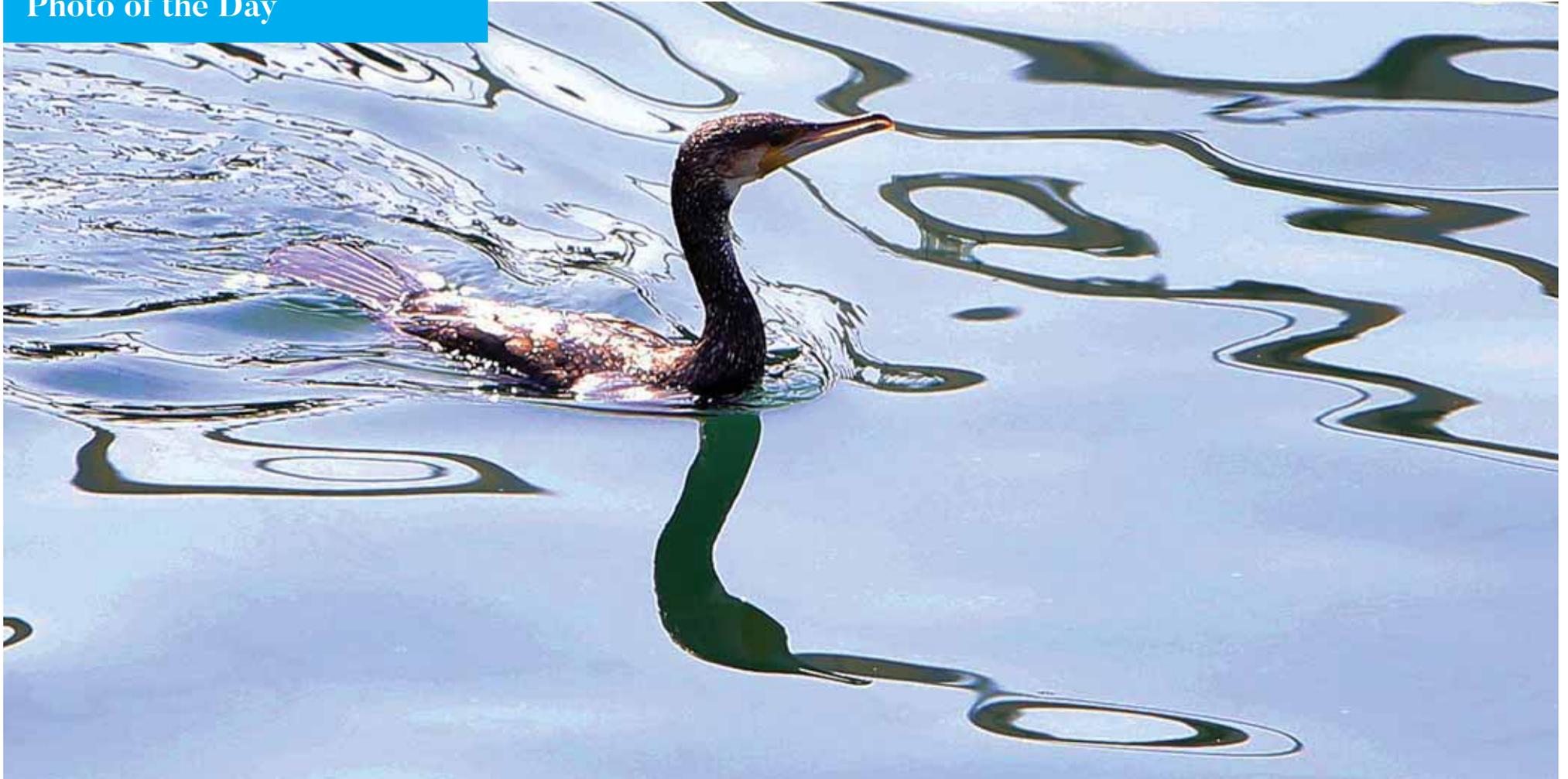


## Local

## Photo of the Day



A seabird is seen in the waters near Souq Sharq. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Free Kuwait movement



IN MY VIEW

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**B**efore the discovery of oil, Kuwaiti people were a hardworking society of shipbuilders, pearl divers and animal herders. They all connected and traded to create a local economy between the desert and the sea. They were independent and free. They were supporting the government at the time and not the other way around.

Oil discovery in Kuwait brought wealth. But it has changed Kuwait society from independent merchants to dependent employees. This created a rent seeking society. This entitlement attitude will not change so long as we have oil revenue. The recent reduction in oil revenues over the past five years will lead to a slow change in society. It will create two sub-societies. People with access to oil wealth and others without it. Or to put it in another way: To be dependent or to be free.

The solution for Kuwait after oil is at the hands of its people, not appointed government officials or elected legislators. The new generation will face limited government

opportunities and dwindling wealth. Therefore, Kuwaitis will be better off when they take the entrepreneurial route. It will provide more economic gains for a wider segment of society. Most importantly, it will create more independent and free generations.

After Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, Kuwaiti refugees started lobbying foreign governments to support Kuwait's liberation. They used the two words "Free Kuwait" to remind people of what needed to be done. After Kuwait's liberation, young Kuwaitis used the two words as a symbol of freedom and independence. Meaning that I can do whatever I know because it is a free country. The meaning of the same words have changed overtime. Let's change it one more time.

The new generation will seek a new identity, a new mission and a new culture. Free Kuwait is the new culture. Future Kuwait will have a free economy. Free market with no monopoly. Policies that encourage business freedom. Free and independent citizens who can sustain and support themselves with no government handouts. It is a culture that we can create.

What we need is to buy from local entrepreneurs and not government enterprises. Next, more of us should take the less-traveled route and setup businesses. Lastly, the rest can invest in startup businesses to receive a share of the profits. This culture will create wealth that is not related

to government jobs.

When corporations get bigger, they create more profits and fewer jobs. Therefore, it makes sense to encourage small non-profits as well. The biggest employer in California is the University of California, a non-profit. The top employer in Ohio is Cleveland Clinic, a non-profit. The largest employer in Minnesota is Mayo Clinic, a non-profit as well.

Encouraging entrepreneurs to create endowments will create institutions that will provide better health services and education. But this time, it is a government-free approach. The end goal is to create sustainable jobs and a free society that can function into perpetuity and contribute to the world.

Join us by buying from Kuwaiti businesses, contributing to Kuwaiti foundations, and working for both. Anyone can be a Free Kuwaiti. Bedoons or foreigners can be Free Kuwaitis. To be one, you can set up a business using the two words. Or set up a non-profit with the same words. Or invest in a business with the two words. Or use a car decal with the two words. Or just tell the story to your friends. Let's create a movement that even Kuwaitis will want to join.

*NOTE: Eid Al-Rashidi is managing partner at FGA Partners LLC, a private equity firm and a member of Kuwait Entrepreneurs Group, a small business advocacy group.*