

Local

Virtual technology parade of EGOV8 takes off tomorrow

Organized by NoufEXPO and held under Prime Minister's auspices

KUWAIT: Organized by NoufEXPO, the 8th eGovernment Forum (EGOV8), which kicks off tomorrow, will be a remarkable technological event that comes after disruption due to the challenges and difficulties of COVID19. EGOV8 convenes during the next two days under the generous auspices of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Dr Rana Al-Fares, Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Communications and Information Technology, will represent His Highness during the opening ceremony. NoufEXPO highly values the support of His Highness the Prime Minister, and wishes Dr Fares all the best in carrying out her responsibilities in leading the Ministry of State for Communications and Information Technology, established for the first time in Kuwait's history.

Dr Fares said on this occasion, "I realize the extent of effort required. The tasks are large, and the challenge is not easy, especially since I realize that the ICT sector has an important role to play in activating the digital transformation paths of the state and society in Kuwait. There is also a big role for ICT in rationalizing the state's expenditure by harnessing technology in the provision of advanced electronic services and protecting society and its institutions and interests through cybersecurity capabilities that have become a national mission. We will move ahead benefiting from what we have now while building together for a better future, benefiting from the achievements of ICT globally as we empower the Kuwaiti youth capabilities to carry out the responsibility."

Vital projects

In his turn, Eng Salem Al-Othainah, CEO and Chairman of the Board of Directors of Communications and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA), said, "We highly welcome the blessed step taken by the political leadership to establish the Ministry of State for Communications and Information Technology. We



HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled



Rana Al-Fares



Salem Al-Othainah



Ahmad Al-Manfouhi



Badr Al-Salman

look forward to working hand in hand with the Minister to achieve this step's aspirations. We hope that her blessed efforts will help implement many vital projects that CITRA has completed their preparatory steps. We, particularly, note the National Center for Cyber Security that we aspire to establish as an independent body to ensure its success in carrying out its tasks, according to CITRA's strategy that the Kuwaiti government approved. Similar countries' experiences and best global practices support CITRA's conclusion. Cybersecurity is a key building block in building sophisticated e-government services." Othainah elaborated that we hope the new ministry would unify government information centers' efforts to energize the development of integrated e-services that spare citizens and residents the burden of visiting government agencies. It is worth mentioning that CITRA is the strategic partner of NoufEXPO in organizing EGOV8.

Ahmad Al-Manfouhi, General Director of Kuwait Municipality, expressed his happiness in dedicating a panel discussion on the Unified Permits System, a joint initiative between Kuwait Municipality and the Federation of Kuwaiti Engineering Offices and

Consultant Houses. Manfouhi said, "The importance of this system is to provide an electronic service to issue all permits electronically by government agencies according to their competence when embarking on plans to implement construction and industrial projects in Kuwait. We are looking to build a unified electronic portal that beneficiaries can visit to issue their permits from their offices or homes' comfort. The process includes getting initial advice, submitting applications, sending or completing documents, follow-up procedures, solving obstacles, if any, and ending up with the issuance of permits electronically. The project includes, of course, an electronic platform with all the requirements of security and privacy." Manfouhi added that Kuwait Municipality is also pursuing this project's implementation with confidence, relying on a professional team that successfully managed to implement a nationwide GIS system.

Private sector's involvement

Eng Badr Al-Salman, the President of the Federation of Kuwaiti Engineering Offices and Consultant Houses, also welcomed the cooperation between the Federation and Kuwait Municipality to

plan for the Unified Permits Project. He said, "The Federation's initiative comes from the government's direction to encourage the private sector's involvement in vital projects. Kuwaiti consultant houses are qualified to carry out the necessary advisory role and act as a mediator between the beneficiaries and the concerned government agencies. We are confident that the members of the Federation can provide this service efficiently. They have the right experience and understand both the requirements of project owners and government department procedures."

EGOV8 mainly focuses on developing integrated e-government services and government process re-engineering that constitute a mandatory requirement for developing those services. It will also consider the long-term impact of COVID19 on government agencies, such as remote work and workforce development and evaluation. The event will feature a special workshop on how enterprises can build their strategies, objectives, and KPIs while associating them with executing their projects to have live dashboards that show their performance levels 24/7. Finally, cybersecurity will be a crucial topic of EGOV8.

