them aware and unleashed their creative energies."

Concluding his speech, he said, "It was Swamiji who said that the fearless, bold, clean-hearted, courageous and aspirational youth is the foundation on which the future of the nation is built. He always believed on youth and youth power."

The fall of yet another government

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

A day earlier, the cabinet ministers headed by Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah placed their resignations at the disposal of the prime minister, saying this was in response to "current developments regarding the relation between the National Assembly and the Government, and was in the best interests of the nation".

The government, which was formed on 14 December, lasted exactly a month. During its 58-year-long march along the path of democracy and a semi-parliamentary form of governance, Kuwait has witnessed the formation of 37 governments — only seven of which have lasted the full four-year term in office. But even by these 'high-churn' standards, the brevity in office of the 37th government is a record blemish in Kuwait parliamentary life.

Frequent squabbles and gridlocks have been the hallmark of relations between the executive and opposition legislators throughout Kuwait's parliamentary history. This has often come at the cost of development and growth of the country, and hampered the government's ability to enact much-needed economic, financial and administrative reforms. Successive government reshuffles and dissolutions of parliament, have also discouraged international investments and made new businesses wary of launching in the country.

The resignation of the present cabinet was foreseen in light of the submission of a grilling motion against the prime minister by three lawmakers, MPs Bader Al Dahoom, Thamer Al Suwait and Khaled Al Moanes, a week earlier.

The present crisis had been brewing since the general election on 5 December, which resulted in a strong presence of the opposition bloc in parliament.

Immediately after results for the general elections to the parliament were announced, many political analysts and commentators predicted that the 16th legislative term of the National Assembly would not see it through its full four-year term. Their prognosis was based on the political makeup of the newly elected legislature. With nearly two-thirds of sitting MPs and pro-government candidates losing their seats and nearly half of the 50-seat National Assembly now filled with opposition candidates, it was obvious that confrontation rather than cooperation would mark the upcoming legislative sessions.

His Highness the Amir, in his inaugural address to the 16th legislative term, had anticipated as much and warned that comprehensive reform was needed to help Kuwait overcome its worst economic crisis in decades. He had stressed that "There is no room for wasting more efforts, time and capabilities on fabricated conflicts, disputes and settling accounts, which have become a source of frustration and discontent for citizens and an obstacle to any achievement."

From the interpellation motion filed against

the prime minister last week, it abundantly clear that in total disregard to the Amir's exhortations for the executive and legislative to work together for the good of the country, the majority of lawmakers are bent on pursuing an aggressive approach aimed at furthering their narrow parochial interests, rather than the wider good of Kuwait.

One frivolous reason given for grilling the prime minister was for "choosing ministers in the cabinet that are 'aggravating', and for not taking into account the directions of the new parliament, which is dominated by MPs with opposing views".

Maybe the lawmakers behind the motion need to re-read the Constitution which underlines the prerogative of the prime minister to recommend a cabinet to His Highness the Amir for approval and appointment.

Article 56 of the Constitution emphatically states: "The Amir appoints Ministers and relieves them of office upon the recommendation of the Prime Minister." Moreover, Article 115 of the Constitution also specifically states that "A member of the National Assembly may not interfere with the work of either the Judicial or the Executive Power."

Another reason to question the head of government was for "attempting to dominate the parliament and its committees through its support for the Assembly Speaker, and in the formation of parliamentary supervisory bodies." Again, Article 92 of the Constitution states: "The National Assembly elects at its first sitting and for the duration of its term a President and a Deputy President from amongst its members. And, that election is by an absolute majority vote of the members present."

Speaker Al-Ghanim was elected by a majority of 34 votes against the 28 votes garnered by the opposition's candidate, former minister Bader Al Humaidi. The vote tally shows that everyone present in the assembly cast their votes during the voting process, including ministers who are eligible to vote. Even more telling was the election of Deputy Speaker MP Ahmad Al-Shohoumi, who won with 41 votes against the opposition's candidate veteran parliamentarian MP Dr. Hassan Johar who received only 19 votes.

In the third interpellation motion, the prime minister is alleged to have failed to adhere to Article 98 of the Kuwaiti Constitution which states, "Immediately upon its formation, every Cabinet presents its program to the National Assembly. The Assembly may make comments with regard to such a program." In all fairness, given the exigencies of an ongoing pandemic and the change in leadership at the helm following the demise of the late Amir, the prime minister did outline the Cabinet's program in the limited time he had during the first session. The minutes of parliamentary proceedings will attest to this.

In his address to the preliminary session the prime minister underlined that the government will act in accordance with the Constitution — especially Article 98 — to achieve the aspiration

of citizens through the direct consultation with parliament to battle against corruption, boost development, and achieve goals such as the e-government."

The prime minister added that respect for law, constitution, and national unity, are the vital tenets that will help steer Kuwait as a nation toward progress and away from strife. He indicated that the cabinet was eager to cooperate with constitutional institutes to achieve the goals of democracy, hoping that the current legislative term will usher a new era of cabinet and parliament cooperation. He stressed that the cabinet would focus on fighting corruption via uprooting it from its sources and would question entities and individuals behind it.



Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled emphasized that the cabinet programs will be based on realistic and implementable goals and that development of government institutions would also be a priority for the government. In his address, the prime minister said that tackling unemployment of national youth, housing welfare of citizens, development of human resources, economic diversification and combating the trade in residency permits were also priorities for his cabinet. He concluded by adding that progress in all of its meaning was a collective responsibility of all members of society.

The rationale cited for the grillings make it obvious that the opposition strategy during the current legislative term is to leverage their majority and thwart parliamentary proceedings at every stage, until the government complies to their irrational, dictative demands. Even if the prime minister forms a new cabinet in a month or two, this is not going to change the opposition's political strategy.

Of course, the grilling motion filed by the lawmakers comes within their constitutional right to file an interpellation against any minister, including the prime minister. But the flippant nature of the grilling raises the question of whether the grilling was a responsible action intended to further the interests of the country, or just the narrow-minded, one-sided policies and interests of the opposition.

If the interpellation had gone ahead, it could have led to a vote of no confidence, in which ministers are constitutionally barred from participating. Unofficial counts had estimated

that around 38 MPs would vote in favor of the motion, which could have led to the downfall of the government. The cabinet's resignation on Wednesday preempted this.

The prime minister now has two options before him. Either form a new cabinet before mid-March, and face the same contentious parliament with probably the same results down the road, or inform His Highness the Amir of his inability to form a new government. In this case, the Amir could appoint a new prime minister or dissolve parliament and call for new elections.

Even as the country faces political impasse, the economy is struggling to stay afloat with a ballooning budget deficit and a depleting General Reserve Fund, amid rising expenditures, low oil revenues, and increasing cost of combating the COVID-19 crisis. Kuwait's KD43 billion economy is expected to face a deficit of nearly KD14 billion this year and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) warned that gross domestic product would contract by more than 8 percent this year.

According to the latest economic report from the National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), oil export revenues, which constitute around 90 percent of total exports, dropped by nearly half to KD1.8 billion in the second-quarter of 2020 (2Q20), relative to the earlier quarter, from the precipitous fall in crude oil prices following the impact of COVID-19 on oil markets. The price of Kuwait Export Crude fell to \$25.8 per barrel in 2Q20, from \$52.1 in the first-quarter. Moreover, oil production also plummeted to a nine-year, quarterly average, low of 2.48 million barrels per day in 2Q20 due to the need to comply with OPEC mandated supply cuts.

The latest gloomy economic forecast had meant that, now more than ever, the new government and parliament needed to work together on long pending economic reforms, including the passage of a public debt bill. Seen as a financial lifeline for the country in its current predicament, the debt law would have allowed the government to borrow up to KD20 billion over 30 years from international debt markets. But the previous parliament, and parliaments before that since 2017, have repeatedly overturned the bill.

