

Celebrating strong ties

By **REHMAN CHISHTI M.P.**

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As Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Kuwait, I am delighted to write this article to mark the 60th Anniversary of Kuwait's independence and celebrate the strong ties between our nations.

Kuwait has long been one of the UK's most steadfast and reliable partners in the region. Just in 2019, we celebrated 120 years of friendship between our two countries – a friendship which continues to this day. Today, the UK-Kuwait Joint Steering Group's biannual meetings between high-level officials and Ministers at the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and their counterparts at Kuwait's Foreign Ministry pay testament to the importance and extent of this relationship, supporting and organising extensive bilateral co-operation on matters as diverse as defence, security, trade, international development, science, health, and education.

On defence and security, Kuwait is one of our most important allies in the region and it is very encouraging to see the extensive co-operation continuing and deepening. For instance the UK and Kuwait participated in Exercise Joint Warrior in 2017 on joint training exercises, and we are working side-by-side in order to defeat Daesh to help prevent terrorism at home and abroad, and to help bring the terrible and deadly conflict in Libya to an end.

Readiness for future security threats must also be a priority and it is great to see that following the 2018 UK-Kuwait Memorandum of Understanding on Cyber Security, our two countries have continued to co-operate on cyber security issues and threats at every level. With the largest Royal Navy Task Force in nearly forty years, led by the HMS Queen Elizabeth, having set off in May 2021 to visit countries in the Middle East and beyond, and with the Integrated Review emphasising the UK's continued security commitments there, this co-operation is set to continue.

Commercial and trade relations between the UK and Kuwait are a continuing success story. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, total trade in goods and services between our two countries reached £3.4bn during 2019, extending widely to diverse sectors including petrochemicals and automotive, but also textiles and agricultural goods, and marking a very significant increase from the preceding four years, from only £2.6bn in 2015. This is supported by a solid underpinning of

over 50 officially agreed treaties, agreements, action plans, and Memorandums of Understanding.

The friendship between our two countries is also about people – whether they are tourists, students, or workers. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the exchange of people between our two countries had reached a record high. Over 7,500 Kuwaitis study at UK universities year-on-year, most of them sponsored by the Kuwait Government, while around 8,000 Britons live in Kuwait as residents. At the same time, 2019 saw a record 181,011 visits to the UK by Kuwaitis, a more than three-fold increase on ten years prior, with nearly seventy per cent of these for the purpose of tourism. It is my fervent hope that in the coming months and years, with the Covid-19 pandemic coming to an end, these fruitful and positive exchanges can resume in full and continue to grow.

The links between Kuwait and the UK are as strong as anywhere on the Parliamentary level. Just recently, the Speaker of the House of Commons, Sir Lindsay Hoyle, welcomed His Excellency Khaled Al-Duwaisan, Ambassador of Kuwait to the United Kingdom, as his first in-person diplomatic meeting since the start of the pandemic. The APPG on Kuwait, which I now have the honour to chair, has organised a number of well-attended events in Parliament over the years, allowing interested Parliamentarians and other stakeholders to learn more about Kuwait and the bilateral relationship between Kuwait and the UK.

With the support of the Kuwait Government and especially the Kuwait Embassy in the UK, the APPG has also been able to organise several visits to Kuwait, the last of which was in November 2018, during which UK Parliamentarians had the chance to meet with high-profile politicians, discuss salient issues in-depth, and explore the country and its institutions. These visits have served to deepen links between our two Parliaments as well as our two countries and I hope we will be able to resume them following the end of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Kuwait Embassy in the UK has been a constant partner in supporting the APPG's work, as well as in promoting the excellent bilateral relationship between our two countries. I particularly wish to thank HE Khaled Al-Duwaisan, Ambassador of Kuwait to the United Kingdom for nearly three decades now, making him the longest-serving Ambassador of any country to the UK, for all his work in this regard and his continuing friendship to the people of the UK.