NoufEXPO concluded its press release by thanking all EGOV8 participating organizations, namely the strategic partners of the General Authority for Communications and Information Technology (CITRA) and the Federation of Kuwaiti Engineering Offices and Consultant Houses. NoufEXPO extended special thanks and welcomed: the Strategic sponsor, Alghanim Industries, the Platinum sponsors Zain, Kuwait Finance House (KFH), Cisco Systems Inc, Huawei, Gulf Cable and Electrical Industries Company, SAP, and Diyar United Company, The Golden sponsors Fortinet, Techno-Management, and Xerox, and Alamba Newspaper which is the exclusive media sponsor of EGOV8. Finally, NoufEXPO extended special thanks to EGOV8 attendees, speakers, experts, and participants from inside and outside Kuwait, wishing them all a successful and enjoyable event.



Minister Fares to participate

Saudi Arabia unveils campaign to tackle climate change

RIYADH: Top crude exporter Saudi Arabia on Saturday unveiled a sweeping campaign to tackle climate change and reduce carbon emissions, including a plan to plant billions of trees in the coming decades. The OPEC kingpin seems an unlikely champion of clean energy, but the "Saudi Green Initiative" aims to reduce emissions by generating half of its energy from renewables by 2030, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said.

Saudi Arabia also plans to plant 10 billion trees in the kingdom in the coming decades, he said in a statement released by the official SPA news agency. Riyadh also plans to work with other Arab states on a "Middle East Green Initiative" to plant an additional 40 billion trees, in what would be the world's largest reforestation program, he added.

"The kingdom, the region and the world needs to go much further and faster in combatting climate change," Prince Mohammed said. "We reject the false choice between preserving the economy and protect-

ing the environment." The statement did not elaborate on how the mammoth plan would be executed in a largely desert landscape with extremely limited renewable water sources.

Saudi Arabia currently draws on oil and natural gas to both meet its own fast-growing power demand and desalinate its water - which consumes huge quantities of oil daily. The new initiatives are part of the prince's Vision 2030 plan to diversify the kingdom's oil-reliant economy. Prince Mohammed said Saudi Arabia and the region face "significant climate challenges", including desertification, which poses an "immediate economic risk".

Some \$13 billion is lost annually due to sand storms in the region, while pollution from greenhouse gases has reduced average Saudi life expectancy by 1.5 years, he added. The initiatives come as energy giant Saudi Aramco, the kingdom's cash cow, faces scrutiny from investors over its emissions.

In January, Bloomberg News reported that the company excluded emissions generated from many of its refineries and petrochemical plants in its overall carbon disclosures to investors. It added that if those facilities are included, the company's self-reported carbon footprint could nearly double, adding as much as 55 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent to its annual tally - roughly the emissions produced by Portugal. — AFP



SANTO ANDRE, Brazil: Patients affected by the COVID-19 coronavirus are seen at a field hospital set up at a sports gym in Sao Paulo state on March 26, 2021. — AFP

Taste and smell gone: Anguish of...

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a New York school, says she has lost many everyday pleasures she once enjoyed, including eating and cooking.

She says she has cried every day for months. Medina is one of a growing number of people with lasting anosmia - a poorly understood disorder that has become an underestimated consequence for many in the pandemic. Most COVID-19 sufferers who lose the ability to taste or smell recover "within three or four weeks", according to Valentina Parma, a psychologist at Temple University in Philadelphia. But 10 to 15 percent lose the senses for months, said Parma. She chairs the Global Consortium for Chemosensory Research (GCCR), which was formed at the start of the pandemic to study the problem.

Sensory loss is estimated to affect more than two million Americans and 10 million people worldwide, according to the expert. Taste and smell are often seen as less essential than sight and hearing, and their loss is often considered as less serious than other effects of "Long COVID"; but they are a key part of socialization, says Parma, noting that "we pick mates based on smells". Their disappearance, moreover, is frequently compounded not just by nutritional problems but by anxiety and even depression, Parma added.

Like other "anosmics", Medina found solace and solidarity in a support group organized by a hospital near her home. Such groups have flourished on social networks. The AbScent group, formed as a charity in Britain in 2019, has seen its members on various platforms soar from 1,500 to more than 45,000 since the pandemic began, according to founder Chrissi Kelly.

