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Good governance, equitable reforms key to prosperous future



THE TIMES KUWAIT REPORT

Political sphere in Kuwait has been witnessing hectic developments since the start of June, with snap general elections held on 6 June, followed two weeks later with the announcement of a new 15-member cabinet headed by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. A day later, on 20 June, the premier, the cabinet and the 50 elected parliament members took their constitutional oath during the first ordinary session of the 17th legislative term of the National Assembly.

Inaugurating the initial session of the legislative term, His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah urged legislators to focus on reforms for the "sake of Kuwait, with the goal of achieving the aspirations

none of the usual ruckus surrounding parliamentary proceedings, or threats of imminent grillings, at least not so far.

Addressing legislators on the occasion, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf-Ahmad Al-Sabah said, "We are living in a new era that needs a new vision of national work based on the foundations of reform, to achieve the aspirations of the people." He added that the "government looks forward to a fruitful relationship with the new parliament".

Outlining the government's program of work for the legislative term to 2027, the premier said the reform-oriented plan was both realistic and feasible. He noted that the work plan includes the priorities to be implemented over the coming period and as per a specific timetable, so as to meet the aspirations of citizens and to ensure the sustainable growth of the country.



of the people for a prosperous future". He further stressed that there was "no room to waste time on conflicts, settling scores, triggering crises, and irresponsible practices".

His Highness the Crown Prince called on MPs to cooperate with the government in order to address all sources of tension and thereby promote democratic practices. He urged them to focus on boosting the supervisory and legislative role of the National Assembly to achieve the aspirations of citizens, and to give the government enough time to achieve its work plans.


His Highness the Crown Prince's sagacious advice has apparently been imbibed by parliament. Since the start of the current session, a rare camaraderie appears to be in place between the executive and legislative wings of parliament, with

The prevailing collaborative environment could help the government win parliamentary approval for several long-pending policies and reforms to revitalize the economy, as well as lend support for the action plan outlined by the premier.

However, gaining parliamentary cooperation and support for implementing various economic, administrative, and social reforms and policies, should not come at the expense of trust in the government, and in its commitment to good governance.

Since taking over as premier in July 2022, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah has made good governance a key plank of his administration, and this has stood him in good stead with the people, and politicians on both sides of parliament.


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Arab countries attract foreign projects worth billions

In a statement last week, the Arab Corporation for Investment and Export Credit Guarantee (Daman) said that foreign direct investment projects coming to the region during the year 2022 increased by 74 percent to 1,617 projects worth over US\$200 billion.

The statement noted that most of these projects were concentrated in Egypt and in the United Arab Emirates. Over the past two decades, Arab countries received in excess of 16,000 projects worth a combined value

of \$15.5 trillion and created more than two million new jobs in Arab countries.

Director General of Daman, Abdullah Al-Sabeeh, pointed out in the statement, that monitoring by 30 independent international entities on over 155 indicators related to investment climate, revealed significant changes in the ranking of Arab countries on global indices in four main groups of indicators (political, economic, organizational, and production factors) during 2022. Al-Sabeeh explained that the outcome of

changes in the status of Arab countries in international indicators reflected positively on the number of direct foreign projects coming to the region and their investment costs, with expectations of continued strong performance in 2023.

The number of foreign projects coming to the region increased by 28 percent, and the value of these



projects rose by 70 percent, to reach \$74 billion during the first third of 2023 compared to the same period of 2022, especially with the political and economic conditions in the region improving.

Daman, a joint Arab body owned by Arab countries in addition to four Arab financial institutions, was established in 1974 with its headquarters in Kuwait.

Kuwait among top countries dangerous to road users



By **Hermoine Macura-Noble**
Special to The Times Kuwait

New research names Kuwait in a list of countries where you are most likely to die on the road. According to experts at the car subscription service FINN – The top four deadliest roads in the world are found in Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Malaysia and Kuwait.

The study analyses the number of fatalities due to car accidents in each country and ranked the most dangerous countries by deaths per 100,000 people. In first place was Saudi Arabia with the highest number of road deaths with 35.94 per 100,000 people. Saudi Arabia has large deposits of crude oil, meaning petrol prices are very cheap. As a result, more people can afford to drive fast fuel-burning supercars which can be less safe than common cars due to factors such



as poor visibility.

Thailand has the second deadliest roads in the world according to the report, with 32 deaths per 100,000 people. Many Thai citizens ride motorcycles rather than drive cars, and it is common for many people to ride on a motorbike together. This, combined with a lack of helmets, can result in an increased likelihood of road deaths. Malaysia has the third-highest number of road deaths followed by Kuwait.

The study also looked at the countries where you are least likely to die on the road – with the top three safest roads in the world found in Iceland, Norway and Switzerland.

According to the report, Iceland has the fewest road deaths, with just 2 per 100,000 people. Despite poor weather conditions and many unpaved roads, Icelandic drivers are some of the least likely in the world to face fatalities on the road. Iceland is a hub for tourism, and many popular

roads around the golden circle and Reykjavik are tarmacked and well-maintained compared to the sparsely populated centre of the country which is connected by a network of gravel roads.

Norway has similar road issues to Iceland, mainly based on adverse winter weather conditions. Despite this, Norway's roads also have some of the lowest number of reported deaths. Scandinavian driving lessons and tests are notoriously thorough, and speeding fines are high, resulting in safer roads.

Switzerland has the third-fewest road deaths, at 2.25 per 100,000 people. Swiss driving laws are strictly enforced, and there is little tolerance for speeding and reckless driving as Swiss roads have a reputation for spectacular views from winding mountain passes.

Hermoine Macura-Noble

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Kuwait, Great Britain mark over a century of robust relations

UK Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs James Cleverly



THE TIMES KUWAIT REPORT

United Kingdom Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs James Cleverly affirmed that the Kuwaiti-British relations are historic and strong, hoping to further develop them in the future.

In an interview with state media last Thursday, on the sidelines of his visit to the country, Mr. Cleverly noted that the two countries share 125 years of relations, adding that the celebration of the 70th anniversary of opening the Kuwait Investment Office in London is an example of the strong partnership between Kuwait and the United Kingdom.

The Secretary of State who is on a three-day visit to the region, expressed his joy at meeting with His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. During the meeting they discussed bilateral ties on all levels. Mr. Cleverly also discussed topics of mutual concern with ministers.

The UK is committed to defending and protecting Kuwait's security and stability, said the minister, noting his country's role in standing side by side with Kuwait during the Iraqi Invasion. He emphasized that the UK's relations with Kuwait are not only limited to the military and economic fields, but also include health, technology and education.

The British Foreign Secretary added that the UK is looking forward to cooperating with Kuwait to achieve peace and stability in the Middle East region, to encourage countries to



turn to dialogue instead of political conflicts. He also noted that his country aims to enhance cooperation with the GCC states, through signing a free trade zone agreement. Touching on the Palestinian cause, Mr. Cleverly said that Kuwait has been continuously supporting Palestine and its people, adding that Kuwait and the UK share the same view on the 'two-state' solution, to achieve peace in the region.

Meanwhile, he spoke of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, saying it is similar to what happened to Kuwait in 1990, affirming that the UK is against any violation of international law.

During his visit, the UK minister also met

separately with First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Ahmad Fahad Al-Ahmad AlSabah, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Oil, Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment and Acting Minister of Finance Dr. Saad Al-Barrak and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

During his three-day visit to the Middle East that began on 25 July, the foreign secretary hopes to emphasize the UK's continued commitment and growing partnership with countries in the region. The visit comes after the

government recently announced that citizens from Gulf countries and Jordan will benefit from the UK's new Electronic Travel Authorisation visa scheme, which will make travel to the UK cheaper and easier for visitors.

All three countries are also important energy, defense and security partners for the UK, and trade and investment with the Gulf is vital to support the UK's priorities to grow the economy. Speaking ahead of his visit to the region, Mr. Cleverly said: "I am delighted to be back in the Middle East. The UK's mutually beneficial relationships with the Gulf and Jordan continue to thrive. We have a bright future together."

On Tuesday, Mr. Cleverly began his trip with a visit to Qatar where he held discussions with the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani. He also visited the UK-Qatar Joint Air Squadron at Duhail Airbase, accompanied by Qatari Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister, Dr. Khalid Al Attiyah.

Following his visit to Kuwait, the British foreign secretary is slated to visit Jordan and hold high-level meetings with the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi. During the visit he is also expected to announce up to £1.5 million to support initiatives for women and girls through civil society organizations.

He will also meet with representatives from UNHCR (the UN's refugee agency) and the World Food Programme where he will announce funding of £30 million over three years to provide cash assistance and support to the poorest refugees.



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Kuwait records first budget surplus in nearly a decade



The closing account for fiscal year 2022-23, issued by the Ministry of Finance shows that in the financial year that ended on 31 March, 2023 the state registered an actual surplus for the first time in nine years

Highlights from the closing accounts

provided by the Ministry of Finance reveals actual revenues amounted to KD28.8 billion, up from the KD23.4 billion estimated in the budget, and marking a 54.7 percent increase over the closing figures for fiscal year 2021-22.

