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Oil dependency risks drive fiscal reforms

THE TIMES KUWAIT REPORT

Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investments, Nora Al-Fassam revealed last week that the government is considering the introduction of several new taxes as part of wider tax reforms that seek to implement equitable tax practices, and position Kuwait as a jurisdiction that conforms to international tax laws.

Minister Fassam pointed out that decree into law 6/2024 on Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes, and decree-into-law 157/2024 on levying a 15 percent tax on large multinational enterprises were being implemented. In addition, the government is reviewing a new selective consumption tax (excise tax) targeting commodities harmful to health, such as sugary drinks, cigarettes, and other tobacco products.

Another major tax reported to be under purview by the finance ministry is one on imposing a corporate tax on all firms in Kuwait



with annual revenues exceeding KD1.5 million. Transformations to Kuwait's tax framework are aimed at broadening the tax base by increasing the number of companies subject to tax.

Taxes on excise and on multinational firms are together expected to deliver nearly half a billion dinars annually to the state treasury in the form of non-oil revenues.

The commitment of the new government headed by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah to diversifying the economy and introducing far-reaching fiscal and structural reforms, reflects the growing realization that reforms are crucial to support a diversified and sustainable economy. The reforms are also seen as key to the country's transformation into a regional financial and commercial hub in line with 'Vision 2035'.

In this regard, the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development, stated last week that various government entities were studying and preparing several draft laws on fiscal and structural reforms aimed at enhancing economic growth, and unlocking gridlocks that hamper the speedy implementation of developmental projects. The General Secretariat stated that the Fatwa and Legislation Department has completed the review of approximately 20 draft laws and submitted them to the Council of Ministers for consideration.

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Al Muzaini Exchange **المزيني** للصيرفة
 SINCE 1942

SEND MONEY TO INDIA
 FOR THE CHANCE TO

MEGA PRIZE
₹1,000,000

₹10,000
DAILY PRIZE

8 GRAMS
GOLD COIN
WEEKLY PRIZE

TOTAL PRIZES OVER
₹3,000,000



AL MUZAINI APP TRANSFERS GIVES
 THREE LUCKY WINNERS THE CHANCE TO WIN
IPHONE 16 PRO MAX

His Highness the Amir, King Charles III seal 125 years of diplomatic relations

The visit of His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, included a tour of Dumfries House, the King's Foundation headquarters, an official audience with King Charles III, and a gift exchange of a kilt and bisht made from a special "Partnership 125" tartan blending UK and Kuwait cultures.



His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, visited His Majesty King Charles III of the United Kingdom, to mark the culmination of year-long celebrations held to commemorate 125 years since the signing of the Anglo-Kuwaiti Agreement of 1899, which established diplomatic relations between Kuwait and the United Kingdom.

His Highness the Amir and His Majesty the King met on 15 January at Dumfries House in Scotland. The visit included an official audience between the two leaders, an exchange of gifts—a Kuwaiti bisht and a Scottish tartan—manufactured using a special 'Partnership 125' tartan that combines traditional weaving materials, patterns, colors, and techniques from both the UK and Kuwait, merging the cultures of the two countries and symbolizing the strong relations between the two nations.

The tartan exchange formally concluded the year-long celebrations held in Kuwait and the UK to mark a century and a quarter of official UK-Kuwait diplomatic relations. As part of the celebrations throughout 2024, governments of both countries organized numerous events, visits, and initiatives reflecting their unique shared history and seeking to enhance future cooperation. The visit of His Highness the Amir also included a tour of the historic Dumfries House estate, which serves as the headquarters of The King's Foundation, the charity founded by His Majesty the King with the aim of building communities and transforming lives around the world through practical programs.

Reflecting on the visit to the UK by His Highness the Amir, the Kuwait Ambassador to



the United Kingdom, H. E. Bader Almunayekh, stated: "The visit of His Highness the Amir of the State of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, to Dumfries House is the culmination of a year full of activities celebrating 125 years of Kuwaiti-British partnership."

"We are very proud of the historic relations between Kuwait and the United Kingdom and

are keen to build on our work over the past year to grow the relationship further across the decades and centuries to come. We celebrated the relationship with many academic and cultural events, as well as the signing of an agreement between the State of Kuwait and The King's Foundation, which led to the creation of a horticultural exchange program.



We were extremely pleased with the results of the first group that joined the program and look forward to building on it over the duration of the agreement. We value the work of The King's Foundation and hope for further cooperation in the future."

For her part, the British Ambassador to Kuwait H.E. Belinda Lewis, said: "The close friendship between the UK's Royal Family and Kuwait's Ruling Family has long underpinned our partnership, and it is therefore fitting that we are closing out joint celebrations to mark 125 years of official diplomatic relations with this audience and exchange of gifts between our respective heads of state."

"The past twelve months have formed a special and memorable chapter in the UK and Kuwait's shared history, further developing—through a series of visits, events, and initiatives—the links between our two peoples and our collaboration across areas including culture, trade, defense, and security. I am excited by the many opportunities to continue progressing our unique partnership over the coming year and beyond."

Commenting on the historic visit, Chief Executive Officer of The King's Foundation, Kristina Murrin noted, "At The King's Foundation, we promote traditional crafts and skills, so we are delighted to showcase this work through the creation of a special new tartan. Following this project, we are looking forward to continuing our horticultural exchange program between the UK and Kuwait, with participants able to spend time in our historic gardens across the country, including Dumfries House and Highgrove Gardens."

Tax reforms to include selective consumption tax

The government is considering the imposition of selective consumption tax on specific goods that harm public health, such as cigarettes and other tobacco products.

Disclosing this in an interview with state news agency, Minister of Finance, Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investments Nora Al-Fassam said that the finance ministry was preparing the selective taxation law targeting commodities harmful to human health, with projections the levies would reap KD 200 million per year.

She added that another major step being considered as part of the wider tax reforms being planned for implementation, is one on imposing a levy on corporate incomes in addition to the decree-into-law 6/2024 for the Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes, and the decree

157/2024 for taxation of multinational enterprises, which came into force from 1 January 2025.

Alluding further to some of the moves for taxing reforms, the minister cited the enactment of treaties on double taxation, combating financial evasion, working out accords for encouragement and mutual protection of investments, in addition to ratifying some international treaties in the realm of taxation cooperation.

She indicated the entities that are compelled to pay the taxes according to the decree-into-law 157/2024 would not be compelled to pay levies for workers as stipulated in the law 19/2000, neither with respect of the alms proportion stipulated in the law 46/2006 for the period that began on 1 January, 2025.

Al-Fassam further clarified that companies legally obliged to pay financial contributions to Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research will continue to do so, and that decree into law 157/2024 mentions no leeway for these companies. She added that government entities, non-profitable organizations, international agencies, pension and investment funds were exempt from taxation under 157/2024.

Taxing multinational entities under 157/2024 is projected to yield around KD250 million annually to the government treasury, with a preliminary count of entities in Kuwait liable



to pay the new tax being around 300, including 20 Kuwaiti enterprises and 25 from other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, and the remaining being foreign firms that operate in Kuwait.

Minister Al-Fassam affirmed that enforcing the tax is in line with the State of Kuwait vision 2035, aimed at achieving a diversified and sustainable economy, and that the proceeds would contribute to diversifying the non-oil returns and stem the siphoning of the returns to other states. She added that implementing the tax on multinational entities would also contribute to boosting Kuwait's role at the level of international cooperation for achieving just taxing practices.

Cabinet reviewing new laws to spur reforms

The semi-annual report on the executive status of development plan projects, prepared by the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development, highlighted the progress made by government agencies in preparing and studying several draft laws essential for development projects.

The report noted that the Fatwa and Legislation Department has completed the review of approximately 20 draft laws, which have been sent to the Council of Ministers for consideration. Among these, the most prominent draft laws include:

- Draft law on regulated withdrawal from the Future Generations Fund.
- Draft law to establish the Northern Economic Zone.
- Amending the Kuwaiti import law.
- The draft law on real estate financing for the Kuwait Credit Bank.
- Public Debt Bill.
- A draft law to restructure the wage system in the public sector.
- Amending the law to include the 2005 increase in the salary subject to supplemental insurance for the private sector.
- Draft law to adopt the Gulf Cooperation Council Agreement on Selective Goods.
- Draft law approving the Gulf Cooperation Council Agreement on Value Added Tax.

The report added that several other draft laws are in the process of being prepared by relevant government agencies, and include among others:

- A draft law amending the attached table to Law No. 42 of 2006, which redefines the electoral districts for membership in the National Assembly.
- A draft law on fees and financial costs for the use of public facilities and services.
- Energy Services Pricing Bill.
- Tourism Bill.

The report indicated that the legislative program for the development plan for the fiscal year 2024/2025 includes 63 draft laws. By the end of the first half of the fiscal year, 24 of these laws had been approved. In addition around 20 laws are currently under discussion by the Council of Ministers, while three laws are in the drafting and review stage at the Fatwa and Legislation Department. Meanwhile, 16 laws are still in the preparation stage with the relevant authorities. The report emphasized the need to accelerate the completion of these draft laws due to



their connection to the progress of development plan projects. The study also pointed out that legislative challenges facing development plan projects account for only about 4 percent of the total challenges, while administrative challenges make up

about 43 percent of the overall obstacles affecting the projects.

The Council of Ministers is said to have instructed the General Secretariat of the Supreme Planning Council to prepare a detailed report on the challenges facing development projects, the completion rates of these projects, and their spending rates in alignment with the development programs and pillars of the New Kuwait Vision 2035. This request was made within the framework of Article (10) of Law No. 7 of 2016 concerning development planning.

The Council of Ministers also requested the Secretariat to follow-up on the implementation of the 2024/2025 annual plan projects, and to coordinate with the relevant authorities to address and overcome all obstacles and challenges hindering the implementation of the plan, and to develop appropriate solutions to these issues.

British Embassy issues guidelines on visas for Kuwaitis

Due to the high volume of inquiries regarding visas for visits, work, and living in the United Kingdom, the British Embassy has announced the following guidance for Kuwaiti nationals.

Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA): An ETA allows you to make multiple short trips (including transit stops en route to another country) of up to six months at a time to the UK, valid for two years or until the passport used to apply expires—whichever comes first. Applying for an ETA via the 'UK ETA' app (available on iOS and Android devices) is quick, inexpensive, and easy. We advise applicants to allow at least



72 hours for confirmation of their ETA, although most applications are processed more quickly. You do not need an ETA if you already hold a valid UK visa.

UK visa: If your ETA application is refused or if you are traveling to the United Kingdom for a purpose or duration not covered by an ETA (e.g., to study a university course for longer than six months), you will need to apply for a UK visa (be sure to check which specific type you need).

For visas with a duration of over six months, the UK has transitioned from physical documents to electronically-held 'eVisas,' accessible via mobile devices or computers. This transition brings significant benefits, as eVisas are secure and cannot be lost, stolen, or tampered with, unlike physical documents. They can also be accessed anywhere and in real time, allowing customers to manage their own data and swiftly update the UK Home Office with new contact or passport details.

Both new and existing customers have been advised of this change through direct emails from UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) and should take action accordingly. For more information on eVisas, please visit: Get access to your online immigration status (eVisa) – GOV.UK. To check UK immigration requirements ahead of any planned travel, people can use the UK government's official visa checker tool at: <https://www.gov.uk/check-uk-visa>

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Health ministry regulates medical advertisements

Health Minister Dr. Ahmed Al-Awadi, has introduced new regulations to monitor medical advertisements in the private sector, aiming to enhance transparency, protect consumers from misleading ads, and ensure compliance with approved health standards.

A ministerial decision issued last week by Minister of Health Dr. Ahmed Al-Awadi, introduced several new regulations and controls that aim to control the process of medical advertisements for pharmaceutical centers, places, and sales shops within the private sector.

According to the ministerial decision, the initiative is part of the government's commitment to improve the quality of health services, enhance transparency, and protect consumers from misleading advertisements, as well as to ensure that all medical promotions adhere to approved health standards.

The ministerial decision included a comprehensive definition of pharmaceutical centers and shops included under the new regulations. It defined 'pharmaceutical centers' as encompassing pharmacies, warehouses, pharmaceutical factories, scientific offices, and the headquarters of companies involved in the import of medicines and medical products.

Additionally, the decision clarified that 'places' refer to locations where health products, nutritional supplements, herbal, and cosmetic preparations are displayed or traded without a license from the Ministry of Health. Meanwhile,

'sales shops' were defined as entities licensed by the Health Ministry to display and sell nutritional supplements, health products, or veterinary medicines.

The ministerial decision also specified that any content published to promote health products, whether for a fee or free of charge, and regardless of whether it is published through traditional or digital media, is considered an advertisement.

The ministerial decision emphasized the need for all concerned entities to obtain prior authorization from the Drug Inspection Department before publishing any advertisements, and to prohibit the publication of such content without authorization across all platforms, including print, audio, visual, or social media, including those on official accounts of pharmaceutical centers, sales outlets, and influencer accounts.

Additionally, the decision mandates that each pharmacy or sales outlet create one account per platform, and ensure that the account clearly displays the name of the center or store, its address, and its license number.

The decision prohibits the advertising of product prices, as well as the offering of



promotions, discounts, or special deals, without prior approval from the Drug Inspection Department. Additionally, it bans the advertisement of any facilities or installment payment systems unless a license has been obtained.

The decision also establishes strict controls on advertising content, prohibiting the use of misleading terms such as "best," "latest," "fastest," or "only," as well as unprofessional titles like "legend" or "celebrity expert." In addition, it forbids the photographing of patients or consumers inside pharmaceutical centers for any advertising purposes.

The decision also outlined the formation of a

committee, led by the Assistant Undersecretary for Drug and Food Control Affairs, to review licensing applications for advertisements. This committee is tasked with issuing the necessary licenses for advertisements and has the authority to revoke them in the event of violations of the established regulations.

Moreover, the decision emphasized the enforcement of penalties as outlined in the laws regulating the pharmacy profession and drug circulation, including both administrative and criminal penalties for violators.

The decision clarified that the provisions of the decision do not apply to advertisements published by the Ministry of Health or pharmacies affiliated with government agencies. The decision also exempts voluntary campaigns, provided they receive the necessary approvals from the relevant authorities.

The Ministry of Health confirmed that the decision seeks to enhance transparency in medical advertisements, safeguard consumers from misleading claims, regulate the use of social media for promoting health products, and ensure that advertisements provide accurate, scientifically backed information.

Q8 EduEx connects students to higher education opportunities

The 10th edition of the Q8 EduEx – Kuwait Higher Education Exhibition is set to connect aspiring students, parents, and professionals with top universities from 11 countries. This premier event offers invaluable guidance for those considering Master's programs or higher education specialties, both in Kuwait and abroad.

The event will take place on February 10 and 11 at Hall 4A, Kuwait International Fair. School/college trips are scheduled from 9:00 AM to 12:30 PM, while parents, students, and professionals can attend from 4:00 PM to 8:00 PM.

Don't miss the chance to meet university representatives and educational advisers who can help shape your academic journey.

Q8 EduEx offers a unique opportunity for students and parents to meet with over sixty university representatives in person to discuss Master's programs and specialty courses for career development. University advisers will be available to provide free counseling on scholarships, offering personalized advice and insights on admissions.

The event is organized under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education, ensuring it meets the highest standards. In addition, we are proud to host

the Q8 Skills for Careers Expo. This platform brings together Kuwait Ministries, Authorities, and Corporate Organizations to sponsor, exhibit, and showcase their contributions to building Kuwait's most valuable resource—its human capital.

The Q8 Skills for Careers Expo offers a dynamic platform for government entities, private institutions, and corporate organizations to connect with high-level



decision-makers and HR professionals from over 250 large companies and ministries in Kuwait. This event aims to support young professionals and aspiring youth by providing employment opportunities and helping them develop skills in demand in the job market.

For more information about the event, contact Khadeer at Khadeer@pineex.com or through WhatsApp at +965 98802567.

Don't miss this exciting opportunity to connect with experts, explore educational pathways, and shape your future!



Embassy of Turkey announces launch of Türkiye Scholarships

Embassy of Turkey announced that applications for Turkish scholarships for 2025 have commenced at the Embassy.

In a statement last week, the embassy said that applications for scholarships for the year 2025 are open until 20 February for international students from all countries.

The scholarships are designed to cultivate a network of future leaders who are dedicated to strengthening cooperation between nations and promoting mutual understanding among societies. This initiative reflects the embassy's commitment to fostering global connections and educational opportunities for students worldwide.

The Turkish scholarships stand out because they offer comprehensive support to recipients. In addition to covering financial needs, including tuition fees, accommodation, and health insurance, the scholarships also

provide university placements and access to academic, social, and cultural facilities at all levels of higher education.

The scholarships are available for applicants wishing to pursue studies at various levels, including fellowship, diploma, bachelors, masters, and doctoral programs.

Additionally, other programs such as research grants and success grants have different application periods and are regularly announced on the scholarship program's website and social media channels.

It is worth noting that Türkiye Scholarships is a highly competitive, government-funded program aimed at outstanding students and researchers.

This scholarship offers the opportunity to pursue either full-time or short-term programs at some of the best universities in Turkey.

Cabinet approves new 'construction-waste' recycling plants

Council of Ministers has approved Kuwait Municipality's plan to collaborate with both local and foreign investors and companies to establish several large factories for recycling and processing solid and liquid construction waste. The plan aims to address the growing volume of construction waste that exceeds the capacity of current recycling plants.

The significant increase in urban development in

recent years, accompanied by the large number of ongoing construction work, including constructing new office and residential buildings and complexes, as well as the demolition or restoration of old buildings and maintenance work on buildings and structure have led to a huge accumulation of construction waste, which poses an environmental challenge.

With over five million tonnes of construction waste created on average annually for the past five years, which equates to more than 14,000 tons of waste per day, Kuwait faces an environmental challenge that needs to be resolved urgently.

The operational capacity of the currently operating recycling factories, range between 2,000 and 2,500 tons per day per factory, necessitating the establishment of new factories to recycle this waste.

Municipal Council has identified several areas totaling 1.25 million square meters for the projects. These areas include one million square meters located in the north of the country, specifically along Salmi Road, where factories dedicated to recycling solid construction waste will be built. The other site, located south of Kuwait along the Al-Artal Military Road, will be allocated for recycling liquid waste, with an area of 250,000 square meters.

Kuwait Municipality is said to have completed preparations for a feasibility study by specialized consultants, on the new construction-waste project, which is expected to attract several local and international consulting companies.

The study is expected to be completed within six months from the final award date, after obtaining the necessary approvals from the State Audit Bureau.

Poland takes over EU presidency with security as priority

Kuwait will host the 29th Gulf European Ministerial Meeting this year

The Times Kuwait Report

Poland has taken over the presidency of the Council of the European Union from the beginning of the year, disclosed Ambassador of Poland H E Michael Cholewa in a joint press briefing at the embassy on 16 January.

Elaborating on the EU presidency, he said, Poland took over the six-month rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union for the second time, the first being in 2011, and will strive to prioritise security as the



main goal. He added that Poland joined the European Union on 1 May 2004, and last year celebrated the 20th anniversary of accession.

Ambassador Cholewa pointed out that while the motto of the Polish presidency was Security, Europe, the foundation of the Polish presidency's activities in 2025 will be the multi-faceted security: external, internal, information, energy, economic, food and health.

Explaining the design of the logo of the Polish presidency, Ambassador Cholewa said that it was inspired by Poland's recent history. It symbolizes the rebirth of independent Poland, hearkens back to the best traditions of the Solidarity movement and marks Poland's return to the mainstream of European debate.

The Polish flag at the center of the European Union symbolizes the present, highlighting the overwhelming enthusiasm of Poles towards the EU as well as Poland's leadership in terms of European integration. The Polish flag is also intertwined with the letters 'E' and 'U', which alludes to two decades of Poland's membership in the Union, as well as the partnership and synergy. In addition, the logo reflects Poland's commitment to European affairs and the ambition to set the course of EU policies, in particular concerning the security of the continent.

Regarding EU-GCC relations, the ambassador said that the EU views the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states as important actors in the regional and global arena, as they have proven to be strong and trusted partners of the European Union in the areas of trade, combatting terrorism, energy, environment, climate change, nuclear non-proliferation and economic diversification.

He stressed that the Polish presidency also considers it important to further strengthen dialogue and cooperation between the EU and GCC, which has increased over the years. "We will strive to implement the statements issued during the first summit between the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council in Brussels, on 16 October 2024," said the Polish envoy.

He also pointed out that Poland's



presidency of the Council of the European Union coincides with Kuwait's presidency of the Gulf Cooperation Council. It is a valuable opportunity to strengthen our bilateral relations. In this context, we hope to see high-level visits in 2025. He indicated that his country supports the exemption for Kuwaitis from the Schengen visa and that the file is currently in the hands of the European Commission, which is expected to submit its proposals to the European Parliament soon.

For her part, Ambassador of the European Union, H E Anne Kostenin, congratulated the Polish Ambassador on the occasion of his country's assumption of the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union, which will last up to 30 June.

She also stated that the Polish presidency in 2025, will be a distinguished year of relations between the European Union and Kuwait and between the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

She wished Kuwait every success in the presidency of the Gulf Cooperation Council for 2025, stressing that Kuwait will play a key role in advancing the results of the first summit between the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. She also pointed out that Kuwait will host later in 2025 the twenty-ninth joint ministerial meeting between the 27 member states of the European Union and the six Gulf Cooperation Council countries, to follow up on what was discussed last October at the Brussels summit.

Elderly-care resort to come up at Sabah Al-Ahmad City

The 133,000-square-meter resort, set to be completed in three years, will offer world-class elderly care and rehabilitation services, positioning itself as a regional hub and eliminating the need for travel to Western countries.

Ministry of Social Affairs, in collaboration with the Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects (KAPP), is preparing to launch the 'Sabah Al-Ahmad Resort for Elderly Care' at the Sabah Al-Ahmad Residential City, coming up around 80 km to the south of Kuwait City.

Elaborating on the resort for the elderly, Assistant Undersecretary for Planning and Administrative Development Affairs at the Ministry of Social Affairs, Dr. Sayed Issa, explained that the resort will be built on a 133,000-square-meter plot in the service axis of Sabah Al-Ahmad Residential City. The project aims to establish a world-class facility that competes with counterparts in developed Western countries, serving as a regional center for providing specialized services and care for the elderly, and eliminating the need for them to travel abroad to seek such services.

He added that the project is a true embodiment of the vision of 'Kuwait 2035', which aims to strengthen partnerships with the private sector and civil society institutions to support social welfare initiatives. The resort will also provide educational, financial, and social welfare services for the elderly, as well as feature venues offering entertainment, administrative, and security services and ensure the psychosocial well-being of the individual.

It will also include a five-star hotel, a shelter care home and an awareness center for Alzheimer's, neurodystrophy, and multiple sclerosis, focused on helping to rehabilitate patients, and to assist families in managing the various stages of the diseases.

Additionally, the resort will house a health, rehabilitation, sports, and cultural club, a physiotherapy rehabilitation center, swimming pools for health rehabilitation and hydrotherapy, acoustic therapy, playgrounds, a walking track, rest areas, a restaurant complex, a cinema, a mosque, services and resort

management facilities, building services, and resort management facilities.

Regarding the project's cost and its funding mechanism, Dr. Issa said that the final cost of the project will be determined by a specialized consultant, and if the project estimate exceeds KD60 million, it will be open for public subscription, similar to recently launched energy projects such as Phases 2 and 3 of the North Al-Zour Water and Power Plant. However, if the total cost is less than KD60 million, then the project will be a partnership between the Social Affairs Ministry, the investor, and KAPP, in accordance with the regulations and procedures specified by the authority's law. He added that the estimated duration of the project is three years, from June 2025 to May 2028.

Dr. Issa further revealed that the project is nearing completion of the study and evaluation phase, and is expected to be presented this week to the Supreme Committee of the Partnership Commission, headed by the Minister of Finance, with membership from the Ministers of Public Works, Trade and Industry, Electricity and Water, and Municipality, along with the Director of the Public Authority for Environment. This will complete the procedures for its introduction.

He pointed out that the entities directly involved in the project include the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Health, the Public Authority for Disability Affairs, as well as public benefit associations.

The Ministry of Social Affairs, represented by the Planning and Administrative Development Sector and under the direct guidance of Minister Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah, is one of the key government entities involved in realizing the project as part of achieving Kuwait's ambitious Vision 2035.

The project will go through several stages: preparation in cooperation with the partnership body, the appointment of a



consultant, and the preparation of a feasibility study. Following this, the project will move to the stages of announcing the project, expressing interest from investors, qualifying investors, and receiving their offers. This will lead to the selection of an investor, negotiations, signing the partnership contract and financial closure, followed by implementation and follow-up.

Dr. Issa highlighted that one of the key focuses of the project is to create job opportunities for citizens in both the government and private sectors. He also noted that the project would enhance Kuwait's international standing, improve its classification in the Sustainable Development and Human Rights Index, and foster a more developed human environment.

He explained that such projects align with the provisions of Law No. 18/2016 on the social welfare of the elderly, particularly Article 19, which requires the government to provide spaces for the elderly in clubs and centers offering sports, cultural, religious, and recreational activities that meet the specific needs of the elderly.



Embassy of Japan hosts exhibition on atomic bomb devastation

The Embassy of Japan and the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters (NCCAL) jointly hosted the launch of the 'Hiroshima Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Posters Exhibition' on 9 January at the Funoon Hall in Ahmad Al-Adwani Art Gallery, in Abdullah Al-Salem Area.

The poster exhibition was organized by the Embassy of Japan in collaboration with the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, and the

Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation

In his opening remarks at the inauguration of the exhibition, Ambassador of Japan, H.E. Mukai Kenichiro, expressed his gratitude to all the organizations involved in organizing the exhibition.

The ambassador emphasized that the exhibition's most important message is to reaffirm the importance of peace and to pass on the tragedy of the atomic bomb to

future generations to ensure it never happens again. He also highlighted that Kuwait is the first country to host the atomic bomb poster exhibition in the Arab world.

The opening ceremony was attended by the Acting Secretary General of NCCAL, Dr. Mohammad Al-Jassar, and the Ambassador of Kuwait to Japan, H.E. Sami Al-Zamanan. The event also saw the presence of numerous public figures, including ambassadors, artists

such as the renowned Kuwaiti artist Thuraya Al-Baqsam, and students. The exhibition will remain open to the public until 20 January, with the hope that it will inspire visitors to strive for a peaceful, nuclear-weapon-free world.

Exhibition timings are in the morning from 8am to 2pm and in the evening from 4pm to 9pm. The exhibition will be closed on Fridays and open on Saturdays only in the evening from 4pm to 9pm.



IWG makes its mark at HORECA Kuwait 2025



The ladies group of the International Women's Group (IWG) took part in the 13th edition of HORECA Kuwait 2025, the country's leading food and hospitality exhibition, held at the Kuwait International Fairgrounds.

The IWG was warmly received by Nabila Al-Anjari, General Manager of Leaders Group and Head of the Organizing Committee for the fair; Mohamed Najia, Executive Director of the fair; and Joumana Dammou Salame, Managing Director of the Hospitality Services Company.

The event organizers provided a comprehensive overview of the exhibition, highlighting its significance in promoting businesses in the hospitality sector and its role in marketing products for hotels and suppliers.

This year's event featured over 200 companies showcasing innovative products and services, bringing together top industry leaders in hospitality and food service. The exhibition

offered attendees unique opportunities to network, foster business relationships, and explore the latest market trends.

Accompanied by exhibition officials, the IWG toured the pavilions, expressing admiration for the high-quality products and services presented by the participating exhibitors.

Mrs. Polina Dalmini, President of IWG and spouse of the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Eswatini, extended her gratitude to the organizers for their hospitality and continuous support of IWG's participation in the annual event.

On behalf of the IWG board and members, Mrs. Polina presented a commemorative shield as a token of appreciation for the fair's significant contributions to Kuwait's hospitality and tourism sectors. In turn, the International Women's Group was presented with a commemorative shield of appreciation for their ongoing support.

Cost of Living in Kuwait second lowest in the Gulf



The 'cost of living' in Kuwait is the second lowest among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The 2025 iteration of the 'World Cost of Living Index', placed Kuwait just above Oman, which has the lowest living cost in the GCC, but below that of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, and the Emirates, respectively.

In the Arab world, Kuwait was ranked 12th and 80th globally out of 139 countries included in the 'Cost of Living' survey. The annual index evaluates the cost of living in each country based on five global standard criteria, comparing them to the cost of living in New York City, USA.

Among the criteria evaluated by the index are the average rental prices (both residential and commercial); average cost of living with rental costs; average grocery prices; average restaurant prices; and the average purchasing power of the local currency based on average net salary. According to the index rankings, Kuwait received 40.4 points in the overall assessment. This means that the overall cost

of living in Kuwait is only 40.4 percent of the cost of living in New York City, which serves as the global reference scale with 100 points.

The five standard evaluation criteria, in comparison to New York City, earned Kuwait 21.9 percent for average rent prices; 32.2 percent for the cost of living with rental costs; 33.7 percent for grocery prices; 40.8 percent for average restaurant prices; and 1.74 percent for the purchasing power of the local currency—in other words, the purchasing power of the Kuwaiti dinar is 1.74 times greater than the purchasing power of the US dollar in New York.

The ten countries with the lowest cost of living in the world, according to the index, were as follows: Pakistan, Libya, Egypt, India, Afghanistan, Madagascar, Bangladesh, Russia, and Paraguay. The ten countries with the highest cost of living in the world, according to the index, are: Switzerland, the US Virgin Islands, Iceland, the Bahamas, Singapore, Hong Kong (China), Barbados, Norway, Papua New Guinea, and Denmark.

Women with revoked citizenship to receive civil ID cards from February

Acting Director General of the Public Authority for Civil Information, Jaber Al-Kandari, announced that, under the directives of the First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Interior, Sheikh Fahd Al-Yousef, the 'My Identity' application

has been activated for individuals subject to the withdrawal of citizenship under Article (8), based on the lists received from the Ministry of Interior.

Al-Kandari emphasized the importance of ensuring that the application is updated to the latest version, 2.1.4, in order to activate it and fully benefit from its features.

Moreover, Al-Kandari stated that, to streamline the process, new civil cards for this category will be issued gradually starting in February, without the need for individuals to visit the Authority.

MoCI committed to prevent market violations, price gouging

Commercial fraud, artificial price increases, domestic labor violations, fish auction abuses, and issues with subsidized goods and commercial licenses top the list of market violations.

Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) reiterated its commitment to monitoring, inspecting, and preventing violations of the law with regard to commercial and industrial activities, and to initiating penalties against the perpetrators or referring them to the concerned entities for further action.

The comments were made by Director of the Commercial Control Department at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Faisal Al-Ansari during a media interview last week. He stressed that the ministry conducts regular inspection campaigns to ensure consumer protection and achieve fairness in the market.

"The year 2024 saw intense oversight by the ministry, and we will continue to address any excesses or anomalies that threaten the transparency of activities in the market or harm consumer rights," said Al-Ansari.

Al-Ansari pointed out that in December

2024, teams from the ministry recorded a total of 600 inspection rounds, seizure reports, and complaints, which included 156 seizure of goods or complaints and 444 inspection rounds across Kuwait's markets.

He noted that the December statistics reflect the vigorous efforts exerted by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to promote integrity and control commercial abuses. While the figures highlight significant challenges, the ministry affirms that it will continue to address any practices that threaten market stability and consumer confidence.

Elaborating on the infringements recorded by the ministry, Al-Ansari explained that the seized violations included offenses affecting societal values and Kuwait's commercial system, and that some of the seized goods "violated public morals," while others contained improperly printed Qur'anic verses.

He added, "Other violations were



concentrated in the vegetable and fruit markets, where products were seized for lacking clear data such as package weight and country of origin, in addition to the absence of scales or price and weight labels."

Al-Ansari explained that the most prominent violations also involved price manipulations, in the recruitment of domestic labor, and in the

failure of commercial agents to secure imported goods or provide maintenance and repair services for goods under warranty.

He pointed out that inspectors have also monitored irregularities related to artificial price hikes, advertising offers and incorrect discount offers in shops and restaurants, as well as excesses in the organization of fish auctions and car rental services.

Al-Ansari said, "The violations did not stop there but extended to issues such as commercial fraud in state-subsidized goods, violations of regulations related to commercial licenses, and the prevention of cash transactions in some activities."

During one of the control tours, Al-Ansari said that inspectors seized shops displaying imported fruits with false data about the country of origin. He pointed out that the shops were immediately fined, and those responsible were referred to the competent authorities.

Initiative launched to reduce food waste, support needy people

Kuwait Association for Needy Families, announced last week the launch of 'Fayad', a non-profit food preservation company. The initiative, organized in partnership with the 'Nemati' project led by Mohammed Al-Muzaini and food entrepreneur Abdullah Al-Mutairi, aims to reduce food waste and provide direct support to needy families, and to promote sustainability and social responsibility in Kuwait.

In his speech during the launch of the initiative, Chairman of the Board of Kuwait Association for Needy Families, Engineer Bader Al-Mubarak stated: "Fayad is a qualitative initiative that reflects the founders' commitment to utilizing food resources in an innovative and sustainable way. The project aims to collect surplus food from various sources, including restaurants, hotels, social events, cooperatives, central markets, vegetable markets, and food factories,



preserve it, and redistribute it to needy workers and families in line with high health standards."

He added that the project aims to promote a culture of social responsibility and reduce food waste while ensuring that support reaches the most vulnerable groups in a dignified and sustainable manner.

For his part, Mohammed Al-Muzaini said that "The launch of Fayad is a significant strategic step in tackling food waste in Kuwait. We are proud to partner with the Kuwait Society for Needy Families, as this project merges innovation and social responsibility to bring about positive change. Collaboration among various entities will help turn surplus food into real opportunities to support needy families, foster a culture of sustainability, and reduce food waste."

Vaccination compulsory for pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia

Ministry of Health (MoH) in Kuwait has announced that anyone traveling to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to perform umrah pilgrimage or visit the Prophet's Mosque, must follow the health guidelines issued by the relevant health authorities in the Kingdom



The guidelines, which are based on the need to ensure the safety and well-being of all pilgrims, specify that all adults and children aged one year or older must receive the quadrivalent vaccine, ACYW-135, that protects against meningococcal meningitis caused by the bacteria Neisseria meningitidis.

The guidelines also underline that it is important for pilgrims to obtain a vaccination certificate verifying that the vaccine was administered at least 10 days prior to arrival in the Kingdom. The certificate must remain valid for three years if the polysaccharide vaccine is used, and five years if the conjugate vaccine is administered. MoH pointed out that the specified vaccine is available at all preventive health centers and traveler clinics in Kuwait during official working hours. This measure aims to facilitate procedures and ensure the safety and well-being of travelers.

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'Kochi Dialogue 2025' strengthens India-GCC partnership

Ambassador Mishal Mustafa Al-Shamali said the event serves as a new platform to develop promising, multifaceted future visions that unite the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and India.

A diplomatic initiative by India that aims to strengthen sustainable partnership with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, was held on 16 and 17 January at Kochi in India's Kerala State.

Kochi Dialogue 2025, organized by India's Centre for Public Policy Research in collaboration with the Indian Ministry of External Affairs and themed 'India's Westward Policy: People, Prosperity, and Progress', seeks to address regional and international challenges and deepen cooperation across multiple sectors in India and the GCC states.

Prominent figures, including Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Jassem Mohamed Al-Budaiwi, along with a group of distinguished political and economic figures from both India and the GCC countries, will participate and enrich dialogue that enhances partnerships, fosters cooperation, and strengthens India-GCC relations.



Kochi Dialogue 2025, which will also include prominent policymakers, business leaders, policy experts, and stakeholders aims to forge action-oriented partnerships to address five

pivotal themes that could further boost India-GCC relations: Trade, Economy and Investments: Explore ways to enhance bilateral trade, ease of doing business, and promote investments across sectors. Maritime Strategic Partnerships: Strengthening cooperation in maritime security and addressing strategic priorities in the Indian Ocean region.

Education, Healthcare and Technology: Building collaboration in education, technology, and healthcare in areas such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and smart city development. Communication with Expatriates: Recognizing the contributions of the Indian diaspora to economic growth and cultural diplomacy while addressing the challenges faced by migrants.

Cooperation and Innovation in the field of energy: Expanding energy cooperation in traditional and renewable sectors, with a focus on green hydrogen and sustainable solutions.

Kuwaiti security and nationality are inviolable red lines

After prolonged silence amidst intense political pressure, the law is taking decisive action during the current reform to distinguish justice from injustice and to safeguard the state, its legal framework, and its security institutions. Kuwait, its security and nationality are inviolable red lines that no one will be allowed to cross, said the Interior ministry.

In a meeting last week, the Supreme Committee for the Investigation of Nationality, chaired by First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Interior, Sheikh Fahd Al-Yousef, decided to revoke and annul Kuwaiti citizenship for 5,838 cases. The cases are now being prepared for submission to the Council of Ministers for further action.



The Interior Ministry announced that the committee's decision to revoke citizenship was based on Articles (10 and 11) of the Kuwaiti Nationality Law No. (15) of 1959, and its amendments. This included four cases of dual citizenship, 128 cases of fraud and false statements (forgery), and individuals who acquired citizenship through dependency under Article (21 bis A). Additionally, 5,706 cases were revoked under Article (8), involving individuals from 54 different countries as per Article (13, Paragraph 4) of the Nationality Law.

Sources at the ministry emphasized that

the cases examined by the committee daily reveal the extent of the tampering with Kuwaiti citizenship. The serious risks exposed by these files serve as a powerful response to those advocating for leniency in handling the discovered cases.

The source stated that forgery has led individuals to occupy positions that pose significant and dangerous threats to Kuwait, its security, and its people. There can be no leniency in this matter under any circumstances. Kuwait is a red line, its nationality is a red line, and its security is a red line.

The process of investigation and enforcement of the law remains consistent, and that all cases undergo thorough investigations, inquiries, and file reviews at multiple stages, followed by the implementation of the necessary legal procedures.

The committee will continue its efforts by making decisions on cases involving forgery, dual citizenship, and Article (8) violations, emphasizing that there is no distinction in handling cases of dual citizenship, whether Gulf, foreign, or Arab. The law is the same for everyone, and the investigators exert extensive effort to thoroughly examine every file where a single instance of forgery is detected, ensuring the integrity of the entire file and verifying the absence of additional forged cases within it.

In response to a question about the role of employees in cases of discovered forgery and the registration of individuals who are not genuine in nationality files, the ministry source clarified that in all forgery cases, the individuals involved submitted documents and files that appeared legitimate at the time, accompanied by witness testimonies. As a result, there was no reason to doubt the authenticity of these records initially.

However, with the advancement of modern scientific methods, such as DNA testing, which definitively eliminate doubt and settle the matter, along with ongoing investigations, inquiries, and additional information, the cases are now being thoroughly scrutinized and forgeries being unearthed.



KCC collaboration with Peshawar Zalmi

KCC Board President Mr. Haider Farman is delighted to announce the upcoming pathbreaking collaboration with Mr. Javed Afridi's PSL franchise Peshawar Zalmi as part of KCC's global development program strategy for its national men's & women's team.

"Following a successful delivery in its first talent hunt program in Colombo which helped Kuwait grow a pool of consistent contracted players for the men's team, KCC Delegation spearheaded by Director General Mr. Sajid Ashraf are heading to Pakistan to conduct a 3 days talent hunt program and sign an official Memorandum of Understanding with Peshawar Zalmi's Director of Cricket, Mr. Mohammad Akram – the former Test & ODI cricketer of Pakistan", Mr. Farman declared.

As part of KCC's vision & future strategy, President Mr. Haider Farman (the former Director of Asian Games & the Global Technical head of ANOC – Association of National Olympic Committees) emphasized that "this is a fantastic opportunity to grow a partnership with an established franchise of a Test nation which will definitely pave the way for multiple opportunities for young talent in Pakistan as well as our players (men's & women's category), coaches, ground staff, support staff and Kuwait cricket as a whole".

As part of its collaboration with the franchise, Peshawar Zalmi have already shortlisted high potential players who will now take part in the final stages of the talent hunt where the final selection will be jointly done by Kuwait Cricket & Peshawar Zalmi coaches from the 18th-20th of January 2025.

The selected players will obtain a golden opportunity to move to Kuwait where they will be provided jobs with KCC's sponsors & partners and join the Men's high performance program, strengthening KCC's Domestic and National

pathway in the process. The same process will be repeated for the Women's pathway as well in the future.

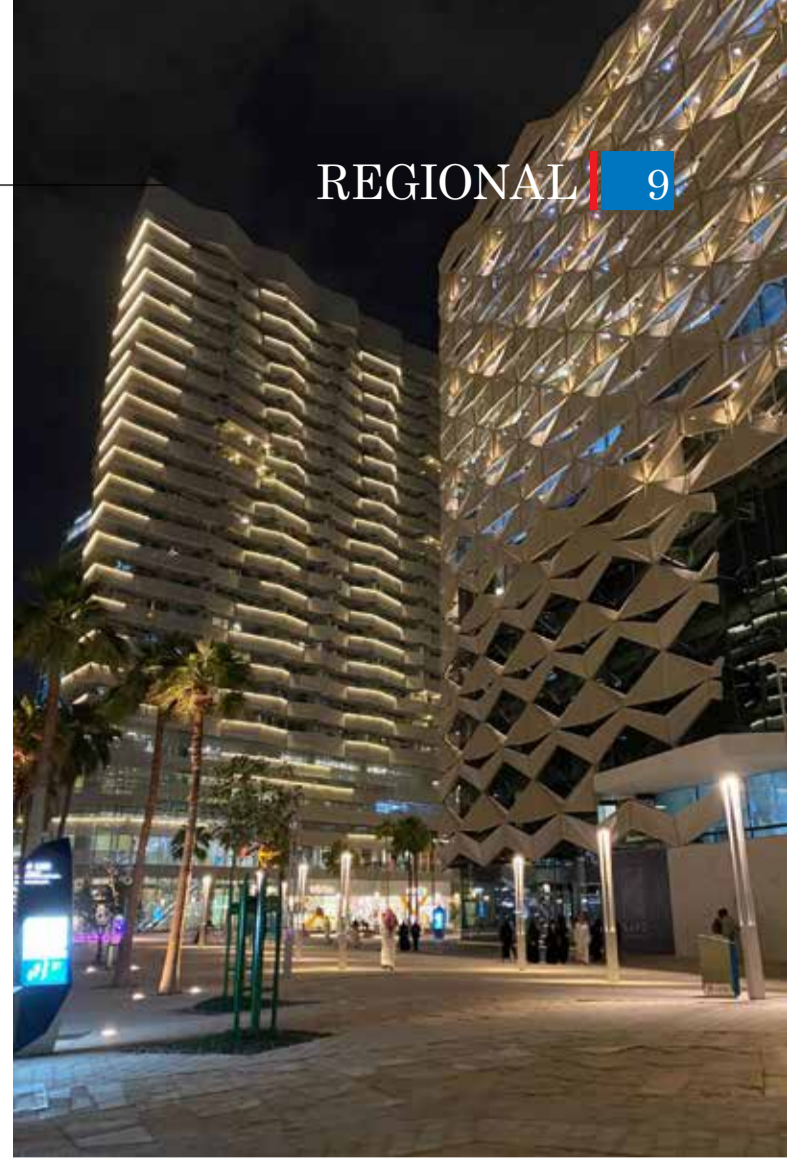
Director General Mr. Sajid Ashraf, who has been the visionary go getter of Kuwait Cricket alongside the KCC Board President Mr. Haider Farman, highlighted that players from Kuwait cricket will also be nominated towards future PSL drafts with the chance to represent Peshawar Zalmi in the coming editions based on international T20I performances for Kuwait & the high performance standards required by Zalmi across all disciplines.

Mr. Ashraf further added that since Kuwait is a high performance country with the ICC, this partnership will help develop KCC's coaching staff which has been diligently & successfully led by the Head Coach Mr. Qasim Ali over the past 12 months and he will be supported by Kuwait's experienced coach Mr. Tahir Khan & high performance committee member & former national player Mr. Saud Qamar on this historic visit to the home ground of Peshawar Zalmi.

In addition, Peshawar Zalmi are committed to developing the global Zalmi league in Kuwait, providing greater exposure and opportunity across our domestic structure. Peshawar Zalmi are also keen in conducting Bi-lateral Tours for our national women's and youth programmes as they look to sustain long term strategic development across both countries.

KCC delegation will get to work with former Test, ODI & T20 legends such as Mohammad Yousuf, & Umar Gul during the talent hunt program which kick starts tomorrow and everyone's bound to gain valuable international and franchise experience as Kuwait Cricket continues to grow in the region.

This ground breaking collaboration is vital to KCC's strategic vision and will continue to strengthen the future of Kuwait Cricket.



Visiting Riyadh Season

By Fajr Sabah
Special to The Times Kuwait

In recent years there has been a noticeable surge in tourism across the Gulf countries, particularly in Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom has excelled in focusing on specific cities and diverse regions to attract tourists, transforming them into destinations for entertainment and enjoyment, with Riyadh Season standing out as a prime example.

Saudi Tourism Authority and related entities have worked diligently to establish and launch the season in the best possible manner, leaving a lasting impression on visitors and enthusiasts



alike. There is no doubt about the annual success of Riyadh Season, its growing reputation, and the cultural, entertainment, and tourism openness it has brought to various fields and regions across Saudi Arabia.

I had the opportunity to experience this unique event and visited Riyadh during its vibrant festivities, ensuring I explored everything it had to offer. I visited Al-Suwaidi Park and enjoyed a Senegalese-themed day, as the park highlights a different country each week. I also strolled through Garden City, played

games at Boulevard World, and attended a sensational musical concert featuring Khalid Al-Mulla, Issa Al-Balooshi, Aseel Abu Bakr, and Mohammed Al-Bakri. Additionally, I made sure to visit the Dior Exhibition, held for the first time.

I explored various cafés, including those in the Diplomatic Quarter, Riva Riyadh, and Listen Valley, as well as the ones along Al-Tahlia Street. I shopped at malls, enjoyed performances and songs from different countries, and experienced their unique events.

I did not miss out on the Jebri heritage area with its diverse museums and contemporary restaurants. I made sure to sip tea at Al-Samhaniya and spend a lovely winter evening at Smaar. Naturally, I also visited cultural libraries and national museums, concluding my trip at the traditional markets of Taibah and Souwaigah.

I sought to immerse myself in the past, present, and future, while also enjoying the moment. Balancing between culture, art, and literature, and between music, shopping, and entertainment, I strived to embrace the harmony of heritage, civilization, and modern times.

Youth Summit highlights role of youth in driving societal transformations

The GCC Youth Summit 2025, organized by the QatarDebate Center and held under the theme, 'Dialogue and Visions', concluded on 12 January with the focus on fostering sustainable development in the region and the role of youth in bringing about societal transformations. The two-day summit featured insightful discussions on groundbreaking ideas, focused on the future of the Gulf region and the pivotal role of youth in advancing various industries.

Organized in collaboration with Qatar's Ministry of Sports and Youth, the strategic partner, and Msheireb Museums, the logistical partner, the event took place at Bin Jelmood House in Msheireb Downtown Doha. The summit provided a vibrant and interactive platform for youth and experts from across the Gulf to present their visions, exchange ideas, and formulate constructive recommendations for the future of the region.

The summit's closing session was attended by Qatar's Minister of Education and Higher Education, Lolwah bint Rashid bin Mohammed Al Khater, along with Undersecretary of the Ministry of Sports and Youth, Yasser bin Abdullah bin Ahmed Al-Jamal, and decision-makers from across GCC countries along with members of the QatarDebate Center, led by its Executive Director, Dr. Hayat Abdullah Marafi.

During the closing session, titled, 'Our Cultural Identity in the Digital Age: Bridging Media Diversity and Cultural Heritage in Production', participants explored the role of initiatives in the GCC to produce visual and written cultural content. Moreover, they highlighted the integration of technological



advancements in the process while focusing on preserving Gulf identity through the promotion of linguistic heritage and regional cultural production.

The session brought together Saad AlQahtani, a Kuwaiti content creator and host of Atheer, Habka; Layan Abdul Shakoor, Saudi founder and creative director of Mauzoun; and Fatma Al Remaili, CEO of the Doha Film Institute.

In his address to the gathering, Al Jamal emphasized the commitment of the Ministry of Sports and Youth to the development of youth and stated, "At the Ministry of Sports and Youth, we believe that young people are the pillar of sustainable development. Therefore, we strive to provide an environment that enables youth to achieve their ambitions and develop their skills."

He further added, "Today's challenges call for teamwork and collaboration to achieve shared goals. Through this summit, we hope that we will be able to develop effective strategies that contribute to empowering youth and enhancing

their contribution to society."

Key recommendations from the summit emphasized the development of policies in several key areas. These included the preservation of cultural heritage, supporting sustainability efforts, addressing climate challenges, developing the Gulf technology sector, and diversifying the economy away from reliance on oil. Other focal points included leveraging the Gulf's political legacy and its international policy paths, and enhancing the region's healthcare system to meet the needs of its societies.

For his part, Dr. Marafi, underscored the importance of the summit in stimulating constructive dialogue among young leaders in the Gulf. She noted, "Gulf youth are the force driving significant societal transformations today. In a rapidly changing world, the youth of the region are not only facing significant challenges but also creating innovative solutions that impact both their societies and the global

community. Therefore, the GCC Youth Summit is an ideal platform for these young leaders to showcase their potential and contribute effectively to vital issues such as sustainability, education, and the impact of technology."

She added, "We are proud to witness a generation committed to shaping their future. At QatarDebate Center, we aim to empower this generation and help pave the way for them to achieve their goals. Young people are the leaders of tomorrow, and together, we will build a sustainable and innovative future in the Gulf and beyond."

The summit marked another significant step in QatarDebate's commitment to supporting the role of youth and their innovative ideas in shaping the region's future. The GCC Youth Summit follows the successful Oasis of Dialogue Forum held in Oman in 2024, and the Doha Forum: Youth Edition 2024, which served as vital platforms for highlighting the voices of young leaders from around the world.

EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Turning the Financial Tide for Small Island States



Maya Delaney and Aminath Shauna

Maya Delaney, a former ambassador of youth climate action for the Bahamas, is the Octopus Desk Project Lead at the Ocean Risk and Resilience Action Alliance. Aminath Shauna, a former minister of environment, climate change, and technology of the Maldives, is a board member at the Ocean Risk and Resilience Action Alliance.

Small island developing states (SIDS) are on the front lines of climate change, threatened by rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and ocean warming and acidification, despite contributing the least to global greenhouse-gas emissions. This now poses an existential risk to our ways of life, our livelihoods, and the very ground beneath our feet.

Given our disproportionate reliance on the ocean, SIDS are uniquely positioned to preserve this fragile but essential resource. These countries are home to 40 percent of the world's coral reefs, which shelter one-quarter of all marine life and directly support the livelihoods of 500 million people. But even though our ecosystems play a crucial role in global climate mitigation and adaptation, SIDS face negative feedback loops from a host of interconnected economic and environmental challenges.

In the Maldives, which comprises nearly 1,200 islands and contains 3 percent of the planet's coral reefs, fishing and tourism account for up to 36 percent of GDP, while around 98 percent of exports are derived from the ocean. Because the economy depends on healthy coral reefs

and marine life, increased coral bleaching and declining fish stocks spell economic trouble. Moreover, climate change has led to freshwater scarcity, forcing the Maldives to rely on bottled water and thus increasing the flow of plastic waste into the ocean.

It is a similar story in the Bahamas, which consists of 700 islands and boasts the world's third-largest barrier reef. Tourism is even more central to the Bahamian economy, accounting for around 50 percent of GDP and employing nearly 70 percent of the workforce. But despite tourism's essential economic role, it has its own challenges, for example cruise ships dump plastics, fuel, and other waste into the ocean, degrading the very assets that attract visitors.

In many SIDS, the ocean also serves as an important thoroughfare. For a population spread out over atolls or an archipelago, the movement of people and essential goods, including food, medical supplies, potable water, and fuel, depends on inter-island mailboats

and barges, which are particularly vulnerable to adverse weather. Increasingly frequent and severe weather events—a consequence of climate change—could thus leave communities with insufficient supplies and uncertain about when the next shipment will arrive.

In addition to disrupting supply chains, climate disasters can destroy infrastructure. Last year, St. Vincent and the Grenadines suffered economic damage estimated at \$230 million, equivalent to 22 percent of its GDP, from Hurricane Beryl, while Hurricane Dorian wiped out over 25 percent of Bahamian GDP in 2019. Dominica suffered an even worse fate in 2017, when Hurricane Maria damaged or destroyed 95 percent of its housing stock and caused economic losses amounting to 226 percent of its GDP. These catastrophic events disrupt every aspect of life on our islands, and the high costs of rebuilding result in another negative feedback loop: greater economic losses from vulnerable infrastructure reduces our capacity to invest in resilience.

In the Maldives, 35 percent of financing for climate adaptation is provided by the domestic budget, while 34 percent comes from loans that will eventually need to be paid back. These outlays divert resources from other pressing needs, such as improving education and health-care services and strengthening democratic governance. Moreover, the financial pressure from climate shocks makes exploratory deep-

investment, since they can no longer access various grant facilities and concessional finance. SIDS are thus at risk of entering a debt spiral.

One promising solution is to increase the use of green and blue bonds, which provide more affordable financing for climate adaptation and biodiversity conservation, enabling SIDS to protect critical ecosystems and build economic resilience. In the Bahamas, for example, the recently announced Nature Bonds project, a cross-sector collaboration between banks, NGOs, and the Bahamian government, is expected to generate an estimated \$124 million for marine conservation over the next 15 years, without adding to the country's debt burden. Programs such as the Ocean Risk and Resilience Action Alliance's Blue Bond Accelerator, a new non-profit entity supporting governments, private issuers, and investors in structuring these instruments, will also help unlock long-term capital for SIDS.

Equally compelling are biodiversity and carbon credits, which recognize the essential role that SIDS play in mitigating climate change. These islands' coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrasses are important stores of biodiversity and carbon, absorbing vast amounts of CO₂ and providing valuable economic benefits. Incorporating these contributions into compliance and voluntary credit markets would develop new funding streams for SIDS, ensuring that they are financially rewarded for their conservation efforts.

With these tools, SIDS can harness our unique ecosystems and natural resources to achieve a more resilient and sustainable future. Yes, these countries are on the front lines in the fight against climate change. But SIDS are also home to some of the world's most valuable natural assets. Preserving these precious resources requires sustainable economic strategies, innovative financial solutions, and, perhaps most importantly, coordinated international support.

“ Although ecosystems in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) play a crucial role in global climate mitigation and adaptation, SIDS face negative feedback loops from a host of interconnected economic and environmental challenges. ”

and barges, which are particularly vulnerable to adverse weather. Increasingly frequent and severe weather events—a consequence of climate change—could thus leave communities with insufficient supplies and uncertain about when the next shipment will arrive.

In addition to disrupting supply chains, climate disasters can destroy infrastructure. Last year, St. Vincent and the Grenadines suffered economic damage estimated at \$230

sea mining and other risky ventures more tempting as a short-term fix to increase revenue, despite long-term damage to the marine environment.

The key to breaking these feedback loops is more financing. The problem is that many SIDS are in or at risk of debt distress, making new borrowing prohibitively expensive. Countries that have graduated from “least developed country” status also struggle to secure enough

EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

International Law in the Dock



Eric Posner

A professor at the University of Chicago Law School, he is the author of *How Antitrust Failed Workers*.

Over the last month, Israel has repeatedly attacked Syria, destroying military facilities and occupying territory, in clear violation of the United Nations Charter, which forbids the use of military force against foreign states except in self-defense or with the authorization of the Security Council.

While some countries have condemned Israel, the United States and most others are withholding criticism. They probably fear that if Syria's weapons are not destroyed, they could fall into the hands of terrorist organizations. Never mind that international law does not allow for such exceptions; it has become another casualty of events.

Israel's strikes in Syria are hardly an isolated example. The ruins of international law are all around us. Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014 and again in 2022, illegally annexed Ukrainian territory, committed atrocities against Ukrainian soldiers and civilians, and now faces accusations of genocide. China has used violence to expand its control over the South China Sea, and it now seems poised to invade Taiwan—an outcome that no one believes will be stopped by international law.

Moreover, the US military interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and elsewhere over the past few decades were all based on dubious legal theories. International crimes are occurring worldwide, in conflict-ridden places like Israel and Gaza, Myanmar, Ethiopia, and Sudan, and within authoritarian countries that are at peace.

Nor are wars and violence the only indications of international law's decline. The same trend afflicts the global economy. With its appellate body unable to function, the World Trade Organization has sat by helplessly as the world turns to protectionism. Likewise, the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court's feeble records make a mockery of their founders' ambitions. The ICJ was supposed to prevent war, and the ICC to ensure justice for victims of war crimes. But neither court does much at all.

A less visible, but equally important, development is that international investment



“As democracy recedes around the world, human-rights law is in tatters. Many governments are stripping citizens of basic legal protections, and repression is on the rise in countries once thought to be on the road to political freedom.”

law has provoked a backlash from its intended beneficiaries. Bilateral investment treaties were supposed to promote economic development in poorer countries by protecting foreign investors from expropriation. But there is little evidence that the law has helped these countries catch up. Instead, multinational corporations have used it to block developing countries from implementing economic reforms and environmental regulations that might cut into their margins.

Meanwhile, international law protecting migrants has spurred a nativist backlash in many destination countries, especially those that have been flooded with asylum seekers. As democracy recedes around the world, human-rights law is in tatters. Many governments are stripping citizens of basic legal protections, and political repression is on the rise in countries once thought to be on the road to political freedom. Even the European Union, the most successful international organization, lost the United Kingdom, has had to contend with

illiberal governments in Hungary and, until recently, Poland, and faces new challenges as Eurosceptic far-right parties gain power in its member states.

In the United States, Donald Trump won the 2024 presidential election despite, or perhaps because of, his contempt for international law. In his first term, the US withdrew from more than a dozen international agreements and organizations relating to security, human rights, climate change, and migration. Now, Trump plans to withdraw the US from the World Health Organization, as benign an international institution as there is, on the first day of his next term. But Barack Obama and Joe Biden also did little to promote international law during their respective terms. US recalcitrance has been bipartisan.

Why has this happened? The simplest explanation is that international law is a victim of the anti-globalization backlash. Globalization was once the promised path to freedom and riches, but today people associate it with uncontrolled migration, job loss, pandemics,

financial crises, and conflict. The benefits it generated for global economic growth were not sufficiently large, widespread, or visible to offset the real or perceived harms.

But international law was supposed to lock into place a liberal global order. In the 1990s, officials and commentators argued that international law enforces itself: as it spreads, it is internalized by states through their bureaucracies and further entrenched by public opinion. In fact, international law exists only to the extent that states—meaning their leaders, elites, and public—are willing and able to enforce it.

Enforcing international law is costly to the enforcer, who must impose sanctions, cut off diplomatic relations, or engage in other actions that may harm it as much as, or more than, the violator. As governments increasingly realized that the law stood in the way of their objectives, which change in response to changes in domestic needs and international relations, the incentive to maintain it waned. It did not help that by the 1990s, it was common to claim that international law reached deep into states' traditional jurisdictions, with provisions to regulate family relations, religious norms, cultural values, and the organization of the economy.

Supporters of international law believed that it would spur countries to adopt common moral and political values; it obviously has not. They also believed that countries would kneel to the Washington Consensus—free trade and investment, property rights, robust markets, low taxes—since all these things seemed to make sense in the US and the West in the 1990s. But such policies turned out to be hard to impose on other countries and, we now know, hard to sustain at home. National prosperity depends on stability, and stability requires the broad sharing of economic benefits, respect for local cultures and norms, and a sense among citizens that their political leaders answer to them, not to the foreign NGOs and international bureaucracies that have become convenient political footballs.

In the past, international law focused on protecting sovereignty, establishing basic forms of coordination (such as borders, time zones, maritime rules, and communication protocols), and, with more limited success, restricting the most extreme forms of violence, especially in war. Quite a few states, and not just China and Russia, have long urged the world to return to this modest but sustainable approach. The US, championing liberal internationalism, stood in the way. Under Trump, it may join them.



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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

Social Media as It Should Be



Robin Berjon
Former Vice-President of Data Governance at The New York Times and former Vice-Chair of the Board of Directors at W3C, is a technologist and governance expert.



Mathematician Cathy O’Neil once said that an algorithm is nothing more than someone’s opinion embedded in code. When we speak of ‘the algorithms’ that power Facebook, X, TikTok, YouTube, or Google Search, we are really talking about choices made by their owners about what information we, as users, should see. In these cases, ‘algorithm’ is just a fancy name for an editorial line. Each outlet has a process of sourcing, filtering, and ranking information that is structurally identical to the editorial work carried out in media—except that it is largely automated.

This automated editorial process, far more than its analog counterpart, is concentrated in the hands of billionaires and monopolies. Moreover, it has contributed to a well-documented list of social ills, including large-scale disinformation, political polarization and extremism, negative mental-health impacts, and the defunding of journalism. Worse, social-media moguls are now doubling down, seizing the opportunity of a regulation-free operating environment under Donald Trump to roll back

content-moderation programs.

But regulation alone is not enough, as Europe has discovered. If our traditional media landscape featured only a couple of outlets that each flouted the public interest, we would not think twice about using every available tool to foster media pluralism. There is no reason to accept in social media what we would not tolerate in legacy media.

Fortunately, alternatives are emerging. Bluesky, a younger social-media platform that recently surpassed 26 million users, was built for pluralism: anyone can create a feed based on any algorithm they choose, and anyone can subscribe to it. For users, this

opens many different windows onto the world, and people can also choose their sources of content moderation to fit their preferences. Bluesky does not use your data to profile you for advertisers, and if you decide you no longer like the platform, you can move your data and followers to another provider without any disruption.

Bluesky’s potential does not stop there. The product is based on an open protocol, which means anyone can build on top of the underlying technology to create their own feeds or even entirely new social applications. While Bluesky created a Twitter-like microblogging app on this protocol, the same infrastructure can be used to run alternatives to Instagram or TikTok, or to create totally novel services— all without users having to create new accounts.

In this emerging digital world, known as ‘the Atmosphere’ (so named for the underlying AT Protocol), people have begun creating social apps for everything from recipe sharing and book reviews to long-form blogging. And owing to the diversity of feeds and tools that enable communities or third parties to collaborate on content moderation, it will be much harder for harassment and disinformation campaigns to gain traction.

One can compare an open protocol to public roads and related infrastructure. They follow certain parameters but permit a great variety of creative uses. The road network can convey freight or tourists, and be used by cars, buses, or trucks. We might decide collectively to give more of it to public transportation, and it generally requires only minimal adjustments to accommodate electric cars, bikes, and even vehicles that had not been invented when most of it was built, such as electric vehicles.

An open protocol that is operated as public infrastructure has comparable properties: our feeds are free to encompass any number of topics, reflecting any number of opinions. We can tap into social-media channels specialized for knitting, bird watching, or book piles, or for more general news consumption. We can decide how our posts may or may not be used to train AI models, and we can ensure that the protocol is collectively governed, rather than being at the mercy of some billionaire’s dictatorial whims. Nobody wants to drive on a road where the fast lane is reserved for Cybertrucks and the far right.

‘Open social media’, as it is known, provides the opportunity to realize the internet’s original promise: user agency, not billionaire control. It is also a key component of national security. Many countries are now grappling with the reality that their critical digital infrastructure—social, search, commerce, advertising, browsers, operating systems, and more—is subordinated to foreign, increasingly hostile, companies.

But even open protocols can become

subject to corporate capture and manipulation. Bluesky itself will certainly have to contend with the usual forms of pressure from venture capitalists. As its CTO, Paul Frazee, points out, every profit-driven social-media company “is a future adversary” of its own users, since it will come under pressure to prioritize profits over users’ welfare. “That’s why we did this whole thing, so other apps could replace us if/when it happens.”

Infrastructure may be privately provided, but it can be properly governed only by its stakeholders; openly and democratically. For this reason, we must all set our minds on building institutions that can govern a new, truly social digital infrastructure. That is why I have joined other technology and governance experts to launch the Atlas Project, a foundation whose mission is to establish open, independent social-media governance, and to foster a rich ecosystem of new applications on top of the shared ‘AT Protocol’.

“ Many countries are now grappling with the reality that their critical digital infrastructure—social, search, commerce, advertising, browsers, operating systems, and more—is subordinated to foreign, increasingly hostile, companies. ”

Our goal is to become a countervailing force that can durably support social media operated in the public interest. Our launch is accompanied by the release of an open letter signed by high-profile Bluesky users such as the actor Mark Ruffalo and renowned figures in technology and academia such as Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales and Shoshana Zuboff.

There is nothing esoteric about our digital predicaments. Despite the technology industry’s claims, social media is media, and it should be held to the same standards we expect from traditional outlets. Digital infrastructure is infrastructure, and it should be governed in the

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EXCLUSIVE to THE TIMES KUWAIT

AI Alone Cannot Save the Planet



Yana Gevorgyan
Director of the Group on Earth Observations Secretariat.



“ Augmented intelligence combines powerful algorithms with human knowledge and lived experience to ensure that these advanced tools account for cultural, economic, and ecological considerations. ”

experience to ensure that these advanced tools account for cultural, economic, and ecological considerations.

For example, indigenous communities have learned how to manage resources sustainably by tracking nature's cycles and observing the environment for centuries. This expertise can help reveal subtle trends that data fail to

capture, ensuring that technology serves real-world needs. Using both indigenous insights and scientific data has provided a more accurate picture of polar bear populations in Canada's Northwest Territories, while an AI-driven model that factored in such traditional knowledge has helped Inuit communities in the Arctic identify new fishing grounds amid changing climate

conditions.

