

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD
GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL
NEWS MONITORING REPORT
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23rd January – 29th January 2010

Following news monitoring report is based on the important political, social, economic and Geo-strategic events occurred in Gulf Cooperation Council States along with a Comprehensive summary of the report.

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SAUDI ARABIA

Social Desk

Experts discuss means to improve Haj services

Makkah Gov. Prince Khaled Al-Faisal opened the 10th seminar on new ideas to make Haj and Umrah more comfortable and safe at the King Abdul Aziz Historical Hall in Makkah on Saturday.

“The ideal methodology followed in this seminar by the institute aims at sustained development of the holy places and continuous upgrading of services to Haj and Umrah pilgrims with a futuristic vision. (The upgrading of pilgrim services) enjoys the top priority of the Kingdom’s rulers over all other ambitious developmental projects,” Prince Khaled said in his address.

King Fahd Center hosting several events

The King Fahd Cultural Center is preparing for an array of cultural and education events in the coming months, prominent among them are a Turkish Cultural Week, the third Artists Exhibition and a theater conference. Prince Turki Bin Sultan Bin Abdul Aziz, Assistant Minister of Culture and Information, has instructed that preparations be made

for these and a number of other events, which are to include conferences on HIV/AIDS and education development, as well as a series of theater productions.

GACA issues new list of violations at airports

The General Authority for Civil Aviation (GACA) will start imposing financial fines on aviation companies, their employees and airport staff committing violations on airport premises, a senior official announced here Tuesday. The spokesman acknowledged that serious violations were taking place on airport premises, but were either ignored or taken lightly by the authorities. "Henceforth these violations will not be tolerated and action will be taken and penalties imposed against violating companies and individuals," said Al-Khaibari.

Cooperation between ministries will create jobs: Education minister

Prince Faisal Bin Abdullah Bin Muhammad, Minister of Education, (Right) tours the International Higher Education Exhibition in Riyadh with the deputy minister of Higher Education Wednesday night.

The continued cooperation between the education and higher education ministries will allow the country to create much needed jobs for graduates, according to Prince Faisal Bin Abdullah Bin Muhammad, the Minister of Education.

International Desk

53 experts to attend higher education expo

Under the auspices of King Abdullah, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, an International Exhibition for Higher Education will be inaugurated here on Tuesday, Dr. Khalid Bin Muhammad Al-Anqari, Minister of Higher Education, said. Addressing a press conference here on Sunday, Al-Anqari said over 300 international universities from 32 countries and 32 universities and 17 colleges from within the Kingdom will attend the four-day event.

"The huge gathering of educationists, experts and representatives from some of the world renowned universities will be a stimulant to help upgrade the educational standard of local universities and colleges in the Kingdom," the minister said.

MIDEAST DIPLOMACY

King Abdullah, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, holds talks with Tony Blair, former British premier and special envoy of International Quartet Committee to the Mideast, in Riyadh.

UK aviation firms keen on Saudi projects

A British aviation group of companies attend an airport seminar under the leadership of Alan Lamond, chairman of the British Aviation Group, with 9 representatives of different British aviation companies at Le Meridien Hotel Jeddah.

Organized by British Consulate Jeddah on Tuesday, the British Aviation Group came with the aim of establishing excellent relationships and enhancing the friendship of the two countries.

The discussion focused on several opportunities in trade and investment beneficial to both countries.

Saudi and US universities ink several accords

Several agreements and memorandums of understanding were signed between US and Saudi universities here recently, Dr. Mohammed Bin Abdullah Al-Issa, Saudi Cultural Attaché in the United States, said Friday.

Al-Issa said 23,500 Saudi students are currently studying in US universities, and that it is expected that there will be more than 30,000 by the end of 2010.

SAUDI-PAK TIES DISCUSSED

Abdul Aziz Al-Ghadeer, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Pakistani Prime Minister Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani, holding talks in Islamabad on Friday. The two discussed fraternal cordial bilateral ties between the two countries and matters of mutual interests.

Economic Desk

Saudi IT market to touch \$4.8b mark by 2013

Saudi IT market is poised to touch \$4.8 billion mark by 2013, according to a leading distribution company and a member of National Technology Group (NTG). The Saudi IT market, which has been valued at around \$3.5 billion in 2009 is expected to reach \$4.8 billion by 2013, said Bassam Abu Baker, Group General Manager of Advanced Integrated Media (AIM).

Health Desk

H1N1 vaccines made available at 15 centers

Anti-swine flu vaccines have been made available at 15 medical centers in the Western Province, Dr. Nuha Dashash, Deputy Director of Jeddah Health Affairs Management's primary health care department, said.

"We have provided these medical centers with enough quantities of H1N1 vaccines. These vaccines will be enough for all community members including Saudis, and expatriates," he said.

UAE

Social Desk

UAE steps up move to promote Arabic language

THE United Arab Emirates has taken practical steps to implement a project to develop the Arabic language, which is one of the most important unprecedented educational projects in the Arab world.

The project aims to improve the performance of public education students, who study the Arabic language within the States Member of the Arab Education Office, and to strengthen their links with the Holy Quran, Sunna and authentic Arab heritage, as well as to produce manuals that help to improve the ways of teaching Arabic language at the Arab world level.

EDC to enhance exporting skills of UAE firms

Dubai Export Development Corporation (EDC), an agency of the Dubai Department of Economic Development, Government of Dubai, is set to conduct the first in its 2010 series of Exporter Training through its newly established EDC Training Academy on Jan. 27, 2010.

The Dubai Export Academy was launched with the aim to enhance the exporting skills of UAE firms to ensure that they become successful in expanding into foreign markets. As the only Centre of Excellence dedicated purely to export related knowledge, it seeks to provide a unique combination of practical on the ground information of foreign markets with generic export related management knowledge.

Sultan, top official hold discussion

His Highness Sheikh Dr Sultan Bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Sharjah received in the presence of His Sheikh Sultan Bin Mohammed Bin Sultan Al Qasimi, Crown Prince and Deputy Ruler of Sharjah, Dr Abdulaziz Othman Altwajri, Director General of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO) on Monday afternoon at the ruler's office.

During the meeting, Dr Abdulaziz Othman presented the Ruler of Sharjah with the Organization's achievements and projects as well as the activities scheduled for the upcoming period, especially those which will be implemented by ISESCO's Regional Office in Sharjah.

'UAE has done well for labour'

The Diplomatic Corps has lauded United Arab Emirates for its role in protecting rights of the migrant workers, offering them the best available milieu and opportunities to work in a most dignified manner.

"UAE is among the civilised nations that protect the rights of migrant workers and is a major destination for everyone who travel to work. It is a country with values and a strong tradition of respect for the rights and freedoms of individuals. The country is also distinguished as a multicultural society," the diplomats said.

International Desk

UAE, China discuss investment options

Sultan Ahmed Bin Sulayem, Chairman, Dubai World received a high-powered delegation from China led by Guo Shengkum, Secretary of CPC Guangxi Committee and Chairman of the Standing Committee of Guangxi People's Congress, where discussions included potential Chinese investment in Dubai.

Guo, who was accompanied by top aides and economic advisers from the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, also expressed interest in learning from Dubai World's experience in the management of ports, free zones and customs.

Zuma affirms ties with UAE important

South African President Jacob Zuma received UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed in Pretoria on Friday.

At the meeting held at the Presidential Palace, Sheikh Abdullah, who was accompanied by an official delegation, conveyed to the South African Head of State, greetings from President His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan and well wishes for the people of South Africa.

Minister receives doctorate

UAE Minister of Foreign Trade, Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi, received an Honorary Doctorate of Laws (LLD) during the graduation ceremony at University of Exeter, in Exeter, Devon, UK, on Saturday.

Professor Steve Smith, Vice President and CEO of Exeter University, handed the certificate to Sheikha Lubna in the presence of faculty, education and law professionals, and other distinguished personalities.

Khalifa greets top leaders

President His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan has sent congratulatory cables to Quentin Bryce, Australia's Governor-General on the occasion of her country's National day and to Pratibha Patil, President of India, on the occasion of republic day.

Vice-President and Prime Minister of UAE and Ruler of Dubai, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, has also sent similar cables to Australia's Governor-General and Indian President.

Also, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, General Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan has sent similar cables.

UAE rushes 700 tonnes of relief to Gaza

The UAE's Red Crescent Society (RCA) said a convoy of 40 trucks carrying 700 tonnes of humanitarian assistance for Gazans is due to arrive in Gaza through the Al-Ouja crossing.

This humanitarian assistance to Gaza is being carried out upon directives from President His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan and General Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, crown prince of Abu Dhabi and deputy supreme commander of the UAE Armed Forces.

Economic Desk

UAE and WCO to promote ties

Officials of the Federal Customs Authority held a meeting with Kunio Mikuriya, Secretary General World Customs Organization (WCO) recently in Abu Dhabi to discuss ways to further bolster co-operation, face global challenges to customs as well as to streamline trade and work at the UAE's points of entry.

According to Acting Director General of the Federal Customs Authority Khalid Al-Bustani, the meeting also discussed the adoption of the best international standards in managing risks and practices that could harm the interests of the economy and the community.

UAE, Poland to strengthen bilateral trade ties

Sultan Saeed Al Mansouri, UAE Minister of Economy, said the UAE and Poland will strengthen bilateral trade relations by leveraging the investment environments in both countries.

On a four-day official visit to Poland, he met with senior officials and more than 30 leading Polish entrepreneurs, who expressed their interest in investing in the UAE.

QATAR

Social Desk

‘Competency standard’ for tech education soon

The Supreme Education Council (SEC) is to set up a competency standard for technical education. The Policy Analysis and Research wing of the SEC held a seminar to discuss the issue recently.

The meeting held in the presence of H E Saad bin Ibrahim Al Mahmoud, the Minister for Education and Secretary General of the SEC, discussed the international and domestic examples of technical good practice, including quality assurance procedures and plans to integrate technical qualifications into a National qualifications framework.

At the meeting, the Minister stressed the need for improving the technical education sector as part of country’s ongoing efforts to develop a diversified and vibrant economy.

Islamic study centre holds open house

The Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies (QFIS), a member of Qatar Foundation for Education Science and Community Development, held its fourth annual Open House recently at Sharq Village & Spa.

Dr Hatem Al Karanshawy, the Dean of the Faculty, opened the event by giving his audience a warm welcome. He emphasised at the outset that QFIS is the first Faculty to offer postgraduate degrees in Education City and in Qatar as a whole.

Education crucial for democratic society: Minister

The Policy Analysis and Research Office of the Supreme Council of Education (SCE) held a forum yesterday at the Doha Four Seasons Hotel in presence of the Minister of Education and Higher Education H E Saad bin Ibrahim Al Mahmoud who is also the Secretary General of the SCE.

The forum aims at setting a strategy for the preparation of national qualification standards for education and technical and vocational training.

International Desk

H H the Emir Receives Syrian President

The Emir H H Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani receives Syrian President Bashar Al Assad at the Doha Four Season Hotel yesterday as Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh H E Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor Al Thani looks on. The two leaders reviewed relations between Qatar and Syria and ways of bolstering them besides discussing a

number of regional and global issues of common concern. The talks were attended by the Prime Minister and Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Al Mu'alim and Presidential Advisor for Political and Media Affairs Buthaina Sha'aban.

American school students clean up Al Alyah island

The Department of environmental protection and rehabilitation, at the Ministry of Environment, in collaboration with the American School in Doha, organised a scientific expedition for students of Secondary School to Al Alyah island.

The event was held as part of the school programme "A Week without Walls." The department of environmental protection and rehabilitation held an environmental awareness programme for students after being given safety instructions on the marina at the The Ritz Carlton Hotel.

Qatari delegation to visit US for food security partnerships

In line with its aim to boost agricultural production to achieve self-sufficiency, Qatar is sending a delegation to the United States to explore new partnerships in food security. The delegation leaves today and will complete its visit on February 2.

The group that is visiting the US to explore synergies in food security, is led by Fahd Al Attiyah, chairman of the Qatar National Food Security Programme (QNFS). He is being accompanied by US Ambassador to Qatar Joseph

Qatar to host next International Food Safety Conference

Qatar will host from March 3 to 4 the next International Food Safety Conference at the InterContinental Hotel Doha.

The international conference focused on food security in the Arab World aims to discuss how to improve food security in the region. The conference will be co-hosted by the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the Islamic Development Bank.

Doha awaits some Darfur groups for talks to begin

The Minister of State for Foreign Affairs H E Ahmed bin Abdullah Al Mahmoud has said that he and the UN and African Union (AU) Joint mediator Djibril Bassole met early yesterday with the Sudanese government delegation led by Dr Ghazi Saluheddin and then met with the Justice and Equality Movement delegation led by Ahmed Tuqud.

As you know, any negotiations should be coped with consultations to arrange for their outset... we are waiting for the arrival of the remaining brethren to complete our consultations, said Al Mahmoud.

Attorney General meets Russian President's envoy

Qatar's Attorney General H E Dr Ali bin Fetais Al Marri met yesterday with the Anatoly Safonov, the Russian president's envoy for International Cooperation in Combating Terrorism and Organised Crime and his accompanying delegation currently visiting Qatar.

During the meeting relations between the two countries and ways of enhancing them were discussed. The two sides also praised the the strong ties between the two countries, particularly in the legal field.

They also stressed the need for closer bilateral cooperation in legal and judicial areas.

Qatar to take part in 68th GCC Health Ministerial Meeting

The GCC Conformity Marking will soon be made mandatory for toys and various electrical goods imported into Qatar, a senior official of the Ministry of Environment said yesterday.

“Beginning June 1 this year, all imported toys must carry the GCC Conformity Marking. Consignments that fail to meet this requirement will not be cleared by the customs authorities,” said Dr Mohamed bin Saif Al Kuwari, Director General of Laboratories and Standardisation at the ministry.

Economic Desk

Commercialbank posts net profