

## Kuwait Times

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## Focus

NO SET MENU TO  
FEED APPETITE OF  
CITIES' RESIDENTS

**B**elo Horizonte in Brazil and Ede in the Netherlands may not have much in common at first sight, but both have become leaders in trying to tackle a growing challenge for the world's cities - providing a reliable supply of nutritious food to residents. In Belo Horizonte, hunger and poverty prompted the mayor in 1993 to declare a citizens' right to food and kick-start an action plan to ensure the poor got fed - a campaign that won it worldwide acclaim as "the city that ended hunger".

Ede's food policy, adopted more than 20 years later, aims to create better opportunities for farmers and make residents healthier, said Leon Meijer from the city, the Netherlands' first local councillor in charge of food. "We chose to have our own food policy because food isn't just about production - it's about food security, public health and people reconnecting with what they eat," said Meijer. Rich and poor countries alike are tasked with creating sustainable and inclusive cities by 2030 under global development goals agreed in 2015 - and sorting out how cities are fed is a crucial part of that challenge, experts say.

Almost 800 million people worldwide do not have enough to eat, according to the U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), while about 30 percent of the world's population are overweight, a paradox nowhere more visible than in cities. As two-thirds of the global population are forecast to live in cities by 2050 compared with about half now, urban planners and policymakers are increasingly looking to agriculture in towns and cities as a solution to provide nutritious food.

## Beyond City Limits

Land used for farming in cities and the areas around them equals the size of the European Union, a recent study said, while others estimate some 800 million urban farmers provide up to 20 percent of the world's food. Unlike imported produce, food from city farms and gardens does not need to travel far, reducing production costs, waste and fuel use. Having your food come from sources close by is also crucial if supply is disrupted by civil unrest or extreme weather in the rural areas that still supply most of the world's food.

"Food is not just a local issue, and to become more sustainable we need to look beyond our own boundaries," Ede's Meijer told the "Resilient Cities" conference in Bonn this month. Ede, located in what is known as "Food Valley" for its high concentration of food companies and research institutes, has shaped a policy that addresses health-related food issues, fosters links between urban and rural areas, and boosts food education for children. It also aims to stimulate innovative food research and start-ups by working closely with businesses in the region.