Adding to the revenues was an actual oil revenue of KD26.7 billion, up from the budget figure of KD21 billion, and notching an increase of 64.7 percent over the previous fiscal year. On the other hand, actual non-oil revenues of registered KD2.1 billion, a decrease of 12.8 percent from the previous fiscal.

The closing statement also showed that the actual expenditure totaled KD22.4 billion, a decrease of 2.6 percent from last fiscal year, and a savings of KD1.1 billion from the KD23.5 billion outlayed as expenses in the 2022-23 budget. The closing account therefore recorded an actual surplus of

KD6.4 billion, in place of the narrow deficit that had been expected in the budget for the year, and a remarkable uplift from the KD4.3 billion deficit in the closing account for fiscal year 2021-22.

Oil revenues were up due to the higher oil prices that prevailed for much of the fiscal year, with the actual average price of a barrel of oil remaining at US\$97.1. This was higher than the average oil price of \$80 per barrel used in calculating revenues in the 2022-23 budget. The higher oil revenues also came about despite a lower production figure of 2.693 million barrels per day, and lower than the 2.7 million barrels per day estimated in the budget.

It is noteworthy that salaries, wages and subsidies accounted for KD17.37 billion or nearly 78 percent of the actual total expenditure of KD22.4 billion. The closing accounts also showed that the actual outlay

for capital expenditure was only KD2.05 billion, or less than 10 percent of expense allocation.

In his comments on the closing accounts, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Oil, Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment and Acting Minister of Finance Dr. Saad Al-Barrak said, "Although Kuwait enjoys a solid financial position, large oil reserves, and monetary and financial stability, the country is keen to follow a prudent path when it comes to its finances, and to ensure sustainable economic development of the country."

He also thanked the Council of Ministers for its support to the Ministry of Finance and expressed his appreciation for the role of his colleagues working in the Ministry of Finance and the financial system in the country, "who have spared no effort over the past months."



'LuLu Proudly South Africa 2023' fest a resounding success

LuLu Hypermarket's festival of South African products titled, 'LuLu Proudly South Africa 2023', was a major success, drawing thousands of visitors to all outlets of the hypermarket in Kuwait.

The event, which was held from 27 July to 1 August, was inaugurated by the South African Ambassador, H.E. Manelisi Genge, along with LuLu Hypermarket's top management in Kuwait, at the Al-Qurain outlet on 27 July. The festival of South African products offered amazing discounts and special offers on all branded products from South Africa.

Adding to the excitement of the six-day festival were special performances by South



African music bands, and traditional dances by South Africa artists, as well as large displays of South African foods and goods.



In addition to the colorful decor of South African flags and festoons, all outlets of the hypermarket featured huge cutouts and

images of iconic places and attractions of the Rainbow Nation.

Other highlights of the celebration included South African street food stalls and free samplings of special foods of South Africa. Among the major South African brands featured at the fest were Blue Diamonds, Heartland, Bokomo, Bakers, Wellingtons, Ceres, The Harvest Table, and Robinsons.

The event's success opened the door for more exciting celebrations in the coming years. It was a welcoming opportunity for customers to experience the vibrant culture of South Africa and to sample some of the delicious food that the region has to offer.

Treated wastewater found largely free of VOC

A recent study by the Water Research Center of the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) concluded that the volatile organic compounds (VOCs) present in wastewater released by treatment plants in Kuwait were within acceptable limits.



Volatile organic compounds are dangerous solid or liquid chemical contaminants released from man-made materials, and are known to cause several adverse health effects. The KISR study targeted one of the largest

wastewater treatment plants in Kuwait, aiming to identify the most prevalent VOCs, measure their concentrations, and evaluate the treatment plant's efficiency in removing these compounds.

The study, headed by Dr. Abdullah Al-Maatouq, involved the collecting of wastewater samples from four distinct locations within the treatment plants. These samples underwent meticulous analysis to identify the common VOCs and determine their concentrations within permissible limits.

The results of the study were promising, indicating that the treatment plants possess a remarkable capacity to eliminate a significant portion of volatile organic compounds during their operation. The overall wastewater processing efficiency surpassed an impressive 98 percent, underlining the efficacy of the treatment process in dealing with VOCs.

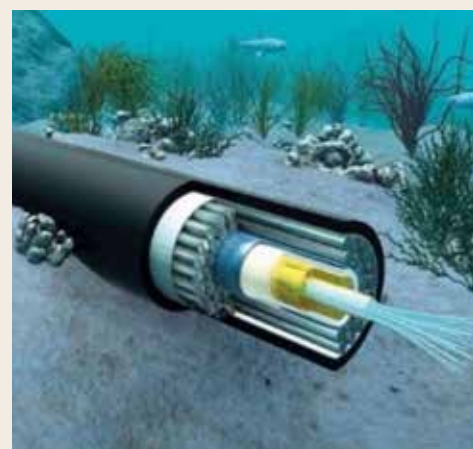
Furthermore, the concentrations of VOCs observed during the study were found to be well below the maximum permissible levels for treated wastewater, further underlining the successful and effective treatment approach at the plant.

CITRA to sign contract for laying sea and land cables

Communications and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) plans to sign contracts with specialized communication and internet companies that would grant the companies an administrative license to lay communication cables undersea or on land in the country.

Indicating that the contract comes within the framework of encouraging investment in the field of data transmission and the internet, CITRA explained that the multiplicity of international cables and landing stations connected to the country will contribute to increasing the volume of data and connections of local networks to the Internet and global networks.

The authority said that the rapid increase in voice and data traffic in the local market necessitated a growth in communications capacity to connect Kuwait with the rest of the world. This called for more landing points in Kuwait for land and sea fiber optic cables to develop the international communications sector, and to increase the speed and volume of data transfer and communication to keep



pace with the steady growth of data volume and movement.

Kuwait is currently connected to the global internet network through three land cables and two marine cables. One of the marine cables is quite old and breaks down often, which leads to disruption and inefficiency in operations of communication and internet networks.

Survey highlights career development expectations in Kuwait

A new survey on career development plans among young professionals in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, shows that 83 percent of Kuwait employees would leave their current companies for better training opportunities.

The survey findings not only reveal that employees in Kuwait view career development as a vital component of their professional lives, but also underlines their motivation and dedication in pursuit of this goal. The employee responses revealed by the survey are also a wakeup call to employers in the country on the need to enhance career development opportunities in organizations.

The survey, conducted by the Middle East's premier job site, Bayt.com in partnership with market research agency YouGov, titled 'Career Development in the MENA 2023', offers valuable insights into the current state and future expectations of career development in countries in the MENA region.

The survey found that management development skills were deemed the most vital training area for respondents (24%), along with technical/job-related skills (18%) and leadership/coaching skills (17%). Team management skills (37%) and leadership/coaching skills (37%) emerged as the areas where most of the respondents had received company training in the past three years,



indicating a renewed emphasis on these skills in the current job market.

"Career development is integral to the success of any organization," said Ola Haddad, director of Human Resources at Bayt.com. "These findings highlight the increased engagement of employees looking toward formal training initiatives and development plans to hone their skills in an increasingly dynamic and competitive landscape. Across MENA, career development is experiencing a thrilling era, with employees showing unprecedented levels of investment in their growth and progress."

All the respondents (100%) are keen to have a formal career development plan in place. Kuwait companies should foster a culture that empowers employees to take ownership of their professional development to drive engagement and satisfaction.

Additionally the survey showed that all the respondents (100%) were keen to have a formal career development plan in place, and that 54 percent of the respondents had formally set development plans with their manager.

The survey highlights the importance of empowering employees to take initiative in their career development.

Almost 6 in 10 respondents (58%) feel encouraged to determine their own career path, indicating a desire for self-directed growth.

Close to 54 percent of employees believe that their organization is dedicated to their professional development. This aligns with the importance placed on career development in Kuwait and reflects positively on companies that prioritize growth opportunities for their workforce.

With 85 percent of respondents believing that their skillset is competitive and up-to-date, organizations must continue to invest in and foster an environment that supports continuous learning and career advancement. Mentoring plays a significant role in professional growth, and 51 percent of current employees in Kuwait report being satisfied with the mentoring received from senior peers. In addition, 55 percent state that their supervisor has taken an interest in their career development.

These figures reflect the positive impact of mentorship and supportive leadership in nurturing employee development and creating a conducive environment for continuous improvement.

Within the career development path, 74 percent of respondents believe that there are opportunities to cross-train and learn new skills, whereas 62 percent believe that the training and development opportunities are explicitly linked to the strategic direction of the company.

Research Director at YouGov, Zafar Shah, added: "It is evident from the survey findings that employees in the MENA region are eager to develop their careers, and are keen to work for companies that offer professional development opportunities. As companies seek out highly trained and motivated employees, they would do well to offer comprehensive skill-building programs aimed at meeting their employees' needs."

Plans to eliminate salary disparity in public sector

To ensure fairness and equality in salaries between employees undertaking similar work in the various ministries and public sector entities, the government plans to introduce a comprehensive salary restructuring in the state's administrative apparatus that is both practical and sustainable.

The proposed measures seek to achieve balance and fairness based on sectoral distribution and specialization of employees, and ensure stability across job categories. Recognizing the flaws in the current salary determination mechanism, the authorities are taking a technical approach to rectify the situation and promote fairness.