It needs to be emphasized that the debt bill is not a permanent solution to Kuwait's economic woes, it cannot come in place of the need for serious economic reforms in other fields. The country in particular needs to diversify its economy away from its over dependence on hydrocarbon revenues and tap other sources of income, including through the implementation of Value Added Tax (VAT) and excise taxes. Kuwait also needs to rationalize current spending, especially on subsidies and grants to citizens, and ensure that available funds are directed towards financing new development and infrastructure projects that boost growth and create jobs. But sadly, amidst the bravado of grillings and hubris of enforcing resignations, no one is listening to what the country needs.

Efficacy and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccine

Following the roll-out of vaccinations proven to prevent COVID-19 in many countries, there is growing interest in learning more about the various available vaccines and how good they are in providing protection against the pandemic.

It must be remembered that all new vaccines have to undergo clinical trials to test how well they work before they are approved for use in the public domain. The developers of a vaccine candidate usually determine the main goals of their trial in their clinical trial study protocol. These goals are called the primary endpoints. For many experimental COVID-19 vaccines currently in development, the primary endpoints focus on preventing new cases of symptomatic COVID-19.

Volunteers taking part in vaccine clinical trials undergo close monitoring. The trial team is usually aware of the participants' general health and any relevant health conditions. Participants usually report any side effects and may fill out daily symptom monitoring diaries.

Many clinical trials also have exclusion criteria such as pregnancy, particular health conditions, and age. Trials involving experimental vaccines rarely include children

or seniors until scientists have collected a significant amount of safety data to protect these groups from potential harm.

At the end of the clinical trials, vaccines are evaluated to find their efficacy and efficiency in preventing the targeted disease. Efficacy and efficiency of a vaccine are not the same thing.

Scientists calculate how well a potential vaccine works by looking at the difference in new cases of the disease between the group receiving a placebo and the group receiving the experimental vaccine. This is referred to as the efficacy of the vaccine. The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, which Kuwait has ordered and is currently being administered, has an efficacy of 95 percent. What this means is that there is a 95 percent reduction in new cases of the disease in the vaccine group compared with the placebo group.

Vaccine efficacy only provides information about how well a vaccine works under the conditions of the clinical trial. Scientists usually base it on factors that they can quantify, such as numbers of laboratory-confirmed cases of COVID-19. But the ideal conditions of a clinical trial do not necessarily reflect what is happening in the real world

outside of clinical trials.

Vaccine effectiveness tells us how well a vaccine works under real-world conditions once people outside of clinical trials receive the vaccine. Many factors can influence how a vaccine performs outside of clinical trials, including the health of those receiving the vaccine, with underlying health conditions affecting vaccine effectiveness.

Another factor is how the disease-causing pathogen changes with time. For instance, the viruses that cause the flu are prone to mutations that make vaccines less effective. Vaccine developers therefore update the flu shot every year to try to achieve a good match to the most prevailing seasonal flu strains.

Some people may not develop full protection despite receiving a vaccine, while there will be others who are unable to have certain vaccines due to an allergy they have to components in the vaccine or because of other health matters, such as taking immunosuppressant medication.

Very few vaccines are 100 percent effective. But many routine vaccines have very high levels of effectiveness. For example, the MMR vaccine is up to 97 percent effective against measles and 88 percent effective against



mumps, and about 97 percent effective against rubella. Whereas the annual flu shot has an effectiveness of only 40-60 percent.

While vaccine effectiveness can inform scientists how much it can reduce new cases in those who have the vaccine, scientists can also use this to work out how many people need to have the vaccine to reach herd immunity.

Herd immunity means enough people are protected from the disease to slow down or stop the pathogen's spread. This means that people who have not had the vaccine or cannot have the vaccine receive indirect protection.

Portable unit measures aerosols for COVID contamination

Coronavirus has held center-stage for most of the year gone by, and many researchers and scientists have been spending a lot of time and effort in laboratories around the world to find ways to treat COVID-19, as well as contain and mitigate the spread of the virus.

Because of the role they play in coronavirus transmission, understanding aerosol concentrations and persistence in public spaces can help determine infection risks. However, measuring these concentrations had so far proven difficult due to the need for specialized personnel and equipment.

Now researchers from the Cardiology Centers of the Netherlands and the University of Amsterdam have demonstrated a commercial hand-held particle counter that can be used for this purpose and to help determine the impacts of risk-reducing measures, like ventilation improvements.

The key challenge with using hand-held particle counters is dealing with the background dust prevalent in public spaces. The scientists found that distinguishing dust particles from aerosols that arise from breathing, speaking,



sneezing, and coughing by people, was key to developing a portable device.

Since dust and aerosols inhaled into human lungs differ in size, the researchers developed a way to subtract the dust signal in the particle counter by measuring the dust for some time, and watching how the signal changes after aerosols are added to the mix. They then compared the aerosol concentration determined using the device they developed to laboratory-based techniques and found the results matched up perfectly. The device, named Fluke 985, is now being trialled to monitor the dust and air quality in clean rooms.

Wireless device could combat obesity

Gastric bypass surgery is sometimes the last resort for people struggling with obesity or have serious health-related issues due to their weight, sometimes resort to gastric bypass surgery. However, this medical procedure is very invasive, expensive and prolongs the recovery period for patients as it involves making a small stomach pouch and rerouting the digestive tract.

Now, researchers at Texas A&M University in the US have developed a medical device that could help with weight loss and requires only a relatively simple operation for implanting the device.

The new device provides a feeling of fullness after eating by stimulating the endings of the vagus nerve with light. Unlike other devices that require a power cord, the centimeter-sized device is wireless and can be controlled externally from a remote radio frequency source.

Obesity is a global epidemic that puts patients at risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart



disease and even some cancers. For those with a body mass index greater than 35, or who have at least two obesity-related conditions, surgery offers a path to not only lose the excess weight but maintain their weight over the long term.

Since it provides sensory information about fullness from the stomach lining to the brain, the vagus nerve has in recent years been the subject of intense studies on obesity treatment. Although there are medical devices that can stimulate the vagus nerve endings and consequently help in curbing hunger, these devices are similar in design to a pacemaker, with wires connected to a current source outside the body, providing electrical jolts to activate the tips of the nerve.

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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

The BRICs at 20



JIM O'NEILL

A former chairman of Goldman Sachs Asset Management and a former UK treasury minister, is Chair of Chatham House.

This November will mark the 20th anniversary of the BRIC acronym that I coined to capture the economic potential of Brazil, Russia, India, and China. Many commentators will be revisiting the concept and assessing each country's performance since 2001, so here are my own thoughts on the matter.

First, and contrary to repeated suggestion, the main point of my original November 2001 paper, 'The World Needs Better Economic BRICs', was neither to forecast endless growth for these economies, nor to promote some new marketing concept for investment funds. As anyone who read that paper will know, the central argument was that these economies' probable growth in relative GDP would have important implications for global-governance arrangements.

With 2001 having been the third year since the introduction of the euro, I argued that large European countries, namely, France, Germany, and Italy, should be represented collectively, rather than individually, at the G7, the International Monetary Fund, and other organizations, thereby making room for the world's rising economic powers. I then outlined four different scenarios of what the global economy might look like in 2010, three of which conjectured that the four BRICs' share of global GDP would grow.

In the event, the 2000-10 decade turned out to be both absolutely and relatively better for each BRIC than I had foreseen in any of my scenarios. But until the 2008 financial crisis, there was virtually no notable change of global-governance structures. And while that upheaval did result in the creation of the G20 summits and some reforms within the IMF and the World Bank, it is troubling that an economic disaster was needed to effect even limited change.

Within a year of the G20 summits' formation, the BRICS had added South Africa and formed their own geopolitical



club. Yet while this development reinforced the original economic concept, it did not seem to accomplish much beyond that. Worse, there has been very little progress on the global-governance front since then, even in the face of a deadly pandemic.

Returning to the BRIC economic story, between 2003 and 2011, my colleagues and I came up with various projections for how each economy would do between then and 2050. This work, too, led to a few

We do not yet know the 2020 GDP numbers for major economies, but most countries' real and nominal 2020 GDP will certainly be smaller than in 2019, and probably significantly so in the case of Brazil, India, and Russia. The exception will be China, whose GDP will probably have increased by 5 percent or more in nominal (US dollar-denominated) terms, further increasing its share of global GDP.

The pandemic comes on the tail of a

size of the United States, its economy is on track to become the largest this decade in nominal terms, having already achieved this threshold in purchasing power parity terms.

Despite a disappointing decade for Brazil and Russia, it is still possible that the BRIC grouping could become as large as the G7 within the next generation. If international trade, investment, and financial flows between the BRIC countries and the rest of the world continue, this level of growth would be good for everyone.

But that is a big if. Much will depend on whether we can muster the political leadership to strengthen international governance and the openness to which Western democracies have long aspired. In terms of these political questions, the BRICs' second decade has been tough. Relations between the West (the US and Europe) and China and Russia are as fraught as they have been in decades, though the recent conclusion of an EU-China investment agreement offers some good news.

One hopes that the arrival of US President-elect Joe Biden's administration and Britain's chairing of the G7 will make up for lost time. There appears to be some momentum behind the idea of creating a larger Democratic Ten (D10) alliance comprising the G7 members and Australia, India, and South Korea. From a Western perspective, this grouping would have obvious geopolitical and diplomatic advantages, and might help with the governance of cyberspace and technology; but it is unclear what purpose it would serve for the wider world.

Indeed, a D10 could raise more questions than it answers. Why not include other democracies that are already in the G20, such as Brazil, Indonesia, and Mexico? Why would South Korea want to be in a group that excludes China, its huge economic neighbor, but includes Japan, with which it is often in diplomatic spat? How relevant could the D10 possibly be in efforts to address climate change, global economic stability and equality, and issues such as the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines and antimicrobial resistance?

What the world really needs is what we called for back in 2001: genuinely representative global economic governance. Let us hope there is a renewed desire to take this path under the new US administration.

“ The BRICS could become as large as the G7 within the next generation, and if international trade, investment, and financial flows between BRICS and rest of the world continues, this level of growth would be good for everyone. ”

misperceptions, one being that we were offering a concrete forecast. In fact, the title of our 2003 paper, 'Dreaming with BRICs: The Path to 2050', made clear that we were imagining one possible, aspirational path, and we certainly did not predict persistently strong growth rates across the board. For the 2021-30 decade, we assumed a real (inflation-adjusted) GDP growth rate of less than 5 percent per year for China, and suggested that only India would still be experiencing accelerating growth after 2020 (owing to its strong demographics).

decade (2011-20) that was nowhere near as fruitful as the first one. Brazil and Russia's respective shares of global GDP are probably roughly back to their level in 2001. And while India has emerged as the world's fifth-largest economy, it has suffered several rocky years. China alone enjoyed remarkable success during this period. With a nominal GDP of more than \$15 trillion, its economy is around 15 times bigger than it was in 2001, triple the size of Germany and Japan, and five times the size of the United Kingdom and India. Already around three-quarters the

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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

No Time to Spare for the Paris Climate Promise



MARY ROBINSON

A former president of Ireland and UN high commissioner for human rights, is Chair of The Elders.

COVID-19 turned the world upside down in 2020. But it has also shown us that when there is a political consensus for action, human ingenuity and innovation can be deployed at the scale and speed needed to meet global challenges.

With unprecedented speed, we have developed, tested, and begun to deploy multiple effective vaccines for COVID-19. Now we must bring the same resolve to bear on fighting the other great existential threat to humanity: climate change. As United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres put it last month, "our future security and prosperity depend on bold climate action."