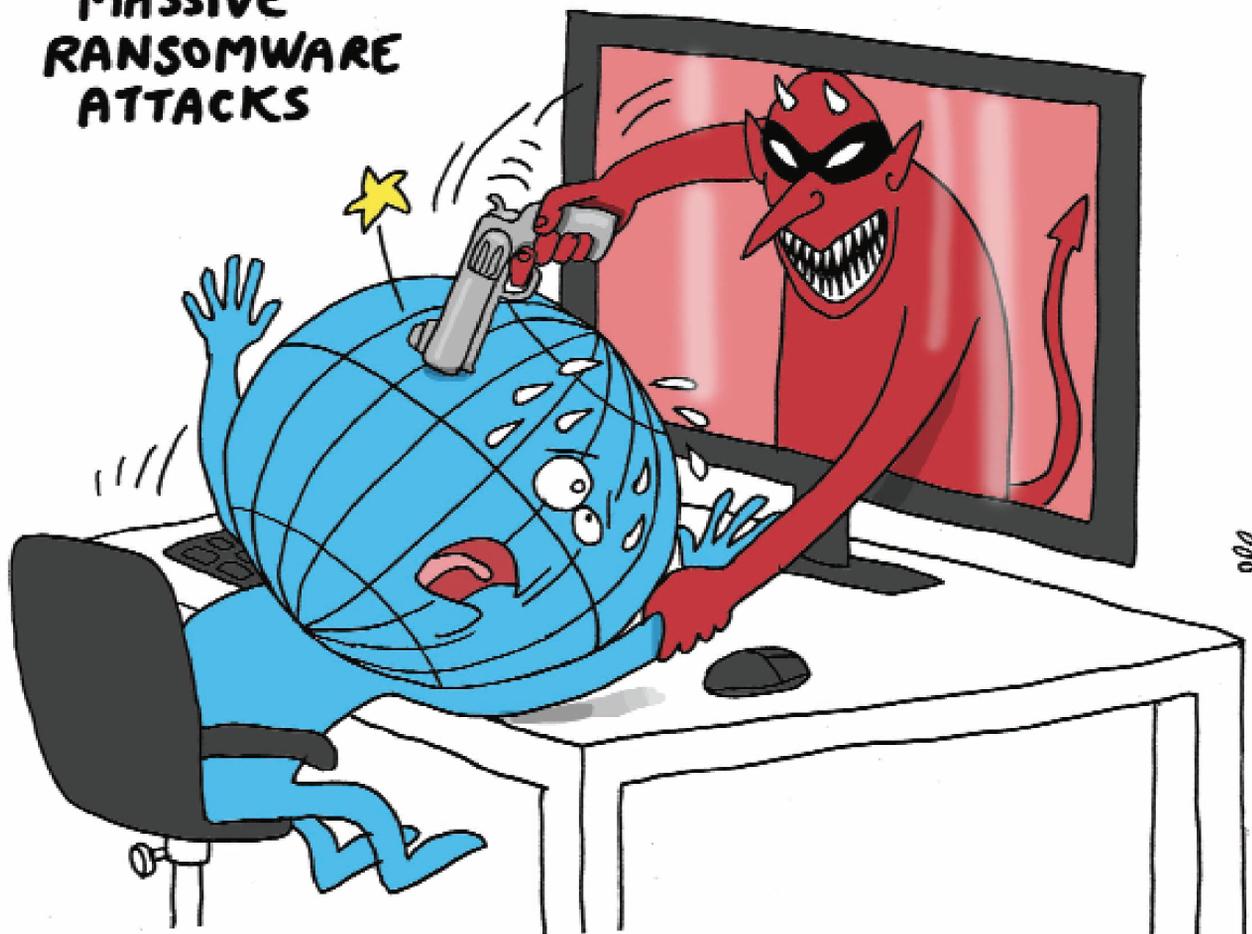
In January, Ede was one of 12 Dutch cities to sign the Urban Agenda on Food, along with three national ministries and Gelderland province - where it is located - with the aim of strengthening the Netherlands' food system. Belo Horizonte, meanwhile, is focusing on healthy nutrition and the inclusion of family farmers into a localized and sustainable food system for its 2.5 million residents. It has created farmers' markets, now a common sight in many cities worldwide, to enable direct sales at affordable prices for the poor, and it regularly surveys and publishes market prices. It has also implemented a national policy stipulating that 30 percent of food consumed in places like schools and hospitals must come from family farmers.

## Complex Web

Yet despite the benefits of urban farming, simply boosting the numbers of city farmers will not guarantee that cities can feed everyone or protect their food supply, experts say. "Local agricultural production has to be part of a diverse food system to become a reliable secure food source for growing urban populations," Pay Drechsel of the International Water Management Institute in Colombo told the Bonn conference. Migration from rural areas to fast-growing cities in the developing world adds more complexity as an increasing number of people living in informal settlements and slums turn to urban farming, studies have shown.

City planners face many other challenges due to the labyrinth of formal and informal food markets, and often lack a clear jurisdiction or mandate to manage food systems. Another barrier is that policymakers tend to divide people into rural or urban, a classification that ignores the many links between the two, including flows of people, goods, money and services. "Food systems have to be part of a sustainable city plan that creates regional linkages because food is so connected to other critical issues, like health and social cohesion," said Tori Okner, a food expert at ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability, a network of 1,500 cities, towns and regions. —Reuters

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MASSIVE  
RANSOMWARE  
ATTACKS

## BRAZIL ROLLS BACK ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

**F**rom sweeping cuts of funds to protect forests, to the loosening of conservation of indigenous land and measures to boost large-scale property deals, Brazil has embarked on the biggest roll back of environmental protections in two decades, former government officials and campaigners said. Amid a political upheaval and an economic crisis, Brazil is backsliding on its commitments to protect land rights, the Amazon rainforest and the indigenous people who depend upon it, environmentalists say.

The changes are the biggest shift in Brazil's environmental policies since it adopted a new constitution in 1988 at the end of a military rule, said Adriana Ramos from the Social and Environmental Institute (ISA), a Brasilia-based campaign group. "It's a serious crisis," a former Brazilian cabinet minister told the Thomson Reuters Foundation on the condition of anonymity. "We are backsliding on land use and new demarcation of indigenous peoples' land."