To achieve this, the government is conducting a thorough financial and technical analysis on the Kuwait market, in collaboration with the Tri International Consulting Group (TICG), which is a joint venture between Kuwait Investment Authority, Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, and Oliver Wyman, a leading international management consulting firm. Given the prevailing financial challenges, the goal of the salary restructuring is to avoid further burdening the state budget with additional deficits.

Preliminary estimates indicate that the previous 'alternative' proposal would cost the state budget approximately one billion dinars, potentially exacerbating the deficit. Thus, it requires careful examination to achieve its objectives without adverse consequences.

It is acknowledged that in order to prevent an exodus of talent from the public sector to the private sector, and to maintain job stability, the current labor market needs comprehensive restructuring. It is also widely accepted that any haphazard salary increases in the public sector could lead to further budgetary strain in subsequent years.

Overall, the government is determined to find a balanced and just solution to address salary differences and enhance the overall efficiency and stability of the state's administrative apparatus.



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Cabinet to review five-year residence terms

The Cabinet is set to review and amend the law regulating the residence period for foreigners before submitting it for discussion and voting by the National Assembly in the upcoming winter session of parliament that begins in October. The residence law was recently revised significantly to address issues related to the trading in residency permits by unscrupulous people.

A team comprising representatives from various departments, including the fatwa and legislation department, legal affairs department at the Ministry of Interior, the Civil Service Commission, Kuwaiti jurists at Kuwait University, and representatives from health insurance companies, has reportedly reviewed the law extensively, taking into account previous observations.

According to the new proposal, expatri-



ates will be granted a residence permit for a maximum period of five years, while investors will be eligible for permits lasting up to 15 years, based on the nature of their business activities. Additionally, fees will be im-

posed to ensure Kuwait can derive benefits from these investments.

The proposal also includes provisions for granting 10-year residence permits to the children of Kuwaiti women and people who

own property, with the provision that realty owners should not be out of the country for more than six months at a stretch to maintain their residency; children of Kuwaiti women are exempt from this clause.

On the other hand, domestic workers will be permitted to remain out of the country for only four continuous months, failure to return within the assigned period will lead to their residency permit being automatically revoked, after which their residency permit will be revoked.

The law is expected to be ready for adoption by the Cabinet during the current summer session, and then forwarded to the National Assembly before the start of the next parliamentary session in late October. The proposed changes seek to establish a more regulated and balanced system for granting residence permits in Kuwait.

KEMS Zajil Telecom Secures VSAT Licenses from CITRA, Expanding Connectivity Services

Gulfnet International/KEMS (KEMS Zajil Telecom) a leading service provider of advanced connectivity solutions, is thrilled to announce that it has obtained VSAT licenses from the Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) in Kuwait. This achievement marks a significant milestone for KEMS Zajil Telecom as it expands its portfolio of cutting-edge communication services.



KEMS Zajil Telecom is currently positioned in Kuwait market as a Digital Solutions Provider that offers a wide portfolio of Enterprise focused cutting edge technology.

VSAT technology enables seamless and reliable connectivity, bridging the gap in remote and underserved areas where traditional terrestrial networks are limited. By establishing satellite links, enterprises gain access to high-speed internet, voice, data, and video services, regardless of their location. This ensures uninterrupted communication, empowering businesses to expand operations, reach new markets, and connect with customers, partners, and employees across the globe.

KEMS Zajil Telecom's comprehensive suite of VSAT services encompasses end-to-end solutions, including system design, installation, maintenance, and round-the-clock customer support. With this strategic development and in leveraging its extensive expertise and state-of-the-art infrastructure, the company will enable businesses and individuals to unlock new possibilities, foster collaboration, and drive innovation through seamless satellite connectivity.

"We are delighted to have obtained the VSAT licenses from CITRA, a pivotal achievement that opens up new avenues for our company and our valued customers," said Waleed AlQallaf, The CEO of KEMS Zajil Telecom. "These licenses reaffirm our commitment to delivering world-class connectivity solutions and empowering our clients with exceptional communication capabilities, no matter where they are located."

KEMS Zajil Telecom is renowned for its customer-centric approach and unwavering focus on quality, reliability, and technological advancement. The addition of VSAT licenses further amplifies its commitment to meeting the evolving needs of customers and staying at the forefront of the connectivity landscape.

As KEMS Zajil Telecom expands its reach and strengthens its presence in the market, it anticipates forging strategic partnerships and collaborations with local and international stakeholders, driving socio-economic growth, and playing a vital role in advancing digital inclusion initiatives.

KMA calls for online sick-leave evaluating system

Kuwait Medical Association (KMA) has denounced in the strongest terms the recent physical assault on a female doctor at the Jaber Al-Ahmad Clinic, by a visitor who asked her for a sick leave for another person who had not visited the clinic.

The Association stated that it would take all legal measures against the perpetrator of the recent attack, and that this was not an isolated event as such attacks on medical personnel are increasing and will not be tolerated.

Pointing out that nearly 90 percent of all attacks on doctors at health centers were related to people faking illness to avail of medical leave, the medical association added that more than 25 percent of alleged sick patients did not visit their local clinic.

KMA called on the Civil Service Commission and other relevant authorities to support the proposal of the Ministry of Health to urgently activate an online system for leave applications and their approval, as is the case in many neighboring countries.

The online system would link the local



clinics, a committee of experts at the health ministry, the Civil Service Commission, the Ministry of Interior, as well as the sick-leave applicant. The committee would evaluate the report submitted by the concerned doctor at the local clinic and decide on whether or not to grant a medical leave to the applicant.

KMA noted that the online system will reduce the burden on the health system in primary healthcare centers, protect the medical personnel, and stop wastage of the health ministry's time and resources.

Subbiya Project key to avoiding power crisis

Record high daily power consumptions that registered over 16,370 megawatts last week, and the simultaneous breakdown of two power generation units in the Northern Al-Zour power station a day later, left the Ministry of Electricity Water and Renewable Energy (MEW) scrambling to maintain power supplies. The situation was salvaged only by importing around 540 megawatts of electricity from the Gulf Interconnected Grid.

Given the steady increase in power consumption annually by 3 to 4 percent, and with peak loads this summer expected to reach 17,000 megawatts, the MEW is reportedly developing plans to avoid a shortage of electric power during the next three summer seasons.

However, with increasing demand for power from the several new residential cities coming up in Kuwait, and plans to increase overall power production still under discussion by the government, MEW is left with very few options to meet the power demand. The ministry is left with only stop-gap measures such as urging consumers to rationalize consumption, and to continue importing power from the Gulf network.

According to experts, the only permanent solution to the power crisis is to implement the Subbiya project, by fast-tracking the supply,



installation, operation, and maintenance of gas turbine units for the fourth phase of the project. This would initially add around 900 megawatts of power, and a further 250 megawatts at a later stage.

The added power from the Subbiya project would support the national grid over the mid-term until the second phase of the Northern Az-Zour project and the first phase of the Al-Khairan project becomes operational.

Experts point out that with MEW having to supply power to the new residential cities, annual power consumption would increase by 6 percent compared to the annual rate of 3 to 4 percent at present.

Around 74,000 patients referred to dermatology clinics annually

The head of the dermatology department at Asaad Al-Hamad Center, Dr. Atfal Al-Lafi, announced that the center annually receives about 74,000 patients in various general and specialized departments.

Al-Lafi said in a statement to a local daily, that "The center has a medical team that corresponds to cases that require dermatological consultation in the various 21 centers and hospitals in the Al-Sabah health region, on a daily basis.

She explained that the Ministry of Health is keen to introduce new, advanced and advanced treatments for the treatment of skin diseases, while the medical staff at the center is working to educate patients and their families on how to deal with diseases.

She mentioned that cases of chronic skin diseases constitute 3 to 5% of the total population, but the percentage of cases that



need periodic follow-up, including psoriasis, bullous diseases — Bullous pemphigoid is a rare skin condition that causes blisters on your skin. It's an autoimmune disease. Certain medications may trigger bullous pemphigoid, but healthcare providers aren't sure exactly what causes it. It can be well-managed with medications — eczema, hidradenitis suppurativa and vitiligo, reaches 30% of the total cases in the center.

US Army tests autonomous military vehicles in Kuwait



By Capt. Richard Moore
U.S. Army Central

The 1st Theater Sustainment Command (TSC), a subordinate command of US Army Centra (USARCENT), demonstrated three autonomous vehicles at the Udairi Range Complex near Camp Buehring, Kuwait, on 25 July. This is the first time these ground-breaking systems were publicly displayed in the US Central Command region.



The vehicles, three Palletized Loading Systems (PLS), are intended to decrease risk during combat operations by reducing the manpower required by traditional, non-autonomous systems. PLSs are ten wheeled

logistics vehicles first introduced in the early 1990s. They are designed to transport palletized loads or containers in support of both combat and non-combat operations.

USARCENT is testing the new autonomous operating systems installed on these PLSs over the coming months in various locations in the CENTCOM region. During the demonstration, the autonomous vehicles navigated a short off-road course without soldiers giving driver inputs to the trailing vehicles.

"Based on our experience, these autonomous vehicles allow a smaller number of soldiers to accomplish larger missions," said 1st TSC Deputy Commanding General Brig. Gen. Maria A. Juarez. "We gained insights during these tests into possible future technologies that remove soldiers from harm's way while enhancing distribution capabilities."

Task Force 39, the USARCENT organization focused on innovation and modernization, organized the testing facilitated by sustainment personnel from the 1st TSC's 371st Sustainment Brigade. The vehicles arrived in Kuwait in early July and will be incorporated into various exercises over the next several months. The unique environment of northern Kuwait provided an opportunity to test the vehicles in an incredibly difficult climate.

For his part, the USARCENT Commanding General Patrick Frank said, "The driver's training we are conducting with the autonomous vehicle PLS trucks presents our soldiers with the ability to be on the cutting edge of innovation and apply industry leading technology to the battlefield." Previously tested on a smaller scale in the United States, USARCENT is incorporating these autonomous vehicles into sustainment

units in Kuwait to provide a greater quantity of real-world data.

"We are excited to test ground-breaking technologies, like autonomous vehicles, within our organization to generate the most realistic test results possible," said Chief Warrant Officer 4 Ricky Horne, USARCENT's senior ordnance ground maintenance officer who helped organize the testing.

Al-Muzaini Exchange Company continues to thrive: opens two new branches



The number one money exchange company in Kuwait, Al-Muzaini Exchange Company recently opened its 131st branch in Al Andalus on Monday, 17th July, 2023 and opened its 132nd branch in Al Eqaila on Tuesday, 18th July, 2023. This rapid expansion reflects the

company's endeavor to always be near its customers and its commitment to providing the highest quality of financial services such as money transfers, foreign currency exchange and bill payments with ease, comfort and safety and at the best prices, seven days a week.

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Peru celebrates 202 years of independence

By Carlos Velasco
Ambassador of Peru

This year the Republic of Peru celebrates two hundred and two years of its Independence, which was declared on 28 July, 1821. Independence marked the birth of the Republic as a sovereign State that places empowering human beings as the supreme goal of the society. As a multi-ethnic and multicultural country, Peru promotes its vast ancient culture and sustainable development for the benefit of its people, as well as for cooperation, peace and security in the world, according to international law.

Peru and Kuwait have developed a strong relationship over the years which dates back to almost half a century and is based on close friendship and cooperation, political collaboration, cultural exchanges, trade, investment, and tourism. Currently



the two sides are negotiating a Visa Waiver Agreement which exempts citizens of both nations to obtain a visa for traveling.

Also both countries have shared interest in international fora as the two nations play important roles in their respective regional and global levels.

Peru is proud to share that it is in the process of joining the Organization Of Economic Cooperation And Development (OECD), which reflects the political will of the country to become a member based on its merits as an open economy that respects the rule of law, human rights, promotes climate change protections, enforce the fight against corruption, all of which makes the country a like minded country for OECD.

The Embassy of Peru in the State of Kuwait, takes this occasion to convey its warmest congratulations to Peruvians residing in Kuwait, as well as to our dear Kuwaiti friends.

Good governance, equitable reforms key to prosperous future

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The importance of maintaining good governance cannot be overstressed, as it forms the linchpin of any government committed to sustainable and prosperous development of the country, and to the welfare of its people.

Without good governance all implementations of plans, policies, and reforms eventually become ineffective, and over time erodes confidence in the government and credence in its various apparatuses and entities. Although there is no universally accepted definition of good governance, it is often described as the process whereby public institutions conduct affairs, manage resources and guarantee the realization of human rights, in a manner that is free of abuse, discrimination and corruption, with due regard for the rule of law.

Good governance involves, among others, transparency, responsibility, accountability, participation, and responsiveness to the needs of the people, which is probably why good governance is such a rare phenomena in public administrations. While governments are largely responsible for implementing good governance policies, they are not the only ones who hold sway in this process. External actors and structures also influence, either overtly or covertly, the model of governance.

In democracies, these external influences include members of the legislative assembly, judiciary, academics, civil society, special-interest groups, and lobbyists for internal and external powers, as well as formal and informal structures, all of whom, or which, could have a voice and a role in how government decisions are made and in how they are implemented.

In Kuwait, the government is represented by the political leadership and the cabinet, who are responsible for the process of formulating and implementing decisions. Other actors and structures influencing the outcome of these processes include the National Assembly, the Courts, and members of civil society, which encompasses social organizations, business

interests, religious leaders, and the media, as well as foreign influences.

Catering to the confluence and divergence of interests and pressures by this varied group of influencers means that the government has a hard time making and implementing decisions that are in the best interests of all people, all the time. Aware of the saying that 'attempting to please everyone will result in pleasing no one', the government has on occasion responded to these pulls and pressures, by taking decisions that involve a trade-off. These decisions have invariably left one or more sections of society dissatisfied with the outcome.

Responsiveness to the needs and aspirations of people is crucial to strengthening good governance. Listening to the demands of the public, and striving to reach a broad consensus on contentious issues through discussions and mediations with different interest groups, is a hallmark of good governance. However, this necessitates the authorities to have a deep understanding of the historical, cultural and social contexts of the society, and awareness of the aspirations of people.

While finding complete consensus on controversial issues would be an ideal form of practicing good governance, it is not a practical or effective way of reaching and implementing decisions. In today's world, good governance necessitates being consensus-oriented, but not consensus-constrained. But, even if gaining buy-in from all stakeholders on controversial issues is not feasible, it is important to ensure that policies, reforms and decisions taken are not wilfully or unwittingly discriminatory towards specific sections of society.

Unfortunately, this is what occurred last week in parliament. As part of its accommodative stance to ensure cooperation and collaboration from legislators, the government last week rushed through a new bill on election reforms and the setting up of an election commission. The bill was promptly and overwhelmingly endorsed by the National Assembly last Thursday.

One would have expected that a bill of

such purport, which could have far-reaching consequences for the country and its political and social life, would be duly deliberated by experts, academia and in the public domain before being presented to parliament, let alone being voted upon at such notice. Admittedly, earlier in the week, the government had announced that it would submit a bill on parliamentary elections and on setting up the election commission, following an agreement reached by the government-parliamentary coordination committee. The bill stipulates that the election commission would function under jurisdictions of the minister of justice and oversee the organization of the electoral process and monitor the polls. It would also be tasked with examining legality of nominations for the parliamentary elections, setting rules for electoral campaigns, regulating election expenses and funding resources and time to be dedicated fairly for the candidates in the audio-visual media.

The supreme commission will also be mandated to receive complaints from voters, nominees and involved organizations and report to the public prosecution regarding any suspected crime during the electoral process. It will also be tasked to declare the election results and preparing an assessment of the general elections, with a copy of this report submitted to the minister of justice and to the head of the supreme judicial council.

Unsurprisingly, once provisions in the bill on parliamentary elections and the setting up of an election commission was elucidated in public, it came in for criticism from many quarters, including by several women's associations and civil society organizations. In a joint statement last week, women's groups voiced their opposition and called for the immediate elimination of Article 16 of the bill that requires women to comply with rules and provisions of Islamic law in order to exercise their voting and candidacy rights.

The statement pointed out that Article 16 of the proposed law not only contradicts Article 35 of the Constitution that guarantees

absolute freedom of belief and the right to practice religious rituals according to customs, but also the fundamental and civil rights of women. Moreover, it was gender discriminatory as it did not ask for such compliance from men candidates. The statement also noted that the Constitutional Court in its ruling in 2009 had upheld the constitution's rejection of such restrictive and conflicting ideas.

In further developments, lawmakers also agreed on amending some provisions of Law No. 14 of 1973 that established the constitutional court. The amendments, which received near unanimous support from legislators, stipulates that in "all cases that come before it, the constitutional court may not consider the decrees on dissolving the National Assembly, and the call for elections after the result is declared".

The modifications also immunize the National Assembly after the voting process, and organizes the time and rules for appeals on the two decrees — dissolving the parliament and the calling for election separately. For his part, the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Faleh Al-Rguba, said the government supports the amendments, and that the modifications could help end the appeals submitted to the constitutional court over the last year.

Amendments to parliamentary elections, the setting up of an election commission, and the curbing of powers of the constitutional court could have far-reaching consequences for the country over the coming period. These are also likely to be contentious topics that reverberate in social discussions and in academic and political deliberations in the days and weeks ahead.

One can only hope that the government, which has built its reputation on good governance in public life, will take heed of these public discourses. And that the authorities will ensure the plans, policies and reforms it seeks to implement through parliamentary consensus, do not come at the expense of the aspirations of large sections of the public, and more importantly, it does not discriminate against specific groups in society.

National Assembly endorses supreme election commission

During a special session of parliament held on 27 July, to examine a bill on national assembly elections, legislators overwhelmingly approved establishment of the 'supreme general commission for elections' in the first-reading.

The bill, which seeks to reform the electoral process through additional legalities and create an environment that allows for free honest and transparent elections, was passed by 56 out of the 57 MPs attending the session.

The bill stipulates that the election commission would function under jurisdictions of the minister of justice and oversee the organization of the electoral process and monitor the polls. It would also be tasked with examining legality of nominations for the parliamentary elections, setting rules for electoral campaigns, regulating elections' expenses and funding resources and time to be dedicated fairly for the candidates in the audio-visual media.

The supreme commission, which would group seven Kuwaiti judges for a four-year mandate, would also regulate the role of civil societies and international agencies in monitoring the electoral process. The commission will also be mandated to receive complaints from voters, nominees and involved organizations and report to the public prosecution with respect of any suspected crime during the electoral process.

In addition, the commission will be tasked with declaring the election results and preparing a report about its assessment of the general elections, with a copy of this assessment submitted to the minister of justice and to the head of the supreme judicial council.

Women's groups decry infringements on rights of women

Several women's groups in the country have jointly voiced their opposition to tampering with their constitutional, political and social rights and their civil liberties by some members in the National Assembly. They note that rather than concentrate on crucial national issues that need urgent addressing, some deputies appear to be prioritizing personal matters.

The associations pointed out that recent developments within the National Assembly pose a threat to the hard-won achievements of Kuwaiti women and their freedoms. Specifically, they highlight the proposed draft law for the establishment of the General Elections Commission, wherein Article 16 requires women to adhere to specific rules and provisions.

They argue that this contradicts not only Article 35 of the Constitution, which guarantees absolute freedom of belief and the right to practice religious rituals according to customs, but also the fundamental rights of women. They further highlighted that in its ruling in 2009 the Constitutional Court had upheld the constitution's rejection of such restrictive and conflicting ideas.

They assert that the essence of Kuwait's constitution is rooted in the openness of Kuwaiti society, empowering women and respecting their choices. Consequently, they demand a thorough review of the draft law and the elimination of Article 16 from it.

The women's associations also expressed their objections to a proposal by some MPs to prohibit women from serving as judges, citing Sharia's alleged prohibition of women's guardianship. They pointed out that the modern judiciary has



evolved beyond individual guardianship and now operates within an institutional framework, making the religious prohibition of women's judicial positions irrelevant. They stressed that this issue has already been resolved, and many qualified women currently hold the role of judges. Thus, they urged the rejection of any further discussion on this matter.

Moreover, the women's societies argued that Kuwaiti women should not be continuously engaged in struggles to obtain even the most basic rights and then have to fight again to preserve those achievements. They condemned certain members of the National Assembly who focus on curtailing personal freedoms, introducing irrelevant matters for discussion, such as regulations on plastic surgery and tattoos, contrary to Article 30 of the Constitution, which guarantees personal freedom.

Among the women's association who signed the statement were the Women's Social Cultural Association; Kuwait Alumni Association; Kuwaiti Social Association; Development Entrepreneurship Association; Kuwaiti Society for National Fraternity; National Association for

Family Safety,

Meanwhile, the Sami Al-Munaees Cultural Forum strongly opposed any attempt to undermine the constitutional and political rights of Kuwaiti women, considering it unacceptable. In a media statement the forum emphasized that electoral reforms should not be achieved by sacrificing the constitutional rights of voters.

The forum recognized that it was important for electoral processes to undergo reform and modernization in terms of frameworks, systems, institutions, plans, administration, and operations. However, they insist that these reforms must adhere to constitutional controls and rights and not backtrack on the gains that have expanded political participation of women.

Regarding the government draft law on the elections of National Assembly members and the establishment of the General Elections Commission, the forum highlights Article 16, which requires women to comply with the rules and provisions of Islamic law to exercise their voting and candidacy rights. The forum points out that since 1973, Kuwaiti women have had equal rights to participate in elections as both candidates and voters. Thus, they strongly opposed any move to roll back these rights.

The forum called on all civil society organizations, especially those supporting women's and societal issues, and political groups to raise their objections to the law. They emphasized that silence on this matter may be interpreted as endorsing the exclusion of Kuwaiti women from their constitutional and political rights, which they view as an unacceptable act of apostasy.



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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Press Freedom on Trial in Guatemala



**Christophe Deloire
and Jose C. Zamora**

Christophe Deloire is Secretary-General of Reporters Without Borders (RSF).
José C. Zamora is the son of jailed *elPeriódico* publisher José Rubén Zamora.



The prosecution alleged that Zamora tried to launder the equivalent of \$38,000, a donation he received to keep *elPeriódico* afloat. The newspaper, which Zamora founded in 1996, was forced to shut down in May after enduring nearly two decades of threats, intimidation, arbitrary judicial proceedings, and cyberattacks. Apart from Zamora, nine journalists who were associated with the newspaper have also been charged

with obstructing justice. Fearing for their safety, most of them have fled the country. Two of Zamora's lawyers have also been arrested and charged with submitting false evidence.

When representatives from Reporters Without Borders (RSF) managed to visit Zamora in prison in May, the 66-year-old publisher appeared physically and psychologically frail. He has lost 16 kilograms (35 pounds) as a result of being confined to a ten-square-meter cell in complete isolation with just one hour of access to sunlight per day. After enduring several episodes of physical and psychological torture, ranging from sleep deprivation to an insect infestation in his cell, he trusted only the food brought by his family during visiting days, which he stored in a cooler. But Zamora's wife and children, fearing possible arrest, have since fled Guatemala.

Journalists in Guatemala have been operating in an increasingly hostile and violent environment for years, with reporters and outlets — particularly those investigating political corruption — routinely harassed and intimidated. Before his July 2022 arrest, Zamora faced numerous threats and assaults due to his investigative work. In 2003, he was held hostage in his home after uncovering links between the Guatemalan military and organized crime groups. In 2008, shortly after *elPeriódico* reported that one of Guatemala's major political parties had received funding from drug traffickers, Zamora was kidnapped, drugged, tortured, and then dumped by the side of a road.

But the attacks on Guatemalan journalists have escalated since former President Jimmy Morales took office in 2016. The country currently ranks 127th (out of 180) in RSF's Press Freedom Index. In 2021, *elPeriódico* reported that current President Alejandro Giammattei had accepted bribes from Russian businessmen in exchange for mining permits. The story triggered a wave of subsequent revelations and evolved into an international corruption scandal dubbed "The Russian Plot" (La Trama Rusa). This provoked Giammattei's ire and led to a fresh wave of assaults and arbitrary legal proceedings against both the newspaper's staff and Zamora himself.

Against the backdrop of the Guatemalan government's growing authoritarianism, Zamora's relentless fight to prove his innocence has turned him into a powerful symbol of democratic resistance. Every Guatemalan journalist, from community-based indigenous reporters to the owners of media outlets that once competed with *elPeriódico*, recognizes Zamora's conviction as part of a government-led effort to restrict press freedom. As one reporter told RSF, "If the owner of a major newspaper has been persecuted and unjustly convicted, literally all of us are at risk."

With one of the country's most prominent journalists behind bars and the judiciary col-

luding with the government to criminalize journalism, self-censorship could soon become the norm. After all, the real goal of Zamora's trial is to suppress independent journalism and preserve a culture of elite impunity. The purpose of the crackdown on *elPeriódico*, which published more than 150 articles about government corruption and the links between the state and private-sector entities, was to intimidate other media outlets into toeing the line.

The report on May's international press freedom observation mission to Guatemala, in which RSF participated, starkly illustrates how Zamora's case is being used to send a chilling message to all Guatemalan journalists who dare to challenge those in power. The report highlights numerous instances when journalists have been charged with crimes for reporting on corruption or covering the trials of corrupt public figures and politicians. According to the Guatemalan Journalists Association, threats and intimidation have forced at least 20 journalists to flee the country in recent years. Former anti-corruption judges and prosecutors have faced a similar fate.

All this is happening at a time of political upheaval in Guatemala after the first round of the country's presidential election was marred by

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Journalists in Guatemala have been operating in an increasingly hostile and violent environment for years, with reporters and outlets — particularly those investigating political corruption — routinely harassed and intimidated.

”

the disqualification of multiple candidates and various legal maneuvers. For example, following anti-corruption candidate Bernardo Arévalo's unexpected second-place finish, a court ruling suspended his party's legal status, and police raided its headquarters, ostensibly on behalf of Giammattei's allies. Guatemalan democracy is already at risk, and the crackdown on journalism is pushing it perilously close to the edge.

At this pivotal moment, we urge the Guatemalan authorities to stop criminalizing journalism. This includes dropping all charges against targeted journalists, overturning Zamora's conviction, and ordering his immediate release.

In the meantime, we call on journalists and media-freedom activists worldwide to advocate for their Guatemalan colleagues and demand Zamora's release. The targeted persecution of *elPeriódico*'s journalists and the newspaper's subsequent closure have severely eroded the Guatemalan public's right to know what their government is doing. The blatant abuse of the judicial system to stifle independent journalism must not be tolerated. When a government systematically undermines press freedom, all other freedoms are in jeopardy.



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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

America's Higher-Education Financing Challenge



Cecilia Elena Rouse

A former chair of US President Joe Biden's Council of Economic Advisers, is Professor in the Economics of Education and Professor of Economics and Public Affairs at Princeton University.

Some 44 million Americans currently owe \$1.6 trillion in student loan debt, and more than seven million of them were in default prior to the pandemic repayment pause. Since this crushing burden is associated with reduced homeownership, degraded credit ratings, and delayed marriage and child-bearing, lawmakers and advocates have pushed for blanket student loan forgiveness. However, a recent effort by the Biden administration to cancel \$430 billion of student-loan debt was struck down by the Supreme Court as unconstitutional.

While much of the public focus has been on the Court's ruling, a one-time loan cancellation was never going to be a lasting solution to the ongoing challenge of financing higher education in the United States. We still need to figure out how to help students invest in their education without saddling them with crushing debt in the first place. A critical step forward would be to replace the existing system with a standard repayment plan that aligns payments with a borrower's ability to pay.

Funding for post-secondary education in the US comes from the public sector (state and local appropriations and federal grants and contracts) as well as from private gifts and contracts, with the remainder covered by student tuition and fees. But an underappreciated fact is that state and local contributions have not kept pace with

the increase in cost. In 1980, tuition and fees paid by students represented only 13 percent of the cost of education at public institutions; by 2020, this share had risen to nearly 20 percent. Students and their families have increasingly borrowed to cover the cost.

There are many proposals for making higher education more affordable, such as offering free (two-year) community college or eliminating student loans altogether. Given that post-secondary schooling yields benefits for all of society — through greater tax contributions, higher productivity, reduced dependence on the social welfare system, and so forth — some public subsidization of the cost of higher education makes sense.

“Post-secondary schooling yields benefits for all of society, through greater tax contributions, higher productivity, reduced dependence on social welfare, and so forth, so some public subsidization of the cost of higher education makes sense.”

At the same time, it also makes sense for students to bear some responsibility for a share of the cost of the education they acquire. After all, post-secondary education and training are well known to increase the likelihood of being employed, boost lifetime earnings, improve health outcomes, and offer other benefits to the individual. Given the substantial private return, it is appropriate that loans remain in the financial-aid portfolio.

But the standard federal student loan under the existing program does not align with the economic realities of post-secondary schooling and the labor market. And, though education is a risky investment that does not pay off for everyone, students face complex and limited options for reducing repayment burdens and are prohibited from discharging the debt

through bankruptcy.

Equally important, the standard repayment plan expects students to repay their loans over the first ten years of their careers, before most have hit their peak earnings. Even for those whose investment pays off over time, the financial burden may be too high during the repayment period.

Aiming to solve these problems, Congress and the Department of Education have, over time, created several income-driven repayment (IDR) programs — a bipartisan idea that dates to the mid-twentieth century, when it was endorsed by economists Milton Friedman and James Tobin alike. Unlike a mortgage, which requires borrowers to pay a predetermined

amount each month, IDR plans set the payment at a percentage of borrowers' income. Set optimally, borrowers repay their loans on average, but should they fall on hard times or select an occupation that does not pay well (such as working in the public sector), they can repay what they can of their loans without undue financial hardship.

Given these merits, it is not surprising that many economists have advocated for such programs. But the existing plans are not optimally designed. Borrowers must opt into an IDR over the standard repayment plan. Payments are based on the prior year's income, which means they do not seamlessly adjust to changes in borrowers' earnings and employment circumstances. Nor do they automatically adjust to borrowers'

current hardships, necessitating complicated forbearance and deferment rules and requiring annual recertification. Further, the plans have different eligibility rules, payment rates, repayment periods, and definitions of discretionary income. As a result, choosing a plan is so confusing that to date only a minority of eligible borrowers take advantage of them.

As a stopgap measure, the Biden administration has introduced Saving on a Valuable Education (SAVE), an even larger, more generous IDR plan than the existing options. The hope is that the new program will be so obviously advantageous that more students will sign up for it, rather than stick with the traditional plan.

But SAVE is far from perfect. It will not be the default plan, and it still bases payments on the past year's income. As a result, it is not clear how effective it will be at addressing the country's student-debt crisis and higher-education financing challenges.

More to the point, SAVE is an expensive plan layered on top of a labyrinth of other student-loan options. That brings us to the larger problem: the Department of Education cannot simply eliminate plans created by Congress. Genuinely transforming federal student loans requires Congress to phase out all existing IDR plans and replace them with a well-structured IDR plan as the default. Ideally, such a plan would be administratively straightforward and designed to encourage students to assume a responsible level of debt to pay for valuable education programs.

Structured properly, an IDR plan helps to address one of the biggest challenges in higher-education financing in a way that does not unfairly burden taxpayers or saddle students with unmanageable debt. While even a well-designed IDR would not solve all the problems in the financing of higher education in the US, making IDR the default repayment plan for student loans would be a huge improvement, and is a reform that both parties should be able to get behind.

EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

The Multilateral Development Banks the World Needs



Lawrence H. Summers and N.K. Singh

Lawrence H. Summers was Chief Economist of the World Bank (1991-93), US Secretary of the Treasury (1999-2001), Director of the US National Economic Council (2009-10), and President of Harvard University (2001-06), where he is currently University Professor.

N.K. Singh, Chairman of India's Fifteenth Finance Commission, is President of the Institute of Economic Growth, a former member of Parliament, and former secretary to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The world is literally on fire this summer. Experts estimate that another COVID-level public health threat is likely to emerge in the next generation. Rising interest rates have left dozens of countries with unmanageable debt burdens. And for the first time in nearly half a century, the global economy is fracturing rather than coming together.

These realities shaped the recommendations that we have just made to the G20 through a special expert group on development financing (which we co-chair). Our central conclusion is that this uniquely challenging moment requires a dramatic transformation of the operations of the multilateral development banks (MDBs), starting with the World Bank. Even as developing countries face much larger financing needs to meet development and climate goals, MDBs' disbursements have not kept pace, and the degree to which they now transfer resources to developing countries is unacceptably low.

While most institutions, most of the time, aim for a gradual strengthening of their scale and effectiveness, MDBs have been stuck in place. We must move past sterile debates about whether we need more money or better policy, more green initiatives or more development spending, more public-sector programs or more private lending, more leverage or more capital. The language of 'both/and' must replace that of 'either/or'. To that end, we are calling for action on three fronts.

First, the MDBs should embrace a triple mandate by adding global public goods (GPGs) to their current goals of eliminating extreme

poverty and boosting shared prosperity. That will mean fleshing out the policies and procedures needed to integrate their climate and development agendas. By clarifying and formally committing to these objectives, MDBs can better design and execute programs to address GPGs (such as climate mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity, water security, and pandemic preparedness) rapidly and at scale.

Turning to middle-income countries, about

provide an additional \$30 billion per year in grants and concessional funding for low-income countries (LICs). That would allow for a threefold increase in the International Development Association's funding by 2030, which is essential for helping LICs fulfill their development goals, manage global shocks, and pursue strong adaptation and resilience plans within sustainable debt frameworks. It would also alleviate LICs' concerns that an expanded mandate for the MDBs would come at the expense of the support they need to pursue economic and human development.

been disappointing: on average, MDBs leverage only 60 cents of private capital for every dollar they commit, well below their potential. For the last six years, their collective direct and indirect mobilization of private finance has been stuck at \$60-70 billion per year.

Contrast that sum with the half-trillion dollars needed from the private sector to help close financing gaps. MDBs should aim at least to double their mobilization and commitment ratios by addressing key challenges such as local-currency risk, policy and regulatory risk, a lack of bankable projects, and insufficient risk capital. Above all, stronger risk appetites at the MDBs will be key to success.

Third, a coalition of funders (including governments, philanthropies, and the private sector) should establish a new "global challenges mechanism" that offers a range of financing options, such as guarantees, equity, and other risk-sharing instruments. This is needed to address a pervasive MDB shortcoming: the underuse of non-lending instruments (like guarantees) for sovereign and non-sovereign borrowers. Such tools have become especially relevant in today's volatile economic climate.

The MDBs are the right vehicles for supporting our planet and its people. They alone provide the necessary combination of expertise, staying power, low-cost financing, leverage, and knowledge-sharing capabilities. But to help transform the future for developing countries, the MDBs must first transform themselves. That means embracing a wholesale culture of change to become more client-responsive, and to operate better together, including through joint financing, risk sharing, and standard-setting.

We recognize that implementing our proposed agenda demands strong political leadership and the ability to stay the course. But we would point out that there is no other choice. The future of our planet and its people is at stake.

“We must move past sterile debates about whether we need more money or better policy, more green initiatives or more development spending, more public-sector programs or more private lending, more leverage or more capital.”

Second, stakeholders should provide MDBs with the requisite resources. By our calculations, sustainable lending levels at the MDBs need to triple by 2030, rising to about \$400 billion annually. This includes grants and concessional finance for the poorest countries, non-concessional funding for creditworthy middle-income countries, and resources for mobilizing private finance.

A top priority is to persuade donors to

half of the amount needed to support a tripling of lending levels can be generated by the MDBs themselves through more efficient use of existing capital. But the other half will require a new round of general capital increases. Fortunately, this mechanism requires that donors pay in only a few cents on the dollar, offering excellent value for money. Every donor dollar could yield \$7 in new sovereign lending and another \$8 in the direct and indirect mobilization of private capital. But even with a major increase in MDB lending, official assistance will fall far short of what is needed. Private capital must fill the gap. The good news is that most MDBs have departments designed to catalyze private finance in a range of sectors, including energy, health, agriculture, financial inclusion, and infrastructure.

The bad news is that their track record has



EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

AI's Pugwash Moment



Gernot Wagner

A climate economist at
Columbia Business School.

Climate change is no longer a future problem. It is here, and the effects are all around. Worse, today's extreme weather events are just a preview of the pain that awaits humanity in the coming decades, almost regardless of how fast we manage to decarbonize the economy this year or next.

