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Press freedom vital to vibrant democracies

By Reaven D'Souza
Executive Managing Editor

World Press Freedom Day observed each year on 3 May is an opportunity to raise awareness on the need for media freedom, access to information and the unfettered dissemination of news and views. The day also highlights the role of independent, free and ethical journalism, in building, promoting, and sustaining democratic societies around the world.

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas



through any media and regardless of frontiers." Ethical journalism and freedom of expression help empower people to make informed choices, and gain greater control of their lives, through social and political processes. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO),

freedom of expression is realized when there is a legal and regulatory environment to facilitate the emergence of an open and pluralistic media sector, as well as the political will to support it, and rule of law to protect it, .

Kuwait currently does not have an integrated media law. Plans by the government

to introduce one in August 2023 were shelved following opposition from lawmakers and criticism from large sections of the public. The draft media law had proposed to streamline existing media regulations — Press and Publishing Law, the Electronic Publishing Law, and the Audio-Visual Law — into an integrated media law.

The draft law included, among others, regulating prohibitions and penalties across all media outlets; limiting penalties to the perpetrator of the violation; canceling referral to any other law, and removing the penalty of revoking the license and closing down establishments that violate regulations. However, lawmakers said that the information ministry was attempting to play the role of the judiciary by introducing restrictions and deciding penalties on its own.

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Kuwait a key political partner to the Czech Republic, to EU



H. E. Jaroslav Siro, the Ambassador of Czech Republic to Kuwait, highlighted that the positive developments in the Gulf region create an opportunity for establishing closer institutional relations between the EU and the GCC countries.

Ambassador of the Czech Republic H.E. Jaroslav Siro, affirmed Kuwait's significance as a crucial political ally in the region for both the Czech Republic and the entire European Union (EU).

The ambassador was speaking during a ceremony organized by the Czech Embassy to mark the twentieth anniversary of the largest expansion of the European Union and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the accession of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland to NATO. The event was graced by the presence of Kuwait's Assistant Foreign Minister for European Affairs, Ambassador Sadeq Marafi, along with the Assistant Foreign Minister for International Organizations Affairs, Abdulaziz Saud Al-Jarallah, and the Director of the Regional Center for the NATO-Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, Muhammad Al-Arifan.

In his speech, Ambassador Siro emphasized the major international concerns and goals shared between Kuwait and his country, and stressed his country's strong support for close cooperation between the European Union, Kuwait, and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. He highlighted that the positive developments in the Gulf region create an opportunity for establishing closer institutional relations between the EU and the GCC countries.

He highlighted the significance of strategic cooperation between NATO and the State of



Kuwait, underlining Kuwait's role as a crucial partner in bolstering regional stability and security in the Gulf region. He pointed out that Kuwait joined the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative in 2004 and has since played an active role in addressing regional and international challenges. Furthermore, Kuwait has been hosting NATO's regional center since 2017.

Ambassador Siro mentioned that the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative Regional Center functions as a hub for enhancing practical collaboration between NATO and its Gulf partners across multiple domains, such as strategic analysis, civil preparedness, military cooperation, and public diplomacy. Its objective is to enhance mutual comprehension of security

challenges and, by promoting interoperability and standardization, facilitate closer cooperation. The recent General Conference on Climate Change and Security, jointly organized by the NATO Regional Center and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, underscores the strong ties between NATO and Kuwait.

For her part, Ambassador of the European Union to Kuwait, H.E. Anne Koistinen, mentioned that the 'Europe Team' in Kuwait, comprising the European Union delegation and 16 embassies of EU member states, is celebrating 'Europe Month' with various activities. She noted that this celebration of the European Union's expansion is one of its greatest successes.

Ambassador Koistinen added, "Twenty years ago, a new and larger European Union was born. At midnight on 1 May, 2004, celebrations commenced across the entire continent, with fireworks lighting up the skies of Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia to welcome the new members."

The ambassador added that due to the 2004 enlargement, the number of EU member states increased overnight from 15 to 25, and the number of official languages increased from 11 to 21, while the bloc's population grew by 75 million people. The ambassador explained that this event was a unique opportunity for Europe to continue uniting the previously divided continent and to expand the peace

project, which is essential to the existence of the European Union. This project, covering much of the continent, is based on a common set of values: democracy, the rule of law, and respect for fundamental freedoms and rights.

Ambassador Koistinen added, "It was not just the birth of a larger union; it was the birth of a new era. It was a promise, because Europe is a promise: the promise that all Europeans are capable of becoming masters of their own destiny. The promise of freedom, stability, peace, and prosperity was fulfilled in the 20 years that followed."

The ambassador explained that with the addition of ten new members, Europe achieved a genuine economic miracle. People and companies across Europe enjoyed new opportunities for studying, working, exporting, and investing in a broader union. The results were quickly evident, as some of the new member states experienced rapid economic growth, surpassing the growth rates of older European Union members.

Ambassador Koistinen said, "The ten countries now also play a very important role in shaping the European Union's response to global challenges. I thank the Eastern members for their resolute support for Ukraine, and I commend Cyprus' leadership in opening a sea corridor for aid to Gaza. Thanks to them, Europe's voice on the world stage is much stronger."



Civil Service Commission stresses confidentiality for employee data

Dhia Al-Qabandi, the Undersecretary of the Civil Service Commission, and Abeer Al-Faris, the Assistant Undersecretary for Information Systems, wrote in an official letter obtained by Al-Anbaa newspaper.

The letter titled "Electronic Correspondence and Integrated Systems Powers for Civil Service Bureau Affairs" highlighted the importance of confidentiality regarding financial and administrative information of Civil Service Bureau employees. They advised taking necessary measures to restrict powers for all the employees of the Civil Service Commission.

The letter explained that this pertains to the functional and financial data of bureau employees themselves. The authority is limited to those whose work nature requires access to this data and information, including, but not limited to, the Administrative Affairs, Financial Affairs, and Employment Affairs Oversight Unit of the bureau.

It added, provided that the names of the employees authorized to do so are determined by the director of the department, and if one of the bureau officials wishes to provide some powers, they will not be granted until they are presented to us to determine the extent of their need or not.

Fines of up to KD5,000 for unlicensed, unrenewed public ads

Muhammad Al-Mutairi, the official spokesman for Kuwait Municipality and Director of the Public Relations Department, has announced the launch of the "License Your Ad" campaign across all governorates, scheduled to begin in May.

He explained that the audit and follow-up teams of municipal services will intensify the field campaign to verify the validity of advertising licenses of all types 'commercial, introductory, construction, seasonal, and events' in implementation of the new advertising regulations.

He stated that the administration launched awareness advertisements on the screens of the main buildings of Kuwait Municipality. Additionally, the campaign was announced through road advertisements spread across all governorates. This included a media message directed to owners of advertisements whose licenses are issued by the service licensing departments in the municipality's branches in the governorates, stressing the necessity of licensing or



renewing advertisements of all types to avoid fines of up to 5,000 Kuwaiti dinars.

He pointed out that the supervisory teams, comprising advertising inspectors and general inspectors, will intensify their inspection tours on various advertisements. Violation reports will be issued if an advertisement is not issued or renewed, or if it violates the terms and controls of the advertising regulations. The financial fines stipulated in the regulations will be applied accordingly.

Belgian ambassador urges Kuwaiti businessmen to invest in Belgium

His Excellency Christian Domes, the Belgian Ambassador to the country, urged Kuwaiti businessmen to invest in Belgium. He emphasized "Belgium's strategic location in the heart of Europe, its highly skilled and multilingual workforce, and its excellent infrastructure."

Ambassador Domes highlighted "the advantage of the logistics services provided by the port of Antwerp, describing it as a significant plus. Additionally, he mentioned Belgium's interesting financial system."

During a ceremony commemorating the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Belgium and Kuwait, attended by diplomats, citizens, and members of the Belgian community, Ambassador Domes said, "My aim is to revitalize these relations and conduct mutual visits. He noted the significance of the meeting, especially as both foreign ministers have a history of interaction at international conferences but have not had direct bilateral discussions until now."

When asked about new memorandums of understanding, the ambassador emphasized that "the importance of following up on the work accomplished during the political consultations held in Kuwait last June." He highlighted "the need to assess the current status after six months



or a year, particularly regarding areas of progress such as cooperation in the medical field."

He added, "Some agreements, like the agreement to avoid double taxation, need updating. This agreement is crucial, and we are working to coordinate with the Kuwaiti side on this matter." When discussing military cooperation between the two countries, he mentioned, "There were naval training courses organized by the port of Antwerp, but they were halted during the COVID-19 pandemic." He also added, "We currently have two military personnel working at the Arifjan base as part of the international coalition to combat IS." He indicated his intention to discuss

with the Belgian military attaché, which is based in Abu Dhabi, the possibility of submitting offers to supply Kuwait with military equipment.

He confirmed that he would discuss the issue of student exchanges between the two countries' universities with Nawaf Al-Enezi, the Kuwaiti Ambassador to Belgium. Additionally, ambassador Domes expressed his desire to bring some Belgian artists to Kuwait.

During his speech at the ceremony, the Belgian ambassador stated that diplomatic relations between Kuwait and Belgium officially began in 1963. In 1964, Ambassador Willie Stevens presented his credentials to His Highness the Amir

of Kuwait, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, becoming the first Belgian Ambassador to Kuwait.

Kuwait opened its embassy in Belgium in 1985, and from the outset, both countries have supported and developed these relations for the benefit of their citizens, ensuring their continuity and improvement.

Ambassador Domes explained, "The celebration of the 60th anniversary of our diplomatic relations is historic. Since Belgium is a founding member of the European Union, we are particularly proud to host this reception as part of the celebrations during Europe Month."

LuLu Kuwait participates in UAE Companies Investment Meet



LuLu Hypermarket, the leading player in the retail landscape of Kuwait, reaffirmed its dedication to fostering economic cooperation between Kuwait and the UAE at the UAE Companies Investment Meet, held on 28 April at the Regency Kuwait. Organized by the UAE Embassy in Kuwait, the event served as a platform for enhancing bilateral trade relations and exploring investment opportunities between the two nations.

The opening ceremony witnessed the attendance of prominent figures from both nations, including UAE Minister of State for Foreign Trade, Dr. Thani bin Ahmed Al-Zeyoudi, the UAE Ambassador H.E. Dr. Matar Hamed Al Neyadi, and Kuwait's Minister of Commerce and Industry, Abdullah Al-Joan, representing His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. Additionally, a host of businessmen, corporate officials, and owners of small and medium enterprises from both countries graced the event.

Among the distinguished attendees was Director of LuLu Hypermarket Kuwait, Mohamed Haris, whose presence represented the company's commitment to furthering economic ties and exploring avenues for collaboration between the two states.

LuLu's active involvement in the event underscored its strategic vision to contribute to the growth and prosperity of the Kuwaiti economy by leveraging synergies with the UAE. With a focus on enhancing trade and investment flows between the two nations, LuLu Hypermarket remains steadfast in its mission to foster mutually beneficial partnerships and drive sustainable economic development.

As the leading retail entity in Kuwait, LuLu continues to explore avenues for expansion and investment, aligning with the broader strategic objectives of both Kuwait and the UAE. Through its participation in events such as the UAE Companies Investment Meet, LuLu Hypermarket reaffirms its role as a catalyst for economic growth and a staunch advocate for bilateral cooperation.

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MEW assures no planned power cuts this summer

Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy (MEW) has assured citizens that there will be no planned power cuts during the upcoming summer months. The ministry is reported to have secured an additional 300 megawatts of electricity from Oman to meet the increased demand during peak periods.

Undersecretary of the Ministry of Electricity and Water and Renewable Energy, Eng. Maha Al-Assousi, emphasized that the ministry is well-prepared to handle the summer demand and that there will be no need for planned power cuts. She urged the public to practice energy conservation

measures to further reduce the strain on the grid. On a related note, last week, MEW signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) to collaborate on construction of a 1-gigawatt (GW) renewable energy power plant. In a statement issued following the signing, the ministry encouraged other companies to follow KOC's lead in adopting renewable energy sources to help alleviate pressure on the national grid.

Establishment of a 1-gigawatt renewable energy power plant is expected to reduce oil consumption and associated costs, as well as lower carbon emissions for KOC,



while mitigating load on the electricity grid. This agreement builds upon the existing partnership between the ministry and KOC, which includes the 10-megawatt SADRH

500 solar photovoltaic renewable energy project. The electricity generated from this project is fed into the national grid through a substation within KOC's concession area, and helps to power electric submersible pumps in the Umm Qadir oil field.

For his part, the CEO of KOC Ahmed Al-Aidan stated that the company's energy transition strategy aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from oil and gas operations and achieve net-zero emissions. He added that in this regard, KOC has developed a roadmap for integrating renewable energy into its upstream, midstream, and downstream operations.

KEMS Zajil Telecom and Quadron Cybersecurity seal MOU in Honour of the Hungarian Embassy's 60th Anniversary in Kuwait



In a landmark event commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Hungarian embassy's establishment and diplomatic ties in Kuwait, KEMS Zajil Telecom, a subsidiary of Kalaam Telecom Group and leading Digital Solutions Partner in Kuwait, and the renowned cybersecurity service provider, Quadron Cybersecurity, proudly announced the signing of a partnership Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) at a ceremony held at the Hungarian Ambassador's residence in Kuwait City, and discussed changing Kuwait's Digital Landscape through AI & Cybersecurity.

The event signifies an exclusive gathering for top Kuwaiti companies, showcasing KEMS Zajil Telecom's dedication to fostering and supporting strong relationships within the local business community. It underscores the company's commitment to promoting collaboration and delivering exceptional support to valued partners as they collectively explore cutting-edge cybersecurity solutions. The presence of distinguished guests from both KEMS Zajil Telecom and Quadron Cybersecurity, along with esteemed representatives from the Hungarian Embassy, further cements the company's dedication to driving innovation and progress within Kuwait's business landscape.



On this significant occasion, the CEO of KEMS Zajil Telecom remarked, "As we navigate an era where digital transformation is imperative, the Government, Enterprise and SME sectors in Kuwait face increasing cyber threats that demand robust defence strategies. Investing in the nation's cybersecurity is not just a necessity, but a strategic imperative to safeguard our national & commercial assets. This partnership

with Quadron Cybersecurity represents a pivotal step towards equipping businesses and government entities in Kuwait with the most advanced cybersecurity solutions available. Together, we are committed to elevating the security standards and ensuring the resilience of Kuwait's digital infrastructure.", said Yusuf Ahmed, CEO of KEMS Zajil Telecom.

Quadron Cybersecurity's Group CEO Peter

Gulyas echoed these sentiments, stating, "As a Hungarian company with many experts, references, and experience in the European markets has been doing business in the Middle East, starting our journey in Kuwait eight years ago having multiple key private sector and government customers already contracted and services delivered successfully. The formation of this strategic partnership is a key milestone in the foundation of our permanent presence in the market. We are excited about the opportunities that this partnership with KEMS Zajil Telecom presents. By combining our capabilities, we are poised to deliver cutting-edge cybersecurity solutions that will meet the evolving needs of our customers for key Kuwaiti companies and government agencies."

The ceremony was enriched by the warm hospitality of His Excellency Mr. Andras Szabo, the Hungarian Ambassador in Kuwait, who graciously hosted a traditional Hungarian dinner for all attendees. Guests had the pleasure of savoring authentic Hungarian cuisine while commemorating the the 60th anniversary of the Hungarian embassy's establishment in Kuwait, as well as the countries' collaborative efforts in fostering innovation and advancement across various sectors.



Kuwaiti travel spending soars to KD4.4 billion in 2023

Latest data by the Central Bank of Kuwait revealed that the amounts spent by Kuwaitis on travel and tourism witnessed a growth of 9.2 percent by the end of 2023, reaching KD4.39 billion compared to the KD4 billion in 2022, the highest surge in spending since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The increased spending has been attributed to several factors, including the operation of new destinations in Europe and other countries, the expansion of airlines offering attractive

family travel offers throughout the year, and a significant increase in flights to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to attend the Riyadh Season and participate in celebrations and programs organized by the Saudi Tourism Authority, which were widely accepted by Kuwaitis.

Meanwhile, spending by foreign tourists increased by 60 percent in 2023, going from KD 332.6 million in 2022 to KD 533.3 million last year.

On the other hand, the Central Bank data revealed a steady decline in remittances by



expatriates to their home countries, with the figure in 2023 dropping by 28.5 percent from KD 5.4 billion recorded in 2022 to KD3.86 billion last year.

The steady decline is attributed to both a reduction in the number of expatriates in Kuwait and the economic challenges faced by many Arab and Asian countries. These challenges have led expatriates to cut back on their annual remittances and hold onto the local currency. This decline marks the second consecutive year of decrease.

Albania a new tourism destination for Kuwaitis

Ambassador of Albania H.E. Ilir Hysa lauded the strong relations between his country and Kuwait, and noted that Kuwaiti government entities, individuals, and charitable organizations have played and continue to play a significant role in his country since the 1990s. In particular, he thanked the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFED) for its substantial contributions of around 100 million euros in favorable loans for development work in Albania.



The ambassador was speaking to media representatives on the sidelines of an event organized by the embassy in cooperation with Jazeera Airways to highlight tourism in Albania.

He pointed out that the start of direct flights between Albania and Kuwait by Jazeera Airways will bring the two countries closer and enhance trade and tourism. Noting that direct flights were the result of numerous requests from Kuwaiti tourists wanting to visit Albania, he revealed that initially Jazeera Airways will operate two flights per week, but that this could increase to three per week in the future.

Indicating that his country has become a new destination for Kuwaiti tourists, Ambassador Hysa mentioned that the number of Kuwaiti tourists who visited Albania last year exceeded 3,000. He further explained,

"Kuwaitis are exempt from entry visas to Albania, and holders of an Article 17 'Bedoon' passport are also exempt. Residents of Kuwait or elsewhere, across various parts of the world, are exempt from visas if they hold a valid multi-entry Schengen, British, or American visa."

Ambassador Hysa highlighted that his country ranked third globally in terms of tourism growth, receiving over ten million tourists from around the world last year. This was attributed to its strategic proximity to Italy, Greece, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Macedonia. Additionally, the country's capital, Tirana, with a population of one million people, is also home to the main international airport that handles over 200 flights daily.

Turning to investments in his country, the ambassador explained that, "Foreigners have the right to establish a private company solely

in their name, without requiring an Albanian partner, for a fee of only one euro and within half an hour." He further mentioned, "Regarding ownership, foreigners are granted permanent ownership of any property, regardless of size, as well as land ownership."

Regarding investors' eligibility for permanent residency in his country, Ambassador Hysa explained, "It starts with a one-year residency, followed by two years, and then permanent residency." He also noted that "investors with

investments exceeding 10 million euros, known as strategic investors, have the right to apply for citizenship in Albania."

Regarding the political situation in his country, the Albanian ambassador affirmed that "the political situation in our country is stable. Albania is a member of NATO and an official candidate to join the European Union." He pointed out that his country's relationships with its neighbors and other countries worldwide are "excellent."

City Hypermarket Salmiyah to host Asian Culinary, Tourism and Services Festival



By Ricky Laxa
Staff Writer

The City Hypermarket Salmiyah with the participation of the Embassies of Asia will hold its first culinary, tourism and services festival on the 24th of May 2024 at the exhibition area of the supermarket from 11 in the morning till five in the afternoon. The event will be participated by several embassies from Asia and their communities that provide food, services and tourism information.

In a brief commentary by Riem ElGhalban, Senior Marketing Executive of City Hypermarket mentioned "We are very excited and looking forward to this event and we hope the venue can provide an exceptional platform to promote embassies and their communities to the public. City Hypermarket is open to all collaborations with different organizations, societies and institutions. I urge everyone to come and visit the festival and experience the

true Asian spirit and hospitality, we hope to see you in the event".

The festival will showcase display tables from participating embassies, which will provide details of the countries essential information on tourism, trade and services. In addition, selected home based and popular food brands will promote their products, free medical services and product samplings will be available for the public. Cultural performances and other exciting activities will take center stage throughout the program. Their Excellencies and key top management team are expected to officiate the cutting of the ribbon.

"City Hypermarket is an ideal venue to promote and bring information to the public due to its busy stream of buyers who come and shop. We hope all looking forward to the event and it's worth the wait" commented Ariel De Jesus, Country Manager of Jollibee and Chow King in Kuwait.

The event is open to the public.

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IWG organizes vibrant Southern Africa exhibition

• The countries showcased their national dress, songs, and tribal dances. Elaborate displays of handicrafts, clothes, textiles, local products, and brochures were beautifully exhibited.

• The immersive experience at the event truly captured the rich cultures of the beautiful and mesmerizing nations of Comoros, Botswana, Lesotho, Eswatini, South Africa, and Malawi.

International Women's Group (IWG) – Kuwait embarked on the first leg of a three-part cultural journey exploring enchanting Africa.

This series commenced on 21 April, highlighting the beauty of Southern Africa through collaborations with the embassies of the Union of the Comoros, the Republic of Botswana, the Kingdom of Lesotho, the Kingdom of Eswatini, the Republic of South Africa, and the Republic of Malawi.

In her welcome address, IWG President Antonia Dimitrova, extended warm wishes for good health and success to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and everlasting advancement and prosperity to Kuwait and its people on behalf of IWG.

She also thanked the Honorary President of IWG, Sheikha Hanouf Badar Al Muhammad Al Sabah, for her support in promoting cultural exchange, friendship, and understanding between nations.

She also expressed her appreciation and gratitude to the participating countries for their outstanding contributions and efforts in making a multi-nation cultural day possible. She mentioned that IWG members were grateful for the opportunity to experience the cultural delights of Southern Africa.

Ambassador of South Africa H.E. Dr.



Manelisi Genge, welcomed the gathering on behalf of the Ambassador of The Union of the Comoros H.E. Dr. El Anrif Said Hassane, who is the representative of SADC (Southern African Development Community). AMR is already recognized as an escalating global crisis. In 2019, it was associated with nearly five million deaths, making drug resistance one of the world's biggest killers. The World Health Organization has identified AMR as one of ten major threats to global health. The ambassador expressed the happiness of the participating countries for the invitation to showcase the rich and diverse

cultural heritage of their nations through their music, dance, intricate handicraft and textiles.

Vice President of IWG, Polina Dlamini, served as MC of the event, delighting attendees with her energy and passion for the culture and beauty of the region.

During the event, a short film about each participating country was shown, highlighting the beauty of various natural sites, monuments, magnificent wildlife, lakes, caves, and adventure tourism activities. Additionally, the participating countries showcased their national dress, songs, and tribal dances. Elaborate displays of

handicrafts, clothes, textiles, local products, and brochures were beautifully exhibited.

Members and guests were encouraged to use the photo booth featuring various African designs and styles. The African headwraps were admired and highly appreciated by the ladies, many of whom had the opportunity to wear them. Gifts were given to those who could answer questions about the countries, and a raffle draw with special prizes from each country added to the excitement. Fresh fruit juices from South Africa were available at the specially erected juice bar, along with a lavish buffet prepared by Crowne Plaza chefs and many Southern African specialties at the International buffet station prepared by the countries.

The IWG President, along with the Executive Board, presented each ambassador with an honorary shield and thanked them for organizing this very special day, delighting the attendees with the cultural richness and beauty of their countries.

Throughout the lively and unforgettable event, attendees cheered and applauded during the informative speeches, lively tribal dances, and colorful traditional clothing displays of each country. This immersive experience truly captured the rich cultures of the beautiful and mesmerizing nations of Comoros, Botswana, Lesotho, Eswatini, South Africa, and Malawi.

Spanish Embassy opens new visa services center



Ambassador of Spain H.E. Miguel Moro Aguilar, inaugurated last week a new visa services center in Kuwait City to facilitate visa services to the more than 30,000 applicants for Spanish visas each year.

The new premises of BLS, the service provider of visa application collection to Spain, is located on the 6th floor of the Kamco Invest building in Kuwait City. The opening of the new office is timely given onset of the summer season campaign, which continues to be the peak period in terms of consular activity at the Spanish Embassy.

"Spain remains one of the major holiday destinations throughout the year for so many of our Kuwaiti friends, something that we, at the Embassy, are proud of and pleased, witnessing

how their numbers keep steadily growing bigger year by year," said the ambassador.

He revealed that until April this year, the Spanish visa section has received more than 9,000 visa applications (almost 5,000 from Kuwaitis), a figure which only anticipates a hectic summer, fostered by the latest European Union approval of the five-years visa for all Kuwaiti nationals, provided that the validity of their passport permits such a long period on their Schengen visas.

This coming summer 2024, the Embassy of Kuwait to the Kingdom of Spain expects to receive between 65,000 and 80,000 Kuwaiti tourists only in the province of Málaga, to the south of Spain, which is a top well-known destination among Kuwaiti travelers in summertime. Accordingly,

the embassy opens every year a temporary office in the city of Torremolinos, in order to provide consular services to the Kuwaiti population residing between June and September in the area of Málaga.

"In this regard, let us remind that last February, the Embassy of Spain organized a successful promotional event in Kuwait, in collaboration with the Municipality of Marbella and the Luxury Association of Spain, at which we were honored to enjoy the presence of the Mayor of Marbella, along with several representatives of some of the best resorts in the Costa del Sol," said the Spanish envoy.

He added, "We sincerely hope that the new BLS location inaugurated today will offer a more

favorable impact on the experience offered to visa applicants to Spain. Anticipating the upcoming summer period in terms of the high numbers of requests, we strongly recommend applicants that, in order to have a smoother visa process, they should plan their holidays adequately and avoid last minute complications, by applying as early as possible, considering that it is possible to do it up to six months in advance."

We would like to take this opportunity to convey, once again, our gratitude to all our Kuwaiti friends for their invariable loyalty to our country throughout the years, one that only keeps growing bigger and more substantial as time goes by. It only remains to wish everyone a great and pleasant stay in Spain, said the ambassador.

Photo-exhibition highlights strength of Kuwait Belgian relations

Sheikha Hala Bader Al-Mohammed Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah stressed that the exhibition aims to document several historical milestones through 60 selected images reflecting the positive trajectory that united the two countries



Sheikha Hala Bader Al-Mohammed Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, head of the Diplomatic Women's Committee (DWC) praised the strong bilateral relations between Kuwait and Belgium, highlighting Belgium's important historical role in supporting Kuwaiti rights and participating in the international coalition forces that liberated Kuwait from the brutal Iraqi invasion.

In a statement to reporters on the sidelines of the opening of the exhibition 'Kuwait-Belgian Relations in Pictures' exhibition at the National Library on 27 April, she added that this year will witness the two countries celebrating the diamond jubilee of their bilateral relations, which have been established for 60 years.

She stressed that this exhibition aims to document several historical milestones through 60 selected images reflecting the positive trajectory that united the two countries. She emphasized that this booklet serves as evidence and documentation preserving a part of the 60-year history of Kuwaiti-Belgian relations. She added that the creative and distinguished researcher, Issa Dashti, collected and prepared the material for this exhibition, along with

issuing three booklets that are considered significant documents and references in the history of relations between the two countries. Thanks to his efforts, both nations were able to preserve and strengthen their relationship with friendly Belgium.

For his part, Belgian Ambassador H.E. Christian Domes, praised the "excellent" depth of Kuwaiti-Belgian relations and expressed his anticipation of further enhancing cooperation between the two countries across various fields.

Ambassador Domes remarked that the exhibition offers a splendid glimpse into the dynamic diplomatic relations between the State of Kuwait and the Kingdom of Belgium, underscoring the significance of cultural exhibitions in showcasing the robust ties between our nations. His Excellency also extended gratitude to the Kuwaiti researcher Issa Dashti for his remarkable booklet, a crucial documentary chronicling the history of relations between the two countries. He noted that the booklet encapsulates 60 years of diplomatic relations through photographs capturing unforgettable events and visits.

The ambassador added, "The Belgian royal

family has forged genuine bonds of friendship and respect with the highest authorities in Kuwait, and numerous political contacts have occurred between ministers and members of Parliament throughout these years."

In turn, Issa Abdul Rasul Dashti, the organizer and proprietor of the exhibition, expressed his joy at documenting this significant occasion through the exhibition. It features approximately 30 diverse photos capturing common events between the two countries. He also mentioned issuing the exhibition brochure containing 60 important photos accompanied by explanations. Notable highlights include Kuwaiti-Belgian events, the book 'Kuwaiti-Belgian Relations in Pictures', and 'The Visit of Belgian Princess Astrid'."

He continued, stating that these are the first books of their kind in this field, constituting vital sources for researchers and those interested in studying bilateral relations. He emphasized that our relationship with Belgium has proven to be older than 60 years, particularly after uncovering British documents mentioning the tenth ruler of Kuwait, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, offering condolences on the passing

of the former King of Belgium. The Kuwaiti flag was flown at half-mast at Al-Saif Palace in mourning for the king's death. Additionally, Kuwait served as a stopover for some of Belgium's ambassadors to the region during their travel in 1938. These and other historical documents from that period provide strong evidence of the enduring friendship between the two countries.

He expressed hope that he had successfully documented this aspect of his country's history and that they would showcase this history in Brussels so that the Belgian people could learn about their special relationship. He also thanked Sheikha Hala Bader Al-Mohammed Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah for her presence and sponsorship of the exhibition, citing it as evidence of her deep interest in the country's history and its connections with friendly and brotherly nations.

He also extended gratitude to Ambassador Domes, for inaugurating the historic exhibition, and he also thanked Siham Saad Al-Azmi, Director of the Kuwait National Office, for embracing and supporting the exhibition and overcoming all obstacles to its establishment

Chipotle introduces its real ingredients to Kuwait

Alshaya Group will open the first Chipotle location in Dubai at The Beach - JBR this October, with a total of four new restaurants anticipated in 2024

CEO - Alshaya Group - John Hadden, Executive Chairman - Alshaya Group - Mohammed Alshaya, Chief Business Development Officer - Chipotle - Nate Lawton, CEO - Mabaneer - Waleed Khaled Al-Sharian

In partnership with the Alshaya Group, a leading international franchise retail operator, Chipotle's first location in the Middle East opened in Kuwait

The new restaurant debuts the company's latest design format and offers a variety of in-restaurant ordering experiences that help introduce Chipotle's menu offerings to new guests in the region

Alshaya Group will open the first Chipotle location in Dubai at The Beach - JBR this October, with a total of four new restaurants anticipated in 2024

Chipotle Mexican Grill (NYSE: CMG) opened its first location in Kuwait in partnership with leading international franchise retail operator Alshaya Group. Since the opening, the restaurant's performance has exceeded our

benchmarks and continues to deliver strong results. Chipotle's location in The Avenues - Kuwait marks the first time the company has entered a new country in over 10 years.

Chipotle is expected to open its first Dubai restaurant this October at The Beach - JBR in partnership with Merex Investment, a joint venture between Dubai Holding and Brookfield Asset Management.

"In partnership with Alshaya Group, we worked tirelessly to ensure that we delivered an exceptional first impression in Kuwait with our freshly prepared menu of real ingredients and we are encouraged by the early results," said Chief Business Development Officer Nate Lawton. "Together, we'll continue to gather insights on regional preferences and adapt accordingly as we grow our presence in the region and expand upon our mission to Cultivate a Better World."

John Hadden, Chief Executive Officer, Alshaya Group, said: "Consumers have long awaited Chipotle's arrival here in the Middle East and the feedback we've received so far has confirmed that we're delivering the same delicious culinary experience that guests have had in their U.S. locations. We're proud to have introduced this popular American restaurant to Kuwait, and we're looking forward to Dubai later this year as the first locations in our exclusive partnership with Chipotle."



Expanding Access

To simplify its ordering experience for new guests, the Kuwait restaurant in The Avenues offers three ordering methods:

Guests can order their craveable burritos, bowls, tacos, and salads in traditional Chipotle fashion by progressing through the front makeline and ordering ingredient by ingredient. The Kuwait restaurant features a kiosk ordering system that executes pick-up orders and enables menu exploration for first-time guests.

Tables at the restaurant feature QR codes that drive guests to download the Alshaya Chipotle mobile app for pick-up orders. This method is especially convenient for large families ordering multiple entrees. As a digital-only menu item, guests can order a quesadilla via the kiosk or mobile app.

The new location in Kuwait is the first Chipotle restaurant featuring the company's

all new design format. Over the past several years, Chipotle's development team has been building out concepts that deploy new materials, textures, and artwork to amplify the company's commitment to Food with Integrity while paying homage to historic designs. New elements include:

In July 2023, Chipotle signed its first-ever development agreement to open restaurants in partnership with the Alshaya Group. Chipotle and Alshaya plan to open the first Chipotle location in Dubai later this year.

Chipotle's existing international portfolio of owned and operated restaurants includes 41 locations in Canada; 19 in the United Kingdom; six locations in France; and two in Germany. In North America, the company currently owns and operates over 3,400 restaurants and is targeting 8 to 10% growth per year for the foreseeable future with at least 80% including a Chipotlane.

UAE's exhibition, forum to help Emirati firms explore market opportunities in Kuwait

The event aims to introduce Emirati companies to the investment environment, legislative systems, and facilities provided in Kuwait by facilitating dialogue with relevant government agencies



Abdullah Al-Joan, Kuwait's Minister of Trade and Industry, and Dr. Thani Al-Zeyoudi, the UAE's Minister of Foreign Trade, have demonstrated their support for the UAE Embassy's initiative to host an exhibition and forum for Emirati companies titled "Exploring Opportunities in the Kuwaiti Market."

This exhibition and forum aim to introduce Emirati companies to the investment environment, legislative systems, and facilities provided in Kuwait by facilitating dialogue with relevant government agencies such as the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Investment Promotion Authority, the Public Authority for Manpower, the Public Authority for Industry, and

the Public-Private Partnership Authority.

The event also aims to showcase the capabilities and expertise of these companies. Emirati companies are inviting investors and businessmen in Kuwait to explore cooperation opportunities across various sectors.

The trade between these two nations continues to expand, reaching 44 billion and eight hundred dirhams at the end of 2023. This total excludes one million dirhams, equivalent to three billion seven hundred and sixty million Kuwaiti dinars, representing the value of additional services like education, health, tourism, and more. Enhancing the financial valuation of these services undoubtedly amplifies trade volumes between

them. The joint supreme committee, fostering collaboration between these brotherly nations and encouraging the private sector to leverage manufacturing capabilities and investment environments, paves the way for increased cooperation and trade fusion between the UAE and Kuwait. This mutually beneficial approach fortifies both countries against potential external disruptions that could impact transportation, production, and service chains.

The UAE embassy is eager to engage and meet with investors and manufacturers from both countries to enhance cooperation, generate employment opportunities, boost exports, and address any challenges that may

arise. Consequently, the idea of organizing an exhibition and forum for Emirati companies emerged, focusing on exploring opportunities within the Kuwaiti market.

This initiative stems from our belief that the Kuwaiti market holds promise, and Emirati companies possess the production capabilities and quality to enter this market successfully, delivering services and products that meet consumer and partner expectations.

Twenty companies from diverse sectors, including food security, infrastructure, healthcare, technology, transportation, shipbuilding, aircraft maintenance, and lubricants, are participating in this exhibition and forum.

Rhythms of Korea mesmerizes audience

The unique ceremony was held in celebration of the 45th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries and the 60th anniversary of their cooperation in the energy sector



Embassy of the Republic of Korea in collaboration with the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Literature (NCCAL), organized a ceremony titled 'Rhythms of Korea' at the Abdul Hussein Abdul Reda Theatre in Salmiya on 1 May.

This event, which showcased the captivating nature of Korean music and dance, was held in celebration of the 45th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries and the 60th anniversary of their cooperation in the energy sector — with Korea importing its first shipment of crude oil from Kuwait in January 1964.

The ceremony featured various performances by the renowned Korean ballet band 'The Little Angels', one of the world's most famous Korean dance and singing groups. They mesmerized a large audience, comprising members of the diplomatic corps, public figures, and culture and arts enthusiasts, with their unique dance routines inspired by Korean history and folklore. These included the fan dance, circle dance, and sword dance, accompanied by music from the Korean musical instrument 'gayageum'.

The fact that the 700-seat theater was packed attested to growing interest and admiration for Korean music and culture in Kuwait. The highlight of the concert was when the band performed renowned Korean folk songs, along with the Kuwaiti national anthem and Kuwaiti songs, acting as a cultural bridge between the two nations and symbolizing their spirit of solidarity. These performances showcased the traditional heritage of Korean culture, distinct from the contemporary trend of Korean dramas and popular K-pop songs.

In his address to the audience on the occasion, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea H.E. Chung Byung-ha, expressed deep gratitude to the

Secretary-General of the NCCAL, Mohammed Khaled Al-Jassar, and the Council staff for their support in organizing the event. The ambassador also commended the efforts of members and volunteers from the Korean-Kuwaiti Cultural Diwan for their valuable contribution to the show's success.

In his speech, the ambassador also emphasized the strong and developed partnership between the two countries. He mentioned that the ceremony was not just a commemoration of the bilateral relations' anniversaries but also aimed to enhance bonds of friendship and boost mutual understanding through art and culture, as well as spread the message of peace and friendship,

which is greatly needed in our world today.

The ambassador said, "When you think of Korean culture, many of you might immediately think of K-dramas, K-films, and K-pop music, which are highly popular and trendy. However, Korea is a country with a rich history spanning thousands of years, during which we have nurtured our traditional arts and performances. These traditions form the foundation of our current cultural prowess. Today, we are excited to showcase a traditional performance that is a significant part of our cultural heritage."

"Visit of the internationally renowned 'The Little Angels', known for their role in fostering cultural diplomacy, holds great significance for Kuwait. This visit occurs approximately 50 years after their first performance in 1974, which took place before the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. This underscores that cultural and economic ties between the two countries predates their political and diplomatic engagements," said the ambassador.

He added, "The hosting of this ceremony bears witness to the continuous and evolving friendship and cooperation between Korea and Kuwait, and paves the way for further distinguished cultural exchanges in the years ahead."





Turkish Embassy donates 250 volumes to Kuwait National Library

H. E. Tuba Nur Sonmez, the Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait, reminded the audience that the written word has the power to transcend borders and unite hearts.

Turkish Embassy, in partnership with the Kuwait National Library (KNL), hosted a unique event last week to inaugurate a Turkish book section at the library, enriched with 250 Turkish books on literature, history, art and science that were donated by the embassy.

The event was attended among others by the Director General of the Kuwait National Library, Siham Al-Azmi, several ambassadors, members of the diplomatic corps, and notable intellectuals, academics, and students.

In her address to the gathering, Ambassador of Turkey, H.E. Tuba Nur Sonmez, expressed optimism that this number will increase in the future, thanks to the valuable contributions of enthusiastic individuals who share a passion for promoting cultural exchange.

Ambassador Sonmez emphasized the significance of the occasion, particularly as it coincided with the sixtieth anniversary of



diplomatic relations between Turkey and Kuwait. The enduring friendship and cooperation

between the two countries are bolstered through such events, said the envoy.

The Turkish ambassador pointed out that this event, held at the Kuwait National Library, represents a milestone in cultural exchange and mutual understanding. With the opening of the Turkish Book Section, it invites readers to explore the richness of Turkish literature, history, and thought. It serves as a bridge between nations, encourages dialogue, and celebrates the universality of human expression.

Ambassador Sonmez concluded her speech

by expressing her hope that the Turkish Book Section will ignite passion, inspire creativity, and strengthen the bonds of friendship between Turkey and Kuwait. She reminded the audience that the written word has the power to transcend borders and unite hearts.

For her part, Al-Azm noted that the Kuwait National Library is a cultural edifice representing a noble bridge between Kuwait and the diverse, integrated cultures of the world. She expressed her happiness at the opening of a special section for Turkish books for the first time in the library, stating that "it is a cherished occasion that confirms the belief that the exchange, coexistence, and interaction between cultures are the shortest paths to spreading friendship, peace, and cooperation among the peoples of the world."

She expressed hope that "this work will open a wide gateway to the ancient and rich Turkish culture through cooperation with libraries and cultural centers in Turkey."

She also hoped that "this occasion would serve as the first step towards concluding similar protocols for cultural cooperation in the future between the Kuwait National Library and its counterparts in sisterly and friendly countries worldwide, taking further steps that we deem necessary to support rapprochement between peoples."

Online users targeted by hourly domestic labor scam: Ministry

The Ministry of Interior's Cybercrime Control Department issued a warning advising the public to avoid interacting with individuals or entities on social media or WhatsApp who offer hourly domestic labor services.

The department cautioned that such claims are often part of elaborate scams aimed at exploiting unsuspecting individuals.

In a statement, the Cybercrime Control Department emphasized that reputable companies like Al-Durah do not offer booking services through social media or WhatsApp.



Kuwait sets prices for vital medicines in public interest move

Dr. Ahmed Abdel Wahab Al-Awadhi, the Minister of Health, issued a ministerial decision that established the pricing for several medicines and pharmaceutical preparations, following the recommendation of the Drug Pricing Committee in the Ministry of Health and in consideration of public interest requirements.

The decision included the approval of prices for 228 medicines and pharmaceutical preparations, along with amendments to 10 medicines and pharmaceutical preparations listed in the decision. It is provided that the list of prices and amendments will be added to Ministerial Resolution No. 74 of 2023.

The ministerial decision comes within the framework of the periodic review of drug prices, and in continuation of the implementation stages of reducing drug prices, based on the



recommendations of the Ministerial Committee on the Pricing of Medicines and Nutritional Supplements formed by Ministerial Resolution No. 117 of 2018.

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Contemporary Cypriot art exhibition opens in Kuwait



“Cultural exchange serves as an important bridge for popular communication, providing a platform for mutual understanding between the two friendly peoples,” said His Excellency Michael Mavros, the Ambassador of Cyprus to Kuwait

As part of cultural exchange promotion, His Excellency Michael Mavros, the Ambassador of Cyprus to Kuwait, inaugurated a contemporary Cypriot art exhibition at the Contemporary Art Platform (CAP). The exhibition featured eight Cypriot artists and three Kuwaiti artists, and was attended by numerous accredited ambassadors and diplomats.

Ambassador Mavros expressed his happiness and pride in hosting this exhibition for the first time in Kuwait. The exhibition was titled “Island Parallels... Transforming Landscapes from One Island to Another,” highlighting the significance of cultural exchange as a key factor in strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries.

He also emphasized that cultural exchange serves as an important bridge for popular communication, providing a platform for mutual understanding between the two friendly peoples. The ambassador pointed out that the embassy



attaches great importance to cultural exchanges due to their significance in various arts.

“The artists drew inspiration for their exhibits from the historical similarities between Cyprus

and Failaka Island in Kuwait, stemming from their strategic geographical locations at the crossroads of major international roads and important trade routes”, the ambassador said.

Ambassador Mavros explained, “Another shared aspect between Cyprus and Failaka is the transformation of their landscapes due to human activities over time, leading to environmental degradation and significant impacts from climate change on both islands.”

The ambassador pointed out that the exhibition aims to foster dialogue and promote technical cooperation between Cyprus and Kuwait. This exhibition is part of the celebrations for “Europe Day” in Kuwait.

“Cyprus highly values its special relationship with the Middle East and the Gulf, stemming from its location at the crossroads of East and West. This relationship is manifested in shared history, culture, and values. We take pride in our efforts to act as a bridge between Europe, the Middle East, and the Gulf, promoting peaceful coexistence and mutual respect among nations, religions, and cultures,” the ambassador added.

Press freedom vital to vibrant democracies

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Critics of the law said rather than introduce new media regulatory laws, the government should focus on expanding existing media freedoms. Moreover, they pointed out that articles in the new draft law were not only in violation of the constitutional rights of citizens, but also did not conform to the needs of society and individuals, and were not consistent with prevailing developments in global media space.

While the Press and Publishing Law regulates print media, Kuwait’s online media space is currently regulated by Law No. 8 of 2016. Under the Electronic Publishing Law, online media outlets need an operating license, and are prohibited from publishing content that incite violence or sectarian strife, undermine national security, or is considered defamatory, blasphemous, or violates public morals. The law has been criticized by many for restricting freedom of expression.

For its part, the government contended that the law aims to balance freedom of expression with national security and public order, and that the law works to promote freedom of expression whilst also ensuring unhindered access to information. It also seeks to eliminate any potential impediments to sharing information on online media, provided it conserves national values and interests.

On a related vein, in early October 2023, the Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA), which regulates internet services and technologies in Kuwait, decided to scrap its tender for developing the

Kuwait International electronic portal that it had floated earlier. The decision followed outcry from the public and by legislators who said that it was aimed at monitoring internet activities of users in Kuwait, and restricting their online freedom.

The strong response by citizens and legislators to any attempts to restrict freedom to access the internet or on freedom of expression is understandable, considering that independent media and freedom of expression are deeply entrenched and constitutionally safeguarded concepts in Kuwait. Moreover, the country’s pervasive mobile internet usage — over 6.5 million mobile subscriptions in a population of less than 4.8 million people — precludes any attempt to curb online interactions.

However, the proliferation of news and opinions through online media platforms and the rapid uptake of these portals among the public, has led to the widespread dissemination of disinformation and misinformation on various issues. The spew of misleading and false information on issues affecting society often undermines public and political support for effective policies aimed at tackling them.

Addressing false narratives requires the public to be provided with access to accurate information in a timely manner. According to UNESCO, besides curbing misinformation, laws that ensure access to information, are key to enhancing transparency, reducing chances for corruption, and enabling accountability in the public domain. They are essential for the promotion of human rights, and conducive to achieving the sustainable development goals.

Kuwait enacted its historic Right to Information Law in 2020. Published in the official gazette in September 2020, Law 12 of 2020 entered into force six months later in March 2021. The law was part of the country’s efforts to implement the Kuwait Integrity and Anti-Corruption Strategy (KIACS), which was developed with UN support. It is also in line with Article 10 of the UN Convention Against Corruption, to which Kuwait has been a party since 2007.

Nonetheless, effectiveness of an access to information law depends on the capacity to enforce it. As is the case with similar legal frameworks in the past, the challenge ahead is to implement the law effectively. A statement issued on the occasion by Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority, Nazaha, said that the law represented “a new building block in preventing corruption, and strengthening transparency and integrity in the public sector.”

Right to information and the transparency it promotes, has a direct consequence on fighting corruption, which in turn has a tangible impact on development. Local and international agencies, including UN entities, have identified government corruption as the primary hindrance to a nation’s development. They also see an independent media sector as the number one tool to fight public corruption. Independent, free and pluralistic media are central to good governance in democracies, as they help ensure transparency, accountability and the rule of law;

promote participation in public and political discourse, and contribute to sustainable, inclusive growth. An independent media sector draws its

power from the community it serves, and in turn it empowers the community to be a full productive partner in the democratic process.

However, integrity of a pluralistic media environment is dependent on a public endowed with the necessary media literacy skills to critically analyze and synthesize the information they receive, use it productively in their daily lives, and hold the media accountable for its narrative. A public empowered by critical thinking competencies and media literacy can maximize the advantages and minimize damages arising from today’s online and off-line media information landscape.

Ethical journalism and freedom of expression are fundamental in protecting human rights, consolidating democratic processes and ensuring sustainable and equitable development. Nevertheless, journalism remains a dangerous and too often deadly profession to practice. According to the UNESCO’s Observatory of Killed Journalists, more than 1,600 journalists have been killed since 1993. — and nine times out of ten, their murder has remained unresolved.

Other threats against journalists continue to grow, especially in non-conflict zones. Journalist imprisonments are at a record high, while online violence and harassment, in particular against women journalists, continue unabated. Today’s scenario of targeting the messenger for the sake of the journalists and their families involved, as well as for a better world where everyone’s voice contributes to enriching the diversity of perspectives.

Youth Speak Forum encourages action on sustainability

President of the Kuwait Chapter of AIESEC, Maysoon Al-Attar

THE TIMES KUWAIT REPORT

On 2 and 3 May, the American University in Kuwait was the venue for the first ever Youth Speak Forum powered by the Kuwait Chapter of AIESEC — an international non-governmental and not-for-profit organization run by youth for youth.

In a recent exclusive interview with The Times Kuwait, President of the Kuwait Chapter of AIESEC, Maysoon Al-Attar, spoke at length about the organization, its activities, and efforts to widen its outreach in Kuwait.

She began by sharing some insights about AIESEC and its mission. "Imagine a multinational company that only 'hires' youth between the ages of 18 to 30. This means that each and every employee, team leader, department head, vice president, country manager, CEO, is between the ages of 18 to 30. Now imagine that each position is a one-year term, and each year youth get promoted into a higher position by applying for desired positions. This is AIESEC. AIESEC is the world's largest youth leadership development organization run 100 percent for youth by youth.

"AIESEC is a global platform for young people to explore and develop their leadership potential by offering services to youth that develop their leadership skills and positions. Our products are opportunities for youth to travel and live abroad to do volunteer work for 6 to 8 weeks, or for work

internships for 3 to 18 months. We also offer mini experiences to youth such as conferences and workshops and local internships.

"AIESEC exists in 109 countries and territories, and is celebrating 76 years of existence this year. We are a non-partisan, independent, not-for-profit organization run by students and recent graduates of institutions of higher education.

"Since we were founded, we have engaged and developed over 1,000,000 young people who have been through an AIESEC experience. The impact of our organization can be seen through our alumni who represent business, NGO and world leaders, including Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Martti Ahtisaari of Finland."

Elaborating on the initiatives undertaken by the Kuwaiti chapter and the impact it is creating, Al-Attar stated: "As AIESEC in Kuwait revived its operations in 2023, we gradually introduced new products and opportunities to the Kuwaiti market. We began with local membership experiences, and then team leader opportunities. This allowed us to grow from one member in January 2023 to 35 active members in January 2024.

"In December 2023 AIESEC in Kuwait hosted its first large-scale public event, the Vivid Leadership Conference which celebrated 75 years of AIESEC globally, and the first year of reviving AIESEC in Kuwait post-COVID-19. The success of this event gave us the encouragement to begin planning for our next conference, Youth Speak Forum, focusing on encouraging youth to speak up and take action on sustainability and the UN SDGs. And finally, AIESEC in Kuwait has begun operating its outgoing Global Volunteer program, giving youth in Kuwait the opportunity to volunteer abroad to develop themselves while creating positive social impact."

Asked what drove her to join AIESEC, she explained: "I first joined AIESEC in Malta in 2010



when I was studying my bachelors in Malta. When I first joined, I wasn't taking it so seriously, but I was enjoying meeting locals and organizing events. In my second year, I was put in the sales and customer services team to send youth on Global Volunteer opportunities. After 9 months, my team leaders encouraged me to apply for a vice president position. At first I was hesitant, but after attending my first regional conference in Vienna, Austria, I decided to try my luck. It was also at this conference that I decided it was crucial for AIESEC to come to Kuwait.

"I got the position of Vice President for the incoming Global Volunteer program, and Sponsorships Manager. After a very successful term, everyone around me encouraged me to apply for the President or Country Manager position for AIESEC in Malta as a whole. This was one of the best experiences I ever had in my life."

Elaborating on the successful organizing of the first ever Youth Speak Forum in Kuwait, Al-Attar said: "Youth Speak Forum (YSF) powered by AIESEC is basically a platform for passionate individuals aged 18-30, companies, organizations, and government entities, unite to discuss, dream, and devise solutions for a better world through engaging discussions and impactful workshops based on Sustainable Development Goals.

"Globally, we have been running it since 2016, but this was the first time it was being held in Kuwait. The Forum focused on sustainability and the SDGs through a diverse set of activities and methods of delivery such as keynote speeches, panel discussions, workshops, and more. The Forum had many additional elements such as a Global Volunteer fair, Worlds Largest Lesson, and the SDG Innovation Challenge in which the winners will turn into Youth Speak Projects."

In conclusion she detailed the processes involved in joining AIESEC. "Anyone between the age of 17 to 30 is able to apply. However, our priority is to focus on the younger segment, mainly 18 to 22. We do not do ongoing recruitment. Instead, we have recruitment periods where youth can sign up to become a member which serves as a 3 to 6 month training period to become a team leader.

"During the recruitment period, we ensure to give youth an experience very similar to getting hired for a job so that they learn from this experience. Therefore, they apply, then they have an interview. Those who pass the interview go through an Induction day seminar. After this they go through an assessment period where they are given different individual and group tasks to assess their commitment and availability. Those who pass attend an onboarding conference where we allocate them into departments and give them their first positions."

Philippine embassy staff end tenure, Master Chefs pursue culinary ventures

By Ricky Laxa
Staff Writer

Luis Carlos Osorio, Officer at the Embassy of the Philippines ends his seven years tenure in Kuwait and in service of the Filipino community. Two Master chefs and trainers from Masterclass Lifestyles Workshops, Yazmeen Deeb Akasha and Beth Osorio, will also return home to pursue business ventures on pastries and delicacies.

Luis Carlos Osorio commenced his post in 2018. He has held various posts at the embassy ranging from being head of ATNU's Medical Response Team to Member of the Embassy's Repatriation Team, from Protocol Officer to being in charge of several operations related to the voting process for overseas Filipinos. Among one of my toughest posts was the electoral process in Kuwait covering the election of Philippine officials from President to senate members, said Osorio.

"It has been a wonderful experience and Kuwait afforded me with remarkable memories that I will always treasure. It is hard to leave friends behind but surely, what awaits the future will always be good if not better," commented Osorio. He urged all Filipinos to continuously respect



the laws, traditions and norms of the host country, Kuwait, and support the embassy and its attached agencies.

Along with Osorio, another embassy staff member departing Kuwait shortly is Yazmeen Deeb Akasha who served from 2018 to 2024 as Arabic Interpreter and Translator, as well as member of ATNU's Legal Team, and Team Assistant during Overseas Voting Elections. Akasha who is also a graduate of Culinary Arts at Masterclass Lifestyles Workshops has, along with Lilibeth Osorio, initiated Kids

baking classes during summer and have mentored and provided assistance to several culinary sessions.

They also spearheaded culinary projects in support of the Philippine Embassy and joined bazaars and exhibitions showcasing their own home based delicacies. Osorio and Akasha plan to venture into the baking business upon their return to the Philippines.

Masterclass Lifestyles Workshops management, trainers and students wish them all the best.

UN Body adopts human rights protections for carbon market mechanism

The UN Supervisory Body tasked with developing and supervising the requirements and processes needed to operationalize Article 6.4 mechanism of the Paris Agreement — also known as the Paris Agreement Crediting Mechanism, has established a new global carbon market last week, reinforcing the protection of environmental and social human rights.

"This is a defining moment," said Maria AlJishi, Chair of the Supervisory Body. "With the introduction of the Appeals and Grievances Procedure, we're establishing new avenues to empower vulnerable communities and individuals, ensuring their voices are heard and their rights are upheld."

The new safeguards allow people affected by activities under the mechanism to appeal decisions or file a grievance. This is a crucial step towards developing a new international carbon market that sets the benchmark for high integrity carbon credits.

"I feel a sense of relief that after years of debate on appeals, we have finally delivered a robust system; one that holds us accountable for our decisions and ensures the activities we approve are responsible for their impacts," added Vice Chair Martin Hession. "In a world where the rule of law and human rights are under threat, I'm not a little proud that we have played our small part in upholding these fundamental principles."

The Appeals and Grievances Procedure has immediately come into effect, marking a significant milestone in the operationalization of the Paris Agreement Crediting Mechanism.

EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Climate Change, a Significant Health Threat



Manica Balasegaram

Executive Director of the
Global Antibiotic Research &
Development Partnership.

It is widely believed that climate change is the single biggest threat to human health. A global temperature increase of two degree Celsius — a threshold that will likely be exceeded by the end of the century — could claim as many as one billion lives, with extreme weather events, heatwaves, droughts, flooding, food shortages and infectious-disease outbreaks among the causes of death. But the situation may in fact be far worse, because the current forecasts fail to account for the inevitable increase in antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

Climate change could have a profound effect on AMR, as evidence increasingly indicates that adverse weather and rising temperatures



can facilitate the emergence and spread of drug-resistant pathogens. But models seeking to gauge the health effects of climate change disregard the growing risk of drug resistance, as do policy responses to global warming — a

massive oversight that will hinder our ability to treat infections and keep people healthy.

Despite increasing the likelihood of extinction for nearly 11,000 species, a warmer planet could actually improve conditions for bacteria and fungi. Higher temperatures are associated with increased bacterial growth and infection rates, and can also put selective pressure on microbes to mutate and develop antibiotic resistance. One recent study in China found that each one degree Celsius increase in air temperature was associated with a 14 percent increase in drug-resistant *Klebsiella pneumoniae* infections and a 6 percent increase in drug-resistant *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* infections.

Similarly, extreme weather, especially floods and droughts, will increase the spread of infectious diseases such as water-borne cholera and typhoid, as well as drug resistance. Such events often disrupt access to clean water and sanitation, making prevention and control of infection much more challenging. Moreover, urban density tends to accelerate the transmission of pathogens. According to some estimates, the climate crisis could displace 1.2 billion people by 2050, likely resulting in ever more crowded cities.

AMR is already recognized as an escalating global crisis. In 2019, it was associated with nearly five million deaths, making drug resistance one of the world's biggest killers. The World Health Organization has identified AMR as one of ten major threats to global health, alongside climate change, and world leaders are serious about addressing the problem, with a high-level meeting on AMR to be held on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in September.

But many still think of AMR as distinct from global warming. For example, the latest Lancet Countdown report on health and climate change makes no mention of AMR, drug resistance, or antibiotics. Similarly, the Quadripartite Secretariat for One Health — comprising the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, the UN Environment Programme, the WHO, and the World Organization for Animal Health — has failed to study the relationship between global warming and AMR, let alone how AMR will affect the health risks of climate change.

The international community is severely underestimating the impact of climate change on people's health and our ability to treat them. To prepare for the mounting AMR crisis, we must increasingly rely on preventing and controlling infection, and, more importantly, ensure the judicious use of effective antibiotics. That will require developing new

antibiotics, which is often unattractive for pharmaceutical companies, and also making the right investments and establishing the right incentives so that existing antibiotics reach the people that need them.

To this end, organizations like mine, the Global Antibiotic Research & Development Partnership, are encouraging the creation of new drugs and working to improve access to essential antibiotics that are already on the market, particularly in lower-income countries. Equitable antibiotic use and distribution will become increasingly important, because, as with climate change, it is the poorest communities that are usually hit hardest by AMR.

“

AMR is an escalating global crisis. In 2019, it was associated with nearly five million deaths, making drug resistance one of the world's biggest killers. The World Health Organization has identified AMR as one of ten major threats to global health.

”

But that will not be enough. Global policymakers must significantly increase funding for AMR research to ensure that they are ready to respond to new forms of drug resistance caused directly or indirectly by global warming.

Doing so will require including AMR in climate-change contingencies and, more importantly, viewing drug resistance and rising temperatures as interconnected, rather than distinct, challenges, starting at the UN high-level meeting on AMR in September and this year's UN Climate Change Conference (COP29) in Baku. Otherwise, the effectiveness of existing drugs will falter just when they are most needed.



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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Our Freedoms Depend on Press Freedom



Jodie Ginsberg

Jodie Ginsberg is CEO of the Committee to Protect Journalists, a nonprofit organization working worldwide to ensure that journalists can report freely and safely.

In just the first week of this year, at least 18 journalists were assaulted or harassed while covering alleged election irregularities and violence in Bangladesh. Then, in early February, journalists in Pakistan were hindered from covering elections by a wave of violence, widespread internet blackouts, and mobile-network suspensions. In March, journalists in Turkey had been shot at and banned from observing local elections, despite their legal right to do so.

It was a worrying, but not especially surprising, start to this “super election year.” With half the world’s population casting ballots, independent reporting on the candidates and the issues is essential. Yet attacks on the media are rising, even in more mature democracies. In the United States, Donald Trump’s return as a candidate has brought back fresh memories of January 6, 2021, when his supporters stormed the Capitol, lunged at journalists and destroyed their cameras, and scribbled “Murder the media” on the doors.

Such examples are illustrative of a broader problem. From the US to India, hard-won freedoms and rights are being eroded. In 2023, the V-Dem Institute, which monitors democracy around the world, published a report warning that the progress made toward democratization since 1989 is being reversed. The authors identify increased attacks on journalists as a leading indicator of ‘autocratization’: “Aspects of freedom of expression and the media are the ones ‘wannabe dictators’ attack the most and often first.”

There is no doubt that threats to journalists are on the rise, and not just in countries where independent media is always a target. Over the past three years, the Committee to Protect

Journalists has documented near-record numbers of journalists (and even top media executives) behind bars, including in supposed democracies such as Guatemala, and in places that once enjoyed relatively high levels of personal and political freedom, such as Hong Kong.

Journalist killings are at their highest levels in almost a decade. In 2022, the American investigative journalist Jeff German was stabbed outside his home in Las Vegas, and a politician whom German had reported on is now awaiting trial for the murder. From Washington and Westminster to Buenos Aires

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and Budapest, journalists who cover politics receive death threats daily and are increasingly vulnerable to being targeted at political rallies and protests.

According to a 2021 UNESCO report, three-quarters of women journalists surveyed had experienced online hate, harassment, or threats of violence. Among the most likely triggers for such abuse was reporting on ‘politics and elections’. Women and those from marginalized communities bear the brunt of this anti-media harassment online, and the vitriol frequently spills over into real-world violence.

The consequences of this disturbing trend are not limited to the media. Attacks on journalists harm us all. Journalists perform the public’s due diligence on candidates, probing their professional records, the veracity of their claims, and the credibility of their promises. By reporting on policy achievements and failures, they help corroborate, or contradict, a candidate’s official narrative, exposing lies and smear campaigns for what they are. They also provide practical information about voting processes, and monitor for electoral irregularities and campaign-finance violations. Without such information, there

and politicians — revelations that would lead to the downfall of President Alberto Fujimori. And it was independent reporting on ‘Partygate’ that ultimately forced Boris Johnson out as prime minister of the United Kingdom.

Independent news media are essential to counter this technology-driven trend. Consider Taiwan’s election earlier this year. Although lies flooded online channels throughout the campaign, studies suggest that much of the disinformation was defused by the combined efforts of local media, election authorities, and fact checkers, all of whom deliberately focused on building trust and furnishing voters with what they needed to make an informed, meaningful choice.

We now need to heed these lessons and watch carefully for warning signs. If this year is a litmus test for democracy around the world, a pre-indicator will be how the media are treated. We will have to remain vigilant in defending a free and independent press, and in championing a vibrant and curious local media. If we do not, you can be certain that the erosion of freedoms will not stop with us.



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Global Elections in the Shadow of Neoliberalism



Joseph E. Stiglitz

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Around the world, populist nationalism is on the rise, often shepherded to power by authoritarian leaders. And yet the neoliberal orthodoxy — government downsizing, tax cuts, deregulation — that took hold some 40 years ago in the West was supposed to strengthen democracy, not weaken it. What went wrong?

Part of the answer is economic: neoliberalism simply did not deliver what it promised. In the United States and other advanced economies that embraced it, per capita real (inflation-adjusted) income growth between 1980 and the COVID-19 pandemic was 40 percent lower than in the preceding 30 years. Worse, incomes at the bottom and in the middle largely stagnated while those at the very top increased, and the deliberate weakening of social protections has produced greater financial and economic insecurity.

Rightly worried that climate change jeopardizes their future, young people can see that countries under the sway of neoliberalism have consistently failed to enact strong regulations against pollution (or, in the US, to address the opioid crisis and the epidemic of child diabetes). Sadly, these failures come as no surprise. Neoliberalism was predicated on the belief that unfettered markets are the most efficient means of achieving optimal outcomes. Yet even in the early days of neoliberalism's ascendancy, economists had already

established that unregulated markets are neither efficient nor stable, let alone conducive to generating a socially acceptable distribution of income.

Neoliberalism's proponents never seemed to recognize that expanding the freedom of corporations curtails freedom across the rest of society. The freedom to pollute means worsening health (or even death, for those with asthma), more extreme weather, and uninhabitable land. There are always tradeoffs, of course; but any reasonable society would conclude that the right to live is more important than the spurious right to pollute.

Taxation is equally anathema to neoliberalism, which frames it as an affront to individual liberty: one has the right to keep whatever one earns, regardless of how one earns it. But even when they come by their income honestly, advocates of this view fail to recognize that it was made possible by

half-billion-dollar lifeline they received from President Barack Obama's Department of Energy in 2010? "Taxes are what we pay for civilized society," the Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes famously observed. That has not changed: taxes are what it takes to establish the rule of law or provide any of the other public goods that a twenty-first-century society needs to function.

Here, we go beyond mere tradeoffs, because everyone, including the rich, is made better off by an adequate supply of such goods. Coercion, in this sense, can be emancipatory. There is a broad consensus on the principle that if we are going to have essential goods, we have to pay for them, and that requires taxes.

Of course, advocates of smaller government would say that many expenditures should be cut, including government-managed pensions and publicly provided health care. But, again, if most people are forced to endure the insecurity

in this year's many elections. In the US, the upcoming presidential election offers a stark choice not only between chaos and orderly government, but also between economic philosophies and policies. The incumbent, Joe Biden, is committed to using the power of government to enhance the well-being of all citizens, especially those in the bottom 99 percent, whereas Donald Trump is more interested in maximizing the welfare of the top 1 percent. Trump, who holds court from a luxury golf resort (when he is not in court himself), has become the champion of crony capitalists around the world.

Trump and Biden have vastly different visions of the kind of society we should be working to create. In one scenario, dishonesty, socially destructive profiteering, and rent-seeking will prevail, public trust will continue to crumble, and materialism and greed will triumph; in the other, elected officials and public servants will work in good faith toward a more creative, healthy, knowledge-based society built on trust and honesty.

Of course, politics is never as pure as this description suggests. But no one can deny that the two candidates hold fundamentally different views on freedom and the makings of a good society. Our economic system reflects and shapes who we are and what we can become. If we publicly endorse a selfish, misogynistic grifter, or dismiss these attributes as minor blemishes, our young people will absorb that message, and we will end up with even more scoundrels and opportunists in office. We will become a society without trust, and thus without a well-functioning economy.

Recent polls show that barely three years after Trump left the White House, the public has blissfully forgotten his administration's chaos, incompetence, and attacks on the rule of law. But one need only look at the candidates' concrete positions on the issues to recognize that if we want to live in a society that values all citizens and strives to create ways for them to live full and satisfying lives, the choice is clear.

“Taxes are what we pay for civilized society,” the Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes famously observed. Taxes are what it takes to establish the rule of law or provide any of the other public goods that society needs to function

government investment in infrastructure, technology, education, and public health. Rarely do they pause to consider what they would have if they had been born in one of the many countries without the rule of law (or what their portfolios would look like if the US government had not made the investments that led to the COVID-19 vaccine).

Instead, those most indebted to the government are often the first to forget what the government did for them. Where would Elon Musk and Tesla be if not for the near-

and fear of not having reliable health care or incomes in old age, society has become less free. Even if multibillionaires' well-being would be crimped somewhat if each were asked to pay a little more in taxes to fund a child tax credit, consider what a difference it would make in the life of a child who does not have enough to eat, or whose parents cannot afford a doctor's visit. Consider what it would mean for the whole country's future if fewer of its young people grew up malnourished or sick.

All these issues should take center stage

Understanding exponential growth to prevent pandemics

The recent COVID-19 global pandemic revealed that most people underestimate exponential growth, especially when it comes to speed of the spread of the disease.

While COVID-19 made us familiar with terms such as doubling time, logarithmic scales, R factor, and exponential growth among others, the familiarity with these terms did not mean we fully comprehended the speed of the spread of the virus.

Exponential growth is in particular a notoriously difficult concept to understand. There is this old Indian legend about a king who wanted to reward one of his advisers. Asked what he wanted, the adviser said he would be happy with a grain of rice placed on the first square of a chessboard, and to double the amount of grains for each of the 63 subsequent squares on the board.

Unaware of the exponential growth involved, the king agreed, only to find that by doubling the amount of grain for each of 64 chessboard squares, he would end up providing the advisor with 18 quintillion, 446 quadrillion, 744 trillion, 73 billion, 709 million, 551 thousand and 615 grains. To put this number in more perspective, to ferry all that rice grains would involve more than 11 billion train carriages filled to the brim. In more picturesque language, the 11 billion train carriages, if placed bumper to bumper, would go around the world at the equator 6,325 times.

Obviously, the ability to grasp the magnitude of exponential growth depends on the way in which it is communicated. Using the right framing helps to understand the huge numbers involved when it comes to global pandemics, or in implementing mitigation measures. Underestimating exponential growth often results in negative consequences during a pandemic, with people misjudging how quickly the virus can spread, and therefore delaying mitigating measures such as wearing masks, social distancing, or staying at home during an outbreak.

This behavioral phenomenon, known as 'exponential bias' is the subject of a new research paper published by researchers at ETH



Zurich's Center for Law and Economics and the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts in Switzerland. They wanted to find out whether the way in which the exponential spread of infectious disease is communicated can affect the magnitude of this bias.

Most people when they talk of growth are intuitively inclined towards linear growth, which is for example (3-6-9-12-15...). This leads them to vastly underestimate the speed of exponential growth (3-9-27-81-243...). From previous experiments, the researchers knew that people underestimate exponential growth even when they are aware of exponential growth bias. In other words, informed people still underestimate what exponential growth really means in practice.

For their study, the researchers presented 400 participants with the same scenario: a country currently has a thousand cases of viral infection, and this figure climbs by 26 percent

every day. With this exponential spread of the virus, the country would reach one million cases in 30 days. However, there is a chance to reduce the growth rate from 26 percent to 9 percent by adopting mitigation measures.

Researchers quizzed participants on the situation, framing their questions from different perspectives: How many cases can be prevented by adopting mitigation measures? By adopting the measures, how much time can be gained before reaching one million cases? How many cases will there be after 30 days if mitigation measures lengthen the doubling time from three days to eight days? By the way, extending the doubling time like this is equivalent to reducing the growth rate from 26 percent to 9 percent — something that few people recognise intuitively.

The first finding from the study was that talking about growth rates is an ineffective way of communicating the spread of pandemic

diseases. Over 90 percent of participants drastically underestimated the number of infections after 30 days of exponential spread. They were much more on the mark, however, when the question was framed using doubling times.

The second finding was that people have trouble gauging how many infections can be prevented with mitigation measures. When asked how many infections could be prevented in the scenario above (starting from a thousand cases, a growth rate of 9 percent instead of 26 percent over 30 days), people responded with estimates that were extremely far off. The typical (median) participant believed that 8,600 cases could be prevented, when, in fact, the figure is almost one million.

However, when participants were asked about the number of days that could be gained by adopting mitigation measures — for example, until hospitals are overloaded, or until there is a vaccine on the market — their estimates were significantly better. The experiment achieved its best results when questions were framed from the perspective of time gained and the impact of slowing down doubling times.

A statement that combines both of these would be, for example: "If each of us adopt preventative measures today, cases of the virus will slow down — we can estimate that they will double only every eight days, as opposed to every three days. This allows 50 additional days to implement preparatory measures to combat the virus (e.g., by providing much needed supplies to hospitals, or finding treatments and vaccines) before reaching one million cases."

The research team added that pandemic measures are just one application of the framing theory when it comes to communicating exponential growth: similar phenomena might also be observed in the banking and finance industry, or when it comes to legal or environmental policy-making, especially with regard to disseminating information on climate change and greenhouse gas emissions.

An ode to vaccinations on 50th anniversary of EPI

As the world celebrates the 50th anniversary of the World Health Organization's (WHO) Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) in 2024, we look at the many achievements of the program, and highlight the impact of vaccinations in saving lives worldwide.

The EPI was launched in 1974 to serve as a global endeavor to ensure equitable access to life-saving vaccines for every child, regardless of their geographic location or socioeconomic status. Over the past five decades, EPI has evolved and achieved milestones that reshaped the global health landscape. This includes the eradication of smallpox in 1980, which stands as a monumental triumph in the history of immunization.

Similarly, thanks to a unique public-private partnership between WHO, Rotary International, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), UNICEF, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, polio has been reduced by more than 99

percent. The world stands on the threshold of eradicating a human pathogen globally for only the second time in history, after the eradication of smallpox.

In the 1980s, UNICEF and partners embarked on a bold mission — to immunize every child against preventable diseases. Governments and partners facilitated one of the greatest logistical mobilizations in peacetime history. By the early 1990s, global childhood immunization levels reached 80 percent. By 2021, in sub-Saharan Africa, a vaccination campaign led by WHO and later Gavi (a multilateral group formerly called the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization), resulted in 68 percent of one-year-olds receiving a first dose of the measles vaccine, 78 percent receiving the tuberculosis vaccine, and 70–71 percent receiving the vaccines against hepatitis B, polio, and diphtheria/tetanus/pertussis.

Vaccines have emerged as a cornerstone of public health everywhere, preventing the spread of deadly diseases and saving countless lives. Since its inception five decades ago, the WHO program, now referred to as the Essential Programme on Immunization is estimated to have saved over 154 million young lives. Of this, 146 million lives were among children under five, including 101 million infants. Because the averted deaths were so concentrated among young people, who on average would go on to live for 66 years, vaccines are estimated to have given their beneficiaries an astounding nine billion additional years of life.

By strengthening healthcare systems and preventing illness, vaccination programs provide one of the highest returns on investment of any public health interventions. Every US\$1 invested in vaccine programs returns an estimated US\$20 in healthcare cost



savings, lost wages, and lost productivity. Vaccination campaigns have led to massive gains in public health.

The measles vaccine, in particular, deserves pride of place; it is estimated to have averted 93.7 million deaths from 1974 onward. In terms of lives saved, the runners-up — tetanus (28 million lives saved), pertussis (13.2 million lives saved), and tuberculosis (10.9 million lives saved) — pale in comparison. All this data serves as a reminder that vaccines have historically been one of our best tools for saving lives and that redoubling efforts to discover and distribute new ones for diseases like malaria and tuberculosis could have a similarly transformative effect.

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The Macron Moment



Mark Leonard

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The days of Europe buying its energy from Russia, outsourcing its businesses to China, and relying on the United States for its security are over. The European Union is only mortal and could very well be vanquished at the hands of Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, Donald Trump, or its own populist parties.

That was French President Emmanuel Macron's warning at the Sorbonne on April 25. With great flair, and at great length, he issued a wake-up call to French citizens, and indeed to all Europeans. It is no exaggeration to say that Europe's security, prosperity, and culture are under threat.

With the zeal of a convert, Macron argues that the stakes in Ukraine include not only Ukrainians' future but also the future of Europe: "The condition sine qua non for our security is that Russia does not win the war of aggression it is waging against Ukraine. This is imperative." Even though the US Congress has finally passed a supplemental aid bill for Ukraine (as well as Israel and Taiwan), Europeans must recognize that the US has only two priorities: "America first, which is legitimate, and China."

Macron warns that Europeans have entered a new world where raw materials face harder supply constraints, critical minerals are governed by geopolitics, the green transition is growing more urgent, and neither China nor America respects the rules of free trade. And on the political front, he deplores the fact that Europeans are increasingly succumbing to imported culture wars. The more their politics are shaped by narratives produced elsewhere, the less equipped they will be to



shape their own future.

True to form, Macron was not short on solutions. Europe's security risks can be mitigated through a missile-defense initiative, long-range weapons, and improved cyber capabilities, all backed by a 'war economy' running on higher military and high-tech production, with financing from the European Investment Bank and mutualized EU debt vehicles. Similarly, Europe's economic problems demand a new industrial policy, with production targets and 'buy European' preferences in strategic sectors such as defense, green tech, raw materials, semiconductors, digital technology, and health care.

Macron's political genius has always stemmed from his think tank-like approach to big problems, and his analysis of what ails Europe is a trenchant one. But he suffers from a reverse-Midas curse: policies become more controversial by dint of him having embraced them. While the president's

team proudly points out that several of the ideas mentioned in his 2017 Sorbonne speech have since been implemented, Macron himself admits that Europe could have, and should have, gone much further. If he wants to look back in seven years and see a better conversion rate, he will have to adopt a new playbook.

First, Macron must begin to show, not just tell. Though his language on the Ukraine war has been striking, French military aid lags far behind Germany's. If Macron had really wanted to demonstrate strategic resolve vis-à-vis Russia, he would already have sent French military personnel to assist Ukraine in a non-combatant capacity – as the US and the United Kingdom have done.

Second, Macron must get over his 'Jupiterian' tendency to see himself as the main character in Europe's drama. Ideally, he and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz would get along well enough to launch ideas in tandem, thus bolstering the idea

of a Franco-German motor. But in the absence of a constructive bilateral relationship (for which Germany is equally to blame), Macron should make a greater effort to build coalitions with other leaders, such as Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, or Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

Underlying all the problems that Macron identified in his speech is a crisis in European leadership. As an American official recently pointed out to me, Macron is like a (young) King Lear. With just a few years left in his term, and with no majority in parliament, he has come to a clear-eyed understanding of the world too late. Sometimes, Macron appears even to lean into the emptiness, crying into the void like Lear on the heath. It is always easier to be right than to do the hard work of bringing others along with you.

That said, the timing for a 'Macron moment' has never been better. Not so long ago, the EU was fundamentally divided between eastern member states that were worried about Russia and looking to the US for protection, and western ones that were not. But since his Damascus conversion on the road to Kyiv, Macron has proven to be a master at articulating eastern members' anxieties. If there is anyone who can bridge the EU's east-west divide, it is him.

Moreover, France's own nuclear deterrent could be critical for providing reassurances to those countries spooked by the threat of an American withdrawal from Europe if Trump returns to the White House in January. While Macron's right-wing opponent, Marine Le Pen, has been doing very well in the polls, her antagonistic relationship with the EU and her closeness to Russia have become more glaring weaknesses. If Macron can find a less imperious approach and put his money where his mouth is, he could create a truly durable political base for his ideas. The Macron of seven years ago scarcely could have dreamed of that.

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