And yet, even at the most recent Climate Ambition Summit on December 12, many leaders' commitments still fell far short of what is needed to meet this collective challenge. To be sure, the European Union, the United Kingdom, and even some of the smaller countries that are most vulnerable to climate change have significantly strengthened their 2030 emissions-reduction targets. But the United States, Japan, China, and other major greenhouse-gas emitters still need to follow suit, preferably well ahead

“Solidarity and justice, and the responsibilities they entail, which lie at the heart of both the Paris accord and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals are more important than ever as we chart a sustainable recovery from COVID-19.”

of the UN Climate Conference (COP26) in Glasgow this coming November. Given the crisis we face, there are no more excuses for delay or prevarication.

Five years ago, after long and painstaking negotiations, the world came together to conclude the Paris climate agreement. This was one of the greatest triumphs of multilateral diplomacy in recent years, but it must not be taken for granted. Without an even greater commitment to action, the legacy of Paris risks being squandered altogether.

The events of the intervening half-decade have created a geopolitical landscape that would be unrecognizable to those who gathered in Paris. Back then, words like "coronavirus" or "Brexit" would have elicited little more than a puzzled shrug; now they command the fevered attention of policymakers and



heads of state and government around the world. But we cannot allow these developments to obscure the continuing and increasingly acute need for climate action, especially climate finance. Over a decade ago, the world's richest countries pledged to mobilize \$100 billion per year by 2020 to assist poorer countries with climate adaptation and mitigation efforts. That deadline has now passed, and these countries have yet to fulfill their promise.

Still, there is hope. I am delighted that US President-elect Joe Biden has reaffirmed his commitment to rejoin the Paris agreement immediately upon taking office. American leadership is sorely needed after the four wasted years of unnecessary destruction under Donald Trump. A \$2 billion payment to the Green Climate Fund by the US to help meet its part of the \$100 billion commitment would be a concrete complement to rejoining the Paris accord. This money was already pledged during Barack Obama's presidency, so there is no excuse to keep it sitting in the US Treasury's coffers. By the same token, other rich countries must not use the renewed focus on the US as an alibi for backpedaling on their own commitments. German Chancellor Angela Merkel's recent announcement that she will initiate a new international process on climate finance next year is a welcome declaration of intent. But past experience shows that we cannot count on lofty rhetoric.

Moreover, all countries in 2021 must give clear proof that they are reviewing and seeking to heighten the ambitions of their nationally determined contributions, the voluntary instrument through which signatories will uphold their commitments under the Paris agreement.

Solidarity and justice lie at the heart of both the Paris accord and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, which were also adopted in 2015. These principles, and the responsibilities they entail, are more important than ever as we chart a sustainable recovery from the shock of COVID-19. The blunt truth is that we have wasted too much time in the five years since Paris. The policies we need to cut emissions, including an end to fossil-fuel subsidies, a meaningful carbon price, and investment in renewable energies, have been fitful, inconsistent, and uncoordinated. But the climate crisis, like COVID-19, observes no borders and is indifferent to national sovereignty.

While attention has properly been focused on the virus, the world has also witnessed ever more extreme weather phenomena, from wildfires in Australia and California to the costliest storm on record in the Bay of Bengal, which forced two million people to evacuate their homes. We have all become acutely and intimately aware of the fragility of human

existence and the extent to which, across borders and generations, our fates are interconnected.

As we move from Paris to 2030, global leaders, businesses, and citizens alike should expect to be judged by the actions that are (or are not) taken today. Neither our descendants nor the planet will tolerate more selfish short-termism.

THE TIMES KUWAIT

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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Ways companies could leverage digitalization



DAMBISA MOYO

An international economist, she is the author of four New York Times bestselling books, including *Edge of Chaos: Why Democracy Is Failing to Deliver Economic Growth – and How to Fix It*.

It is no secret that rapid digitization is upending firms' operations, systems, and entire business models. Whether companies can both manage the risks and also reap the massive rewards that digital technologies can deliver depends significantly on the actions they take in five key areas.

First, digitization should enable managers to allocate the company's capital and labor better, in real time. Efficient companies regularly review and upgrade their operations in at least three ways: streamlining existing processes, adopting best practices from outside their organizations, and identifying the most productive use of their assets. Digital technology can enhance all of these activities.