Such sobering observations tend to provoke arguments about the importance of 'climate optimism'. Pessimism, after all, demotivates. Martin Luther King, Jr. had a dream, not a nightmare, for the future his children would inhabit.

I typically join these calls for optimism. The accelerating pace of the clean-energy race is heartening, as is the emergence of positive socio-economic feedback loops to match all the negative ones associated with climatic tipping points. Still, while the pace of clean-energy deployment is faster than it has ever been, the world overall is racing in the wrong direction — global greenhouse-gas emissions are still rising.

So, how should we talk about this challenge, with these two dynamics tugging in opposite directions?

One answer is to embrace the language of risks and uncertainties. Not too long ago, those resisting climate action were the ones playing up the issue of uncertainty. The 'merchants of doubt' — marginal scientists and other commentators in hock to the fossil-fuel industry — focused on our lack of complete knowledge to challenge the strengthening consensus around anthropogenic climate change. Uncertainty



was their friend. But for the rest of us, it is public enemy number one. The unknowns and unknowables are what make climate change such an urgent problem.

Over the past few decades, advances in climate science and economics have helped to quantify more climate-related uncertainties. This progress has been both helpful and alarming, because it has further underscored just how dangerous those uncertainties truly are.

Above all, it shows that we need climate action not only to keep relatively slow-moving averages from increasing further, but — even more importantly — to keep uncertainties in check. The floods, droughts, wildfires, and other extreme climate-driven phenomena are what make the problem so costly. Conversely, climate policymaking that cuts off the tail end of the extreme-weather distribution should be regarded as a major success.

Sometimes, this will literally mean taking out insurance against the worst phenomena. Insur-

ance mandates, for example, would compel homeowners to account for the cost of floods and wildfires when deciding where to live. As the price of homeowner's insurance rises in disaster-prone areas, mandates could become one of the most effective ways to encourage climate-change adaptation.

Similarly, investments in low-carbon energy sources are often best viewed as investments in resilience — and thus in decreased uncertainty. Lowering one's average carbon footprint ought to be valued and appropriately rewarded. But whether you are installing solar panels on your roof, using a battery pack as backup storage, or switching to a heat pump and induction stove, the biggest payoff comes in extreme circumstances, or the lack thereof.

The solar panels and battery packs will ensure that your lights stay on even if the grid goes down because of extreme weather. Similarly, a heat pump and induction stove will allow you to cut off your gas line and declare in-

dependence from future gas supply shocks that directly affect your heating bill. (The indirect effect via the electric bill points immediately back to solar panels and battery packs, and it further reinforces the urgency to decarbonize the overall electric grid.)

The cost of solar and all-electric appliances will only decline over time, whereas natural gas and oil markets will continue to fluctuate, owing to the vagaries of geopolitics and the global economy. A surefire way to prevent 'fossil-inflation' is to get off fossil fuels altogether.

What is true for homeowners also is true for whole economies. Less dependence on fossil fuels means less uncertainty. True, the clean-energy transition also relies on potentially volatile commodities like copper, lithium, and other critical minerals. But there are crucial differences between these and fossil fuels. For one, the millions of tons of material going into clean technologies are orders of magnitude smaller than the billions of tons of fossil fuels being burned every year. And still better technologies with ever-lower costs are likely to emerge as we rapidly climb the learning curve on clean-energy solutions.

The trend lines support a cautiously optimistic outlook on the clean-energy future. But there are plenty of hurdles still to overcome, many of them erected and propped up by fossil-fuel incumbents trying to delay the inevitable. There is also plenty of climate-driven pain and destruction still in store. Things will get worse before they get better.

But even if we can no longer prevent climate change, we can still mitigate it by minimizing the accompanying uncertainties. We must embrace these uncertainties for what they are: a wake-up call to prevent the worst. Climate risk is financial risk, and climate action is an insurance policy — for the world as much as for individual companies and for us as individuals.

LIFESTYLE

Visceral fat, the silent killer

Ask Mira: Eating Right to Live Happy & Healthy

Visceral fat, also known as intra-abdominal fat, is the type of fat that surrounds the important organs in the abdominal cavity. Unlike subcutaneous fat, which lies just beneath the skin and can be pinched, visceral fat cannot be easily measured and poses a more significant health risk.

Some studies show if you have a more 'apple-shaped' than 'pear-shaped' you may have more visceral fat. 'Apple-shaped' describes people with ample waists and a tendency to gain weight in their abdomens. 'Pear-shaped' folks have smaller waists and carry their extra pounds in the hips, thighs and butt.

Research has also shown a direct link between visceral fat and various health issues, making it crucial to understand the role of nutrition in managing this dangerous fat. Excessive visceral fat has been associated with an increased risk of several chronic diseases, including type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and certain cancers.

Unlike subcutaneous fat, visceral fat releases hormones and chemicals that lead to insulin resistance and body inflammation.

The best way to reduce visceral



fat is through losing weight and diet. Here are a few ways of cutting down visceral fat:

Caloric Intake Control: One of the primary factors contributing to the accumulation of visceral fat is excessive caloric intake. Consuming more calories than the body needs leads to weight gain, including the storage of visceral fat. A balanced diet with appropriate portion control is essential to maintain a healthy weight and reduce the risk of visceral fat accumulation.

Nutrient-Rich Foods: Eating a nutrient-dense diet provides the body with essential vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. These nutrients help

support overall health and may play a role in reducing inflammation and oxidative stress, which are associated with visceral fat accumulation.

Limiting Added Sugars and Refined Carbohydrates: Diets high in added sugars and refined carbohydrates, such as sugary beverages, sweets, and processed foods, have been linked to

an increase in visceral fat. Replacing these unhealthy choices with whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and lean proteins can help control visceral fat levels.

Healthy Fats: Not all fats are harmful. Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, found in foods like avocados, nuts, seeds, and oily fish, are considered heart-healthy and may help reduce visceral fat levels when consumed as part of a balanced diet.

Regular Exercise: While nutrition plays a crucial role in managing visceral fat, it is essential to complement it with regular physical activity. Exercise helps burn calories, reduces overall body fat, and may specifically target visceral fat. Combining a balanced diet with an active lifestyle enhances the chances of effectively managing visceral fat.

Visceral fat is a silent killer if not treated. Prioritizing the above lifestyle changes will not only enhance physical appearance but also promote longevity and better quality of life.

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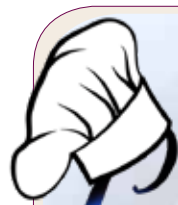


Mira is a go-to source for nutrition and wellness and has joined The Times Kuwait team in a new weekly column discussing nutrition and answering queries. You can send in your questions to infotimeskuwait@gmail.com

Thought “ for the week

Dreaming is the
beginning of getting
everything you want.

- Annette White



Binu's

Saco tuna salad with quail egg

La Salade Niçoise is a French salad that is reputed to have originated in the French city of Nice and is traditionally made of tomatoes, hard-boiled eggs, olives, and anchovy filets, typically dressed with olive oil. Other common ingredients include tuna (canned or fresh), onions, garlic, green beans, capers, and artichoke hearts. The original salad was made without anchovies or lettuce. The addition of these ingredients may have been influenced by the popularity of Caesar salad in France during the 1930s and an increase in the availability of canned tuna and New World produce.

Fresh tuna has the most protein by weight and is at the top of the list of commercially available, high protein fish. The fish is easy to prepare and enjoy whether seared, baked, or even raw in sushi or sashimi. Even canned tuna, a more convenient option, contains 25.5g of protein per serving.

Serving: 4 portions

Ingredients:

- Tuna 380g
- Quail egg 4
- Keniya green beans 50g
- Tomato 50g
- New potato 80g
- Cucumber 80g
- Capsicum green 60g
- Olive black 40g
- Lettuce romaine 80g
- For dressing
- Olive oil 30ml
- Salt 5g
- Pepper 5g
- Sugar 5g

- Mustard 5g
- Vinegar 5ml
- Lime juice 40ml
- Honey for taste
- Rosemary 5g
- Water for consistency.

Instructions:

For salad:

- Wash and set aside all the vegetable ingredients
- Dice the cucumber, tomato, capsicum into small pieces
- Wedge the potato and marinate with salt, pepper, and olive oil
- Roast the potato and set aside
- Cut and blanch the beans so it retains its green color
-]Bring water to boil in a pot, add baking soda or salt and boil the quail eggs for exactly 2 minutes, and immediately transfer to a bowl of ice water to cool

For dressing:

- Place all the ingredients together in a bowl and mix well
- Check for taste; the salad should have a sweet and sour taste, add seasoning to taste. Garnish with finely chopped rosemary.

For serving:

- Toss all vegetables in the dressing until well mixed
- Arrange the vegetables on a clean plate, and place half-cut quail eggs and lettuce on top. Sprinkle more dressing on top before serving.



Creative, enthusiastic and with a passion for food, Chef Binu Joseph is currently Chef at The Regency Hotel Kuwait. With over 17 years of experience serving in luxury five-star properties in the region, Chef Joseph has an in-depth knowledge in preparing multiple cuisines, including Arabic, Asian, American, Continental and Indian dishes. In addition, his culinary skills in putting his own

stamp on traditional dishes to create new combinations of flavors, textures and tastes allows him to prepare dishes that meet the tastes of the most discerning patrons. Chef Joseph now brings his versatility and 5-star culinary creativity to the pages of The Times Kuwait, with simple recipes that anyone can prepare using ingredients that are readily available in Kuwait.