Supporters of measures to remove protected area status for more than one million hectares of land say the changes are overdue. Brazil is suffering its worst recession on record and large-scale agriculture offers has boosted exports, giving the country's rural lobby more clout, Ramos said. Proponents of moves to relax regulation and spending cuts say they are necessary to boost growth get more than 13 million unemployed Brazilians back to work.

"If it wasn't for that contribution (from agriculture), we would likely be forecasting another fall in gross domestic product," said Rodolfo Margato, an economist with Santander Brasil, in São Paulo last month. The government will spend this year working to pass the new series of environmental and mining laws, cabinet minister Eliseu Padilha said on Friday, outlining future priorities. "These are measures we can take to make the country more prosperous," Padilha told lawmakers in the capital.

## Big Cuts

As part of efforts to close its yawning budget deficit, Brazil's government has launched a series of wide-ranging spending cuts, led by President Michel Temer who took power following the impeachment of his predecessor last year. The environment ministry has been hit hard, with its budget slashed by more than 40 percent this year, according to government figures. Funding at the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI), the government body responsible for protecting the rights of Brazil's 900,000 indigenous people has been slashed by more than 40 percent.

FUNAI has drawn criticism from rural lawmakers who say it is giving away too much land to indigenous people by making biased assessments of their historical claims. "The budget cuts will obviously have a major impact on our work," a senior government official working on environmental protection told the Thomson Reuters Foundation on condition of anonymity. The cuts come in tandem with a rise in deforestation in the Amazon, the world's largest tropical forest and crucial for absorbing carbon dioxide emissions. Deforestation increased by 29 percent last year following previous reductions.

## Conservation Areas

Among the proposed changes are measures to reduce the size of conservation areas in the Amazon by more than a million hectares - an area larger than Jamaica. The changes to conservation areas, put forward by Temer at the end of 2016, are expected to be passed by Brazil's Congress in the coming months, according to environmentalists. "Cutting protected areas at a time when deforestation rates are increasing is the opposite of what Brazil needs," Greenpeace Brazil campaigner Cristiane Mazzetti told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

But the moves have the support of some local politi-

cians, such as Atila Lins, a lawmaker from Amazonas State, because he says they will benefit his constituents by opening more land for farming and other economic activities. "A decision (to reduce the size of protected areas)... will not cause any environmental impact," he wrote on his Facebook page. Other proposed measures include relaxing the environmental licensing rules for big infrastructure projects, opening sales of farmland to foreigners, and loosening rules for approving new mining projects.

## 'Legalizing Land Grabbing'

Lawmakers are also debating a plan to amend property registration rules that critics say would lead to an increase in "land grabbing" known locally as "grilagem". Politicians supporting the move say changes to land laws would make it easier for small farmers and poor Brazilians to formally own properties where they have lived and worked for decades. Making it easier for landless Brazilians to be granted tenure for their property could be positive, said Ramos from the ISA.

But the amendments would also allow landowners to register territory they had been informally occupying, she said - an incentive for rural businessmen to clear forests or occupy public land to gain formal ownership under the titling program. "They have also increased the size of what can be regularized to 2,500 hectares," Ramos told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "They are effectively legalizing land grabbing." Senator Romero Juca, an ally of Temer from the Amazonian state of Roraima where many residents do not formally own their land, argues the landless poor will be the prime beneficiaries of the initiative. Juca did not respond to interview requests. "We want every family to have their title deeds," Juca said in a statement supporting the proposal. "This legislation will improve the lives of millions of Brazilians." —Reuters

## SWIFT CHANGES IN SOUTH KOREA UNLIKELY

**S**outh Korea's new liberal President Moon Jae-in promised to seek a parliamentary review of a controversial US anti-missile defense system. If the vote were held today, the deployment would likely be endorsed in the legislative body controlled by conservative and moderate politicians. More importantly, pushing for that motion would strain Moon's already fraught relations with the opposition, whose cooperation is essential on a more urgent policy goal: creating hundreds of thousands of jobs in a country where youth unemployment is near an all-time high.