Movie-theater companies, for example, already deploy human capital based on real-time demand trends: in the United States, information about ticket sales and social-media reviews following releases on the East Coast will shape staffing decisions on the West Coast. Similar approaches can be implemented (or enhanced) in a wide range of sectors, boosting efficiency and productivity. The benefits will grow progressively, as companies adjust their hiring practices to target candidates with the relevant expertise.

But, just as fast-growing stores of data can aid management teams, they also risk complicating the picture. Fortunately, digitization can help managers to organize and collate data to enhance decision-making. This is the second key area.

Traditionally, management teams worked with far less information. Businesses tended to operate within one or few jurisdictions. And company decision-makers would hear the perspectives of a subset of stakeholders, such as shareowners (at annual general meetings or in smaller-group conversations) and employees (through internal surveys).

Today, businesses increasingly operate across multiple jurisdictions, and hear from a much broader set of stakeholders, including customers and community members, especially through social media. Public pressure is already forcing corporations to divulge more details about their products' provenance, including working conditions, average wages, and environmental metrics, such as the amount of water used and carbon dioxide emitted. With employees able to air their grievances on digital platforms outside the company's purview, such as Glassdoor, Blind, and TheLayoff.com, there is nowhere for firms to hide.

In such an environment, managers must be able to organize and interpret data for themselves, identify broad economic, geopolitical, and social trends, and use the insights they glean to adapt their strategies quickly. To this end, they should foster productive engagement with all stakeholders and leverage digital technologies and the data they provide, to root out inefficiencies, eliminate redundancies, and simplify burdensome processes.

The third way organizations must apply digitization is to enhance organizational flexibility in responding to external threats and opportunities. For example, trends underpinning de-globalization, including protectionist policies, cross-border capital controls, and tighter immigration rules, may affect where and how companies sell their products, how they fund themselves and deploy investment capital, which talent pools they can tap, and how reliable their supply chains are. In particular, escalating tensions

between China and the West have raised the specter of balkanized trade, technology, and currency regimes. We may even see the emergence of a 'splinternet', characterized by two competing digital environments, led by the US and China, with different IP protocols. This would pose a serious challenge for many companies, which are set up to operate in a single globalized system, with centralized financing, procurement, and hiring systems.

Amid rapid social, economic, and cultural change, organizations need to build flexibility into their business models and operations. Digital technologies can provide that flexibility in a cost-effective way, reducing friction costs and mitigating downside operational risks, while enabling firms to trade, raise and deploy capital, and hire in a balkanized or bifurcated system.

Digitization can also enable firms to tailor their offerings and prices to individual consumers. This is the fourth priority area.

Life insurers have long priced the policies they offer on the basis of individual factors, such as health status, lifestyle, and actuarial tables. As gathering and analyzing high-quality data about consumers becomes easier, a wider range of companies will be able to take a similarly personalized approach to pricing. Some industries already have a relatively tailored approach. Consider financial products, such as mortgages and car loans. Today, a group of people with broadly the same set of attributes would be charged the same interest rate. With greater digitization, individual customers can be charged an interest rate that is better aligned with their specific risk profile, including a range of metrics from assets to life expectancy.

If corporations design and execute effective digitization strategies in these four areas, they will both boost revenues (by getting more goods and services into the hands of customers faster) and reduce costs (by streamlining hiring, manufacturing, production, and logistics processes).



Rethinking how to distribute the increase in profits resulting from digitization is the fifth priority area.

Companies typically divide profits among debt reduction, reinvestment, and payouts to shareholders in the form of dividends and buybacks, or store them for long-term strategic purposes. But as shareholder capitalism gives way to stakeholder capitalism, a broader range of interest groups, such as employees and local communities, will expect benefits. Companies' growing roles in areas like education, health care, and infrastructure, as well as the impending rise in structural unemployment owing to automation and digitization, will reinforce this expectation.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the fragility of many business models, it has also intensified the race to adopt cutting-edge technologies. But adoption is only the first step. How these technologies are applied across the five priority areas described here will determine who reaches the finish line, and when.

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