IYM 2023

As the promotion of millets during the International Year of Millets (IYM) gathers pace, millet-based dishes are increasing in popularity. Here is a new take on traditional sushi, using proso millets infused with fruits to deliver a unique taste.

Hakka Noodles with Finger Millet Flour



Hakka noodles made of finger-millet flour is a very healthy item that can go into the lunch pack of kids, or as an energy-filled breakfast food in the morning. Finger millet is considered one of the most nutritious grains. The vitamins, minerals, and fiber found in finger millet, such as potassium, and the B vitamins provide several important health benefits, including in lowering the risk of heart disease, and helping prevent blood sugar levels spiking after a meal

Total time: 30-40 minutes

Serving: 2

Ingredients:

*For the dough:

- 1 cup finger-millet flour
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1 tsp oil
- 1 cup water
- *For stir fry:
- 2 tbsp sesame oil
- 1 medium sliced onion
- 1/4 cup green bell pepper
- 1 tsp green chili chopped
- 1 tsp ginger (finely chopped)
- 1 tsp garlic (finely chopped)
- 1/4 cup carrot Julian
- 1/4 cup shredded cabbage
- 1 tbsp tomato ketchup
- 1 tsp soy sauce
- 1 tsp chili sauce
- 1/4 tsp black pepper powder
- 1/2 tsp chili flakes
- Pinch of sugar
- 1 tsp vinegar
- 1 spring onion for garnishing

Instructions:

- Bring 1 cup water to boil in a pan
- Add salt, oil and flour to the pan and mix well
- Turn off the flame, cover, and let it sit for 7 minutes
- Once the mixture cools, knead it gently on a kitchen top to form soft dough
- Place the dough in a noodle mold and press out the noodles
- Using a steamer vessel, steam the noodles for 10 minutes
- Remove noodles and set aside to cool
- In the meantime heat oil in a pan, add onion, garlic, ginger, chili and saute for 2 minutes. Add the remaining vegetable and saute well until the veggies turn tender.
- Add in the sauces, spices and mix well before adding the noodles
- Gently toss the mixture, garnish with spring onion and serve hot



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

Meet Dr. AI, the new doctor in town

ChatGPT, the artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot developed by OpenAI and launched in November 2022, is now proving to be quite adept at responding to healthcare related queries by people. Studies indicate that the responses provided by ChatGPT are nearly indistinguishable from those provided by human healthcare providers.

A new study by researchers at New York University's (NYU) Tandon School of Engineering and Grossman School of Medicine reveals that artificial intelligence powered chatbots have the potential to become effective partners for healthcare providers to communicate with their patients.

For their study, the researchers provided around 400 people aged 18 and above with responses to health related questions from patients. Half of the responses were generated by a human healthcare provider and the other half by ChatGPT.

Participants in the study were asked to identify the source of each response, and to rate their trust in the ChatGPT responses using a 5-point scale from completely untrustworthy to completely trustworthy.

The study found people have limited ability to distinguish between chatbot and human-generated responses. On average, participants correctly identified chatbot responses 65.5 percent of the time and provider responses 65.1 percent of the time, with ranges of 49 percent to 86 percent surety for different questions. Results remained consistent no matter the demographic categories of the respondents.

The study found participants mildly trust responses by chatbots overall (3.4 average score), with lower trust when the health-

related complexity of the task in question was higher. Logistical questions (e.g. scheduling appointments, insurance questions) had the highest trust rating (3.94 average score), followed by preventative care (e.g. vaccines, cancer screenings, 3.52 average score). Diagnostic and treatment advice had the lowest trust ratings (scores 2.90 and 2.89, respectively).

According to the researchers, the study highlights the possibility that chatbots can assist in patient-provider communication particularly related to administrative tasks and common chronic disease management. Further research is needed, however, around the ability of chatbots to take on more clinical roles.

However, researchers behind the study warned that both patients and healthcare providers should remain cautious and exercise critical judgment when curating chatbot-generated advice due to the limitations and potential biases of current AI models.

On a related note, researchers behind a separate, international multi-disciplinary collaborative study on artificial intelligence (AI) noted that it would soon be possible to predict our risk of developing serious health conditions later in life, with the aid of AI powered software.

Studies, led by researchers at Edith Cowan University's (ECU) School of Science and School of Medical and Health Sciences in the United States, along with their counterparts in other universities and research centers in the US and Canada, led to the development of an AI software that could detect abdominal aortic calcification (AAC) much more faster than current methods.

Abdominal aortic calcification is a medical condition caused by calcium buildup, or



calcification, on the inner walls of the abdominal aorta, the main artery from the heart to the abdomen. Calcification in this blood vessel is a marker used by doctors to evaluate the risks associated with cardiovascular disease events such as heart attacks and stroke, as well as risks of falls, fractures and late-life dementia.

Currently, bone density machine scans that help detect osteoporosis are also used to detect AAC. But analysis of these scans to detect AAC requires highly trained experts, who could take anywhere up to 15 minutes to scan each image. Even the best of experts are able to analyze less than 30 images in an eight-hour work day. In contrast, researchers behind the new software say that their AI-enabled system could analyze up to 60,000 images in a single day.

The significant boost in efficiency from

the use of the new software is expected to speed up further research into AAC that could lead to new approaches in early detection of cardiovascular diseases, and in monitoring for the disease during routine clinical practice. Although the new software is not the first algorithm developed to assess AAC from scans, this study is the biggest of its kind and is the first to be tested in a real-world setting using images taken as part of routine bone density testing.

More than 5,000 images were analyzed by experts and the team's software. After comparing the results, the expert and software arrived at the same conclusion for the extent of AAC (low, moderate or high) 80 percent of the time — an impressive figure given it was the first version of the software. More importantly, only 3 percent of people deemed to have high AAC levels were incorrectly diagnosed to have low levels by the software. The small error level is notable considering that these are the individuals with the greatest extent of disease and highest risk of fatal and nonfatal cardiovascular events and all-cause mortality.

The researchers admitted that there was more work to be done on fine tuning their software to improve its accuracy compared to evaluations by trained practitioners.

Automated assessment of the presence and extent of AAC with similar accuracy to imaging specialists provides the possibility of large-scale screening for cardiovascular disease and other conditions, even before someone has any symptoms. This will allow people at risk to make the necessary lifestyle changes far earlier and put them in a better place to be healthier in their later years.



Gene variation protects against SARS-CoV-2

A new study shows why some people display no symptoms of COVID-19 despite being infected by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Researchers at the University of California say people who do not develop COVID-19 symptoms (asymptomatic) may have a genetic variation that helps their immune system to destroy the virus.

The study found that asymptomatic people are more than twice as likely as people who become symptomatic to carry the specific gene variation that protects them from SARS-CoV-2 virus. helps them obliterate the virus, according to a new study led by UC San Francisco researchers. The study provides the first evidence that there is a genetic basis for asymptomatic SARS-CoV-2.

The genetic variation was found to occur in the human leukocyte antigen (HLA), or protein markers that signal the immune system. A mutation in one of the genes coding for HLA, which was labeled HLA-B*15:01, appears to help the body's virus-killing T cells to identify SARS-CoV-2 early and launch a swift response, even if they have never encountered it before, thanks to its resemblance to the seasonal cold viruses they already know.

The genetic mutation was found to be relatively common, with 10 percent of the study participants carrying the mutated gene.

The mutation does not prevent the virus from infecting cells but, rather, prevents people from developing any of the COVID-19 symptoms, such as a runny nose or a sore throat.


For the study, the researchers recruited nearly 30,000 people who were also registered in a national HLA registry as donors for bone marrow transplants. The volunteers were tracked through the first year of the pandemic when vaccines for the disease were not yet available, and many people were undergoing routine COVID testing to find if they were infected. Researchers identified 1,428 unvaccinated donors who tested positive between February 2020 and the end of April 2021, before the vaccines were widely available and when it still took many days to get back test results. Of these, 136 individuals remained asymptomatic for at least two weeks before and after testing positive.


The researchers also found that 20 percent of people in the study who remained asymptomatic after infection carried at least one copy of the HLA-B*15:01 variant. Risk factors for severe COVID-19, like being older, overweight and having chronic diseases like diabetes also did not appear to play a role in who remained asymptomatic.

To figure out how HLA-B*15:01 managed to destroy the virus, the researchers collaborated with scientists at the La Trobe University in Australia. They homed in on the concept of T-cell memory, which is how the immune system remembers previous infections.

The researchers looked at T cells from people who carried HLA variant but had never been exposed to the SARS-CoV-2 virus, and found these cells still responded to a part of the novel coronavirus called the NQK-Q8 peptide. They concluded that exposure to some similar seasonal coronaviruses in the past, enabled T cells in these individuals to quickly recognize SARS-CoV-2 and mount a faster, more effective immune response.

The researchers said that their findings could potentially lead to identifying new ways of promoting immune protection against SARS-CoV-2, which could be used in future development of vaccines or drugs.





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