On the organization's main Facebook page, the question that haunts Medina repeatedly comes up:

"Will I ever regain my sense of taste and smell?" At this stage, said Parma, "it is quite difficult to predict how things will evolve."

But there is one good indicator that anosmics are on their way to recovery: Developing parosmia, when people's smells of familiar things are distorted, like smelling garbage while sniffing coffee. Presently there is no known cure, and the only treatment recommended without reservation is to smell four different scents twice a day. According to Parma, this works in 30 percent of cases, but only after three to six months of practice.

Faced with this uncertainty, it's perhaps no surprise that the likes of AbScent's Kelly, who lost her taste and smell after a bout of sinusitis in 2012, and Katie Boateng, an American who lost the senses in 2009, have become near-celebrities. They share their experiences, and push the medical community to intensify research and recognize the seriousness of their symptoms. In 2018, Boateng created the Smell Podcast, a mine of information and advice for her companions in misfortune.

She is now part of a patient advocacy group that helps guide GCCR's research. Although Boateng has given up hope of being cured herself, "I am still very hopeful that we can lead to research that can cure people in the future," she said. While waiting for a medical breakthrough, many continue to perform their daily sniffing exercises, sometimes with the help of a coach, like Leah Holzel.

The food expert, who had lost her sense of smell from 2016 to 2019, has helped six people recover from anosmia since the start of the pandemic. Many sufferers also cling to messages about improvements or healings that appear regularly on social networks, enjoying the camaraderie that the groups provide. "It's almost exactly a year after I first lost my smell and taste and I'm pretty much okay now," Dominika Uhrakova, who lives in Southampton, England, wrote on AbScent's Facebook page. "Hang in there, don't lose hope and I'm wishing you all best of luck," the 26-year-old added. — AFP

Suicide attack on cathedral...

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DNA tests on body parts scattered at the grisly scene. "There were two perpetrators killed, one is a man and another one is a woman," Prabowo said. "They're members of the JAD group which carried out a bomb attack in Jolo in the Philippines." It was not clear if the pair were a married couple. An Indonesian militant and his wife - members of JAD - were blamed for two explosions that ripped through a Catholic church on the Philippines' Muslim-majority island of Jolo in 2019, killing worshippers at Sunday mass and security forces. Two other militants linked to that attack were shot dead by Indonesian security forces earlier this year.

One witness to yesterday's bombing described hearing two "very strong" blasts and then seeing

plumes of smoke, an attack that wounded about 20 church officials, congregants and security staff. "There were several injured people on the street. I helped one woman... who was wounded and covered in blood," Yosi, who like many Indonesians goes by one name, told AFP. "Her grandchild was also injured. There were body parts everywhere."

Indonesian President Joko Widodo said he "strongly condemned this act of terror". "Terrorism is a crime against humanity," he said. "I call on everyone to fight against terror and radicalism, which go against religious values." Amnesty International said the bombing showed "complete contempt" for human rights.

The explosion at the main Catholic cathedral in Makassar - a port city of about 1.5 million - happened just after congregants finished celebrating Palm Sunday, the first day of Holy Week, which commemorates Jesus's entry into Jerusalem. It comes a week before Easter. In his mass for Palm Sunday, Pope Francis said he prayed for all the victims of violence, "especially those of this morning's attack in Indonesia, in front of the Cathedral of Makassar". — AFP

Deaths in Egypt building collapse...

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Cairo governor Khaled Abdel Aal toured the site on Saturday and ordered a team of experts to be formed to inspect nearby buildings for damage. Egypt has suffered several deadly building collapses and industrial fire accidents in recent years, due to the dilapidation of many premises and the failure of many constructors to respect safety and planning measures. Often developers add floors on foundations that

are not designed to support them in order to boost profits. Saturday's accident came a day after a train crash in the southern province of Sohag killed 19 people and injured more than 180 others, the latest in a series of deadly collisions generally attributed to poor infrastructure and maintenance. Also Saturday, a fire ripped through ramshackle shops near a train station in the eastern city of Zagazig, in the Sharqia governorate, without causing any deaths.

Egypt, the Arab world's most populous nation, has been beset by a series of woes that began Tuesday when a giant container ship got stuck in the Suez Canal, vital for international shipping. The blockage, now in its sixth day, has stalled more than 300 cargo vessels at either end of the 193-km waterway. — AFP