Despite the election of the first liberal president in South Korea after nine years of conservative rule, sweeping policy changes on the left are almost untenable in the divided National Assembly, where Moon's Democratic Party holds only 40 percent of the 299 seats. Moon's first 100 days in office will likely focus on pushing economic reforms that have broad consensus across the political spectrum, political experts say.

While Moon has promised a shake-up of South Korea's powerful family-run conglomerates, lawmakers would likely support more modest changes, such as ending the practice of pardoning convicted corporate criminals, given the outsized importance of chaebols to Asia's fourth-largest economy. Kang Dong-wan, a political science professor at Dong-A University in Busan, saw "a good chance of a very messy parliament" unless Moon uses a "give-and-take" approach with other parties.

During the campaign, Moon criticized the previous government of impeached leader Park Geun-hye for agreeing to host the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system without seeking parliamentary approval. He also promised to reopen the Kaesong Industrial Zone just north of the militarised border with North Korea, a joint economic cooperation project Park scrapped in 2016 after the North fired a long-range rocket.

But these pledges have drawn fierce



In this May 10, 2017, photo, South Korea's presidential candidate Moon Jae-in of the Democratic Party is greeted by supporters as he arrives to give a speech on a stage in Seoul. — AP

criticism, unlike his other goals - creating jobs, raising the minimum wage, reforming conglomerates, and setting up a body to investigate corruption by high-ranking public officials. "Moon will first have to tackle issues which have some kind of common ground among political parties and the public, not divisive issues such as THAAD," said Kim Jun-seok, a political science professor at Dongguk University.

## Deploying THAAD

Underscoring the dilemma for Moon, North Korea on Sunday fired a ballistic missile in defiance of calls to rein in its weapons program, only days after he took office pledging to engage the North in dialogue. Backing away from his THAAD pledge could ease tensions with Washington, though it does risk alienating Beijing, which considers THAAD's powerful radar a threat to its own security. "Unless Moon is out of his mind, he shouldn't con-

tinue to drag on with the THAAD issue. He really can't oppose it anymore," said Hong Moon-jong, a member of the conservative Liberty Korea Party, the second-largest party with 107 seats, behind the 120 seats held by the ruling party.

Two other major opposition parties, the centrist People's Party and the conservative Bareun Party that together have 60 seats, also support the deployment. If the new administration wants to work with the opposition, Moon should focus on creating jobs instead, which the Liberty Korea presidential candidate had also promised, Hong said. In fact, Moon's first executive action was to create a presidential "jobs council" tasked with implementing his promise to create 810,000 public-sector jobs over his single five-year term.

Officials have started drafting a supplementary budget, worth as much as 10 trillion won (\$8.95 billion) that will pay for new jobs, people involved in the effort told

Reuters. It requires parliamentary approval. Also high on his list: increasing the minimum wage to 10,000 won (\$8.83) an hour by 2020, from 6,470 won and cutting working hours to about 1,800 a year, from an average of 2,113 as of 2015. Parliament also has to approve such changes.

## Taming Parliament

South Korea's National Assembly has a long history of physical scuffles. One lawmaker famously set off a teargas canister to thwart a bill in 2011. It passed anyway. The so-called parliament advancement law, which requires three-fifths of all lawmakers to approve disputed bills, was created in 2012 to civilize debate and prevent the largest parties from railroading bills through. While the law refined parliamentary proceedings, it also prevented Park's government from passing any major legislation despite her Saenuri Party holding a majority.

Even before her party lost its majority in the April 2016 election, Park's package of four bills, introduced in 2015 to reform South Korea's rigid labor market, never passed. The labor reform bills were central to her election pledges of boosting economic growth to 4 percent. Opposition parties in parliament also blocked Park's other election promises, including easing regulations for the services sector to boost investment.

"The previous Park Geun-hye administration tried all it could to make things possible without parliamentary approval as it was not friendly with parliament, but it got little done," said a senior government official tasked with creating new policies in the Moon administration. With most major reforms requiring a supermajority of 60 percent to pass in parliament, Moon has acknowledged bipartisan unity will be key to his success. He spent a large part of his first day in office meeting with opposition leaders and requesting their cooperation. — Reuters