But indigenous populations are not the only ones with valuable insights. Local communities and private-sector actors, from smallholder farmers to multinational corporations, accumulate site-specific data when responding to droughts, adopting regenerative agriculture practices, investing in biodiversity projects, and decarbonizing their supply chains. Sharing this knowledge, which reflects cultural traditions and economic realities and is enriched by human judgment, strengthens the data on which AI models rely. Humans and machines learn from each other, creating a feedback loop that leads to more effective solutions.

Greater openness fosters trust, which in turn accelerates the adoption and refinement of AI tools. Before long, the willingness to share data, insights, and innovations will be seen as a mark of leadership and prestige, rather than a risk. Those who advocate data sharing will facilitate collective progress, demonstrating the cooperation and wisdom needed to guide us toward a safe and healthy planet. Augmented intelligence should be at the heart of global strategies for biodiversity conservation and climate mitigation and adaptation.

Policymakers can take steps to bridge the gap between digital innovators and local environmental stewards. Businesses can align their investments with nature-positive goals and share any resulting knowledge. Innovators can create accessible tools that take into account cultural contexts and input from communities—turning top-down interventions into agile, responsive, and collaborative efforts.

When political leaders and executives convene in Davos, they must acknowledge that technology is not a cure-all for climate change and biodiversity loss. Without human guidance, bolstered by our capacity for empathy, cultural understanding, and ethical reasoning, it will be impossible to unlock AI's potential. In the Intelligent Age, coupling advanced tools with lived experience will enable us to transcend the zero-sum mentality that pits people against machines.

This year's annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, where participants will address the theme of 'Collaboration for the Intelligent Age', comes at a critical juncture for the planet. Ecosystems are straining under the pressure of climate change, and the interconnected cycles that maintain freshwater availability, soil moisture, ocean health, and plant growth are spinning out of balance at an alarming pace.

At least 420 million hectares of forest globally have been lost to deforestation since 1990, causing biodiversity loss to accelerate and fueling climate volatility. Freshwater resources have declined so precipitously—owing to rising temperatures, groundwater mismanagement, saltwater intrusion, pollution, land degradation, and increased population density—that demand is predicted to exceed supply by 40 percent by 2030. And wildlife populations in freshwater habitats fell by 85 percent between 1970 and 2020.

The paradox is that we continue to degrade the systems that sustain life on Earth despite knowing more about their fragility than ever before. In the search for solutions, we often look to technology, especially artificial intelligence (AI), as a panacea. But AI alone cannot save the planet. Instead, we must ensure that AI complements, rather than replaces, human capabilities to realize its full potential.

While AI models can identify patterns, they often use incomplete or biased data, and thus lack important context. This is where 'augmented intelligence' comes in. Augmented intelligence combines powerful algorithms with human knowledge and lived

Oil dependency risks drive fiscal reforms

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

These include several draft laws to bring about fiscal and economic reforms, including one on the regulated withdrawal from the Future Generations Fund; the public debt bill; restructuring the public wage system; approving the GCC Agreement on Value Added Tax; repricing utility fees; establishing the Northern Economic Zone; and amending the import law.

The government's push to implement fiscal and structural reforms in a calibrated and prudent manner, highlight the cabinet's strategic approach to fostering resilience and sustainable growth in the economy. Reforms are also pivotal to spur the country's development plan, amid a projected slowdown in the global economy and a decline in oil prices.

Local economic analysts and international financial organizations, including the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, have long urged Kuwait to enact fiscal and structural reforms, and to diversify its oil-dependent economy. With oil and its derivatives accounting for more than half of Kuwait's gross domestic production (GDP), around 90 percent of fiscal revenues, and nearly 95 percent of exports, experts have opined that reforms and economic diversification are vital to offset risks posed to Kuwait's oil-reliant economy.

The overwhelming dependence on hydrocarbon revenues to fuel growth, and the slow pace in implementation of reforms

and economic diversification, exposes Kuwait to a slew of potential risks. Among others, the economy remains vulnerable to prolonged periods of low global oil prices, as well as from the rising marginal cost of oil production, and the continued decline in demand for fossil fuels, as the world transitions to renewable forms of energy.

Revenues from the country's large financial assets, including investment income from the copious sovereign wealth fund (SWF) and profit transfers from state-owned-enterprises (SOE), have in the past provided resilience to the Kuwaiti economy during low global oil price scenarios. However, unless urgent reforms and economic mitigatory measures are implemented, even Kuwait's large fiscal assets will be insufficient to sustain long-term growth and cater to a growing population.

Undercurrents of risks to Kuwait's economy are already becoming evident. The oil sector continued to remain in negative territory in the third-quarter of 2024, marking the sixth consecutive quarter of decline, amid reduced crude production due to compliance with supply cuts mandated by Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its non-OPEC allies—together known as OPEC+.

Concerns over oil supply security amid evolving geopolitical situations around the world, and faltering global oil demand, caused international oil prices to fluctuate in 2024. According to the US Energy Information Agency (EIA) Brent crude averaged \$80

per barrel (bbl) in 2024, marking the third consecutive annual decline—from \$82/bbl in 2023 and \$99/bbl in 2022.

Projections by the EIA for oil prices in 2025 also reveal that after an initial increase, oil prices could decline from mid-2025 through the end of 2026 as growth in global oil production outpaces growth in oil demand. The projections by EIA were corroborated in the latest economic analysis by the National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), which projected oil to remain at the lower end of the current trading range in 2025, averaging around \$70/bbl.

The bank observed that a combination of softer global oil demand growth and higher supplies from oil producers outside the OPEC+ group could lead to a supply overhang in the international oil market. OPEC+ is likely to extend already-delayed production rises beyond the first-quarter of 2025 or risk downward price pressures, opined NBK. It added that any attempt by OPEC+ to increase its supply to recapture market share from non-OPEC+ countries could drive oil prices even further down.

Larger-than-expected weakness in the Chinese economy, as well as a global fall-out from a potential hike in trade tariffs by the US, and higher oil supply growth under the pro-energy agenda of President Trump could further derail oil prices in 2025, said NBK. Supporting the bank's assessment of a global supply overhang this year, the Paris-based International Energy Agency (IEA)—the leading intergovernmental

agency on the global energy sector—indicated in its latest report that after years of high oil prices, 2025 would likely witness a moderation in international oil prices.

The IEA report showed that world oil demand growth is set to accelerate from 840,000 barrels per day in 2024 to 1.1 million barrels per day (mb/d) in 2025, and raise global consumption to 103.9 mb/d this year. However, this increased demand is tempered by an increase in oil supplies by 630,000 b/d in 2024 and by 1.9 mb/d in 2025, to reach 104.8 mb/d this year, leading to a supply overhang of 950,000 barrels per day in 2025. Unwinding of production cuts by OPEC+ in March 2025 would increase the supply overhang to 1.4 mb/d and further dampen oil prices.

The Agency stressed that despite the latest decision by OPEC+ to delay the unwinding of their additional voluntary production cuts by another three months and extend the ramp-up period by nine months through September 2026, persistent overproduction from some members within the group, as well as robust supply growth from outside OPEC+ countries and the relatively modest global oil demand growth, leaves the oil market looking comfortably supplied in 2025.

Policymakers in Kuwait will need to read and heed the multiple reports that point to oil's prospects in the year ahead and beyond. The reports also highlight the urgency in implementing the fiscal and structural reforms that are vital for Kuwait to ensure a vibrant and sustainable future.

Brief intense exercises help lower blood pressure

The study, conducted by researchers from UCL, in collaboration with colleagues at the University of Sydney in Australia, analyzed health data and blood pressure measurements from 14,761 participants with an average age of 54 from six cohorts in the Prospective Physical Activity, Sitting, and Sleep consortium.

Regular exercise along with a healthy diet and sound sleep are key components of a lifestyle that promotes good health and wellbeing. In particular, regular exercise and an active lifestyle have been associated with positive health outcomes such as maintaining a healthy blood pressure (BP) and body weight.

A new study by researchers at University College London (UCL) in the United Kingdom suggests that while regular exercise is key to overall health, adding a few minutes of vigorous physical activity to the daily exercise routine can result in clinically meaningful reduction in blood pressure.

Blood pressure refers to the force exerted by blood pushing against the inner walls of arteries as the heart pumps it around the body. A blood pressure reading is made up of two numbers: The pressure exerted when the heart beats (contracts) is recorded as systolic pressure, and the pressure when the heart is at rest (relaxes) is diastolic pressure. For example, a reading of 120/80 means a systolic pressure of 120 and a diastolic pressure of 80.

An extra five minutes of stair climbing, cycling, and running was linked to slight reductions in systolic and diastolic blood pressure, while clinically meaningful improvements were seen at an additional 10 and 20 minutes of daily exercise.

Less strenuous forms of movement, such as standing or walking, had minimal effects on blood pressure.

The findings suggest that, for most people, exercise is key to reducing blood pressure. Whatever your physical ability, it does not take long to have a positive effect on blood pressure. But if you want to make a real dent in blood pressure, then the best way is to put more demand on the cardiovascular system through bouts of vigorous exercise.



The study, conducted by researchers from UCL, in collaboration with colleagues at the University of Sydney in Australia, analyzed health data and blood pressure measurements from 14,761 participants with an average age of 54 from six cohorts in the Prospective Physical Activity, Sitting, and Sleep consortium. They tracked blood pressure changes over 24-hour periods comprising six different activities with the following average durations:

Sleeping (7.1 hours), sedentary behavior (10.7 hrs), slow walking of less than 100 steps per minute (1.6 hrs), fast of more than 100 steps per minute (1.1 hrs), standing (3.2 hrs), and exercise such as running or cycling (16 minutes).

The researchers then estimated the impact of replacing one type of activity with an additional 5, 10, and 20 minutes of exercise. The team found that replacing less active behaviors with 5 minutes of exercise lowered systolic blood pressure (SBP) by 0.68 millimeters of mercury (mmHg) and diastolic blood pressure (DBP) by

0.54 mmHg. They also noted that a 2mmHg reduction in SBP and a 1mmHg reduction in DBP equated to a 10 percent reduction in heart disease risk. In addition, the team estimated that 20 additional minutes of daily exercise could lead to clinically meaningful improvements in SBP, and 10 extra minutes of exercise per day could improve DBP.

The researchers emphasized that even everyday activities such as climbing the stairs, short walks or cycling errands that get the heart pumping may promote healthy blood pressure. The study, which found measurable changes in blood pressure with just a few minutes of exercise, which is something that can be incorporated into even a busy schedule, reinforces the recommendations by physicians for regular daily exercise.

Physical activity induces change in organs and tissue that enable them to improve their performance and efficiency, which can then lead to improved control over blood pressure.

By increasing the intensity of exercise, you are accelerating the physiological changes that are providing the benefits to heart health.

The findings of the study should not be construed as suggesting that five minutes of exercise a day is enough. Rather the study encourages people already getting regular exercise to increase their output, particularly those with high blood pressure.

Current guidelines from the United States Centers for Disease Control (CDC) for physical activity recommend 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise each week for adults, or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise, or a combination of moderate and vigorous exercise. For heart health, doctors typically recommend 30 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity daily on most days of the week.

Aerobic forms of exercise include walking briskly, jogging, cycling, swimming or water aerobics. It is also helpful to incorporate some strength training, as this also helps to improve the function of blood vessels and improve blood pressure.

However, patients who do not have their blood pressure under control should avoid very high intensity exercises such as sprinting or heavy weights, as these activities can lead to a spike in blood pressure.

There are several easy ways to incorporate physical activity throughout the course of the day, including short five-minute brisk walks while at work, taking the stairs instead of the elevator, parking farther in the parking lot and walking to your destination. In addition to regular physical activity, other ways that could help lower blood pressure include, following a healthy, balanced diet low in salt and sugar, getting enough quality sleep, maintaining a healthy weight, managing stress, and avoiding tobacco and alcohol.

Platforms mimicking viruses could improve future health

Researchers from the Postech Department of Chemical Engineering in the Republic of Korea, in collaboration with 2024 Nobel Chemistry Laureate Professor David Baker from the University of Washington in the United States, have developed an innovative therapeutic platform by mimicking the intricate structures of viruses using artificial intelligence (AI).

This study was supported by the Republic of Korea's Ministry of Science and ICT under the Global Frontier Research Program and other related scientific programs, with additional funding provided by the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) in the United States.

Viruses, which are the most numerous biological entities on Earth, are submicroscopic infectious agents that replicate only inside the living cells of other organisms. They are found in almost every ecosystem in the world, and infect all life forms, from animals and plants to other microorganisms such as bacteria.

When not inside an infected cell or when they are in the process of infecting a cell, viruses exist in the form of independent viral

particles, or virions. Individual virions consist of long molecules of DNA or RNA that encode the structure of the proteins by which the virus acts (genetic material), encapsulated within a protein coat (capsid) that protects the genetic material they enclose. In some cases, an outside envelope made up of lipids could also be present.

Most virus species have virions too small to be seen with an optical microscope and are usually one-hundredth the size of most bacteria. The virions come in different shapes that range from simple helical and icosahedral forms to more complex structures. The unique design of encapsulating genetic material within a spherical protein shell enables them to replicate and invade host cells, often causing disease.

Inspired by these complex structures, researchers have been exploring artificial proteins modeled after viruses. These 'nanocages' mimic viral behavior, enabling them to effectively deliver therapeutic genes to target cells. However, existing nanocages face

significant challenges: their small size restricts the amount of genetic material they can carry, and their simple designs fall short of replicating the multifunctionality of natural viral proteins.

To address these limitations, the research team behind the new study used AI-driven computational design. While most viruses display symmetrical structures, they also feature subtle asymmetries. Leveraging AI, the team recreated these nuanced characteristics and successfully designed nanocages in tetrahedral, octahedral, and icosahedral shapes for the first time.

The resulting nanostructures are composed of four types of artificial proteins, forming intricate architectures with six distinct protein-protein interfaces. Among these, the icosahedral structure, measuring up to 75 nanometers in diameter, stands out for its ability to hold three times more genetic material than conventional gene delivery vectors, such as adeno-associated viruses (AAV), marking a significant advancement in gene therapy.

Electron microscopy confirmed the AI-designed nanocages achieved precise



symmetrical structures as intended. Functional experiments further demonstrated their ability to effectively deliver therapeutic payloads to target cells, paving the way for practical medical applications in the future.

The team behind the innovative micro biological therapeutic platform said that advancements in AI have opened the door to a new era where we can design and assemble artificial proteins to meet humanity's needs. We hope this research not only accelerates the development of gene therapies but also drives breakthroughs in next-generation vaccines and other biomedical innovations.



Healthiest snacks to enjoy

Ask Mira: Eating Right to Live Happy & Healthy

As you know by now, it is important to eat three small meals and have snacks in between during the whole day. The main idea is to increase your total metabolism, so that your body can burn more calories. But what kind of snacks should you eat in between? I personally love to munch on some healthy snacks but that doesn't mean I don't prefer some desserts I like sometimes and specifically during the weekends.

I will give you some healthy snack options that I love to bite into between my meals, depending on what I feel like having every day.



Bananas: This fruit is known as a good source of potassium, and is so rich in vitamin B6 for only 80 calories. It has 4 grams of fiber, and is full of carbohydrates which is the main source of energy.

Bran muffin: 1 small muffin has 3 grams of fiber and almost 90 calories. It makes you feel satisfied, plus it is sweet, which makes it perfect as a snack.

Carrots: One medium carrot meets your daily vitamin A recommendation, which is needed for a better vision as well as for healthier skin.



Rice and milk pudding: I love this food item, especially when it is cold. It is perfect to have in the afternoon, and is so refreshing while containing only 120 calories. Try to make it at



home by using skim milk.

Strawberries and sweeteners: I am sure you heard about this combination but a lot of people use the white refined sugar instead of the sugar-free sugars. And when I say sugar-free sugars, I mean the ones that are not absorbed by the body. Try to have almost 20 strawberries with 2 teaspoons of any kind of sweetener, put in the fridge for few minutes before eating it.



Fruit yogurt: This is another favorite of mine, and I love the strawberry flavor. Fruit yogurt provides all the vitamins and the calcium needed for better health of bones. The zero fat one gives you the sweet buzz for only 45 calories.

Raw walnuts and almonds: These two snacks are great sources of omega-3 fatty acids, essential for heart and brain functions. They are also rich in vitamin E and antioxidants, needed to fight against cancer and many diseases.

Popcorn: I am more a sweet person, but popcorn is my only favorite salty snack. I don't mind having it every day. It is the best snack you can have at night while watching a movie or while chilling in front of your laptop. Go for the fat-free microwavable one which is a healthier option. It is full of fiber and one popped cup gives you only 80 calories.

Now that you have eight healthy options, try to pick at least three of them and include them in your daily eating habits.

What is the best snack you can eat at night?

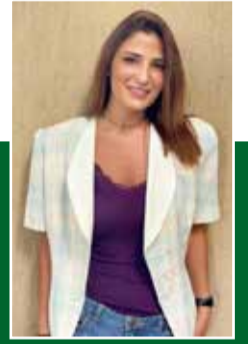
At night, and before sleeping, if you feel hungry and want to have something light and consistent, I advise you to have a cup of skim milk or soya milk (cold or hot), or to have a cup of low-fat yogurt. Your body will still be working while sleeping, and this is what we call resting or basal metabolic rate. So don't worry about weight gain.

Plus milk and yogurt both contain big amounts of protein and the body works hard to digest it, so the metabolism will be even higher while it is digesting, unlike carbs and fat which are easily digested. So don't worry, if you feel hungry before bedtime, milk and yogurt are the best options.



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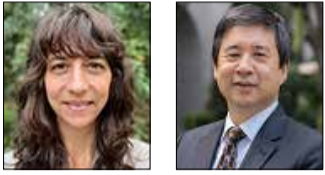
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Revealing an Invisible Health Threat



Angela Bandemehr and Albert Park

Angela Bandemehr is International Environmental Protection Specialist focusing on Lead Pollution Capacity Building at the US Environmental Protection Agency.

Albert Park is Chief Economist at the Asian Development Bank.

Lead is everywhere, often hiding in plain sight—in the water you drink, the air you breathe, the food you eat, your personal care products, and your children's toys. Despite being a useful metal, it is highly toxic and difficult to detect: its fumes and dust are odorless, and exposure to them does not immediately cause overt symptoms in most cases.

This is particularly worrying because exposure to and ingestion of lead can negatively affect almost every part of the body. Recent research finds that exposure contributes significantly to cardiovascular disease, killing millions worldwide. But while lead poisoning is responsible for more deaths annually than HIV/AIDS and malaria combined, and more than tuberculosis, it receives a small fraction of the funding allocated to these better-known diseases.

The health effects are often irreversible and unequally distributed. For example, lead is especially harmful to children's cognitive development, leading to lower IQs and behavioral problems. Today, one in three children worldwide have dangerous levels of the metal in their blood, and nearly all of them live in low- and middle-



income countries (LMICs). This inequality in exposure accounts for more than 20 percent of the learning gap between high- and low-income countries.

Moreover, the annual economic losses from lead poisoning are enormous, amounting to around 6.9 percent of global GDP. Health care for those sickened by the toxin, coupled with additional financing for special-education services to address the developmental and behavioral issues caused by lead poisoning, costs millions of dollars each year in the United States alone. Lead poisoning also reduces an individual's lifetime earning potential, leading to lost tax revenue.

This makes it all the more important to reduce and eliminate lead exposure. The good news is that it is possible to detect lead in soil, spices, food, paint, cookware, and other solid materials using a portable X-ray fluorescence analyzer (pXRF), which provides near-instantaneous results and has already proven effective in many settings.

In Nigeria, health officials used pXRFs to

help identify and clean up the source of a lead-poisoning epidemic that killed more than 400 children, ultimately saving thousands of lives. An assessment of lead levels in consumer goods and foods used the devices to test samples in 25 LMICs, finding that 45 percent of ceramic tableware, 52 percent of metallic cookware, and 41 percent of paint exceeded regulatory limits. The technology has enabled some governments to test the safety of toys and playgrounds, enforce lead-paint regulations in houses, and investigate whether lead exposure is the cause of health incidents. Researchers using pXRFs identified dangerous levels of lead paint, which is still sold in many LMICs, in schools and playgrounds in Guyana.

But very few LMICs currently use pXRFs to determine the sources of lead poisoning. In some cases, policymakers lack awareness that lead exposure is a major public-health issue. Perhaps most importantly, these devices are expensive to buy and maintain, and training on how to interpret the data they produce remains limited.

What would it take to improve access to this valuable technology, so that LMICs can identify and eliminate the sources of lead poisoning that put their populations, especially their young people, at risk? To answer this question, a working group comprising global lead-poisoning experts, practitioners, policymakers, and funders gathered in 'Room 3' linked to Sustainable Development Goal 3 for Good Health and Wellbeing, within the 17 Rooms initiative launched by the Brookings Institution and The Rockefeller Foundation in the US. In our discussions about how to make pXRFs universally available by 2030, we agreed that the recently launched Partnership for a Lead-Free Future (PLF), supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), is best positioned to bring together stakeholders to support such an initiative. Regional hubs, centrally coordinated by the PLF, could be established to provide pXRFs at low cost, training for authorized users, and technical support, both in terms of maintenance and data analysis, for governments, NGOs, and academic partners. With sufficient demand, the proposed hubs can negotiate directly with pXRF manufacturers to lower prices and tailor device design to ensure cost-effective and accurate screening for lead in different sources.

The PLF could thus roll out this technology on a global scale—a breakthrough that would serve as a mechanism for international and local organizations to work together to raise awareness among LMIC governments about the importance of lead poisoning. This could include setting clear protocols and guidelines for using pXRFs to screen for lead in different sources and for acting upon the results.

When it comes to lead exposure, prevention is the only option, because there is no cure. Increased access to pXRFs could help us win the fight against lead poisoning, safeguard the health and future potential of millions of children and young people, and unlock billions of dollars in economic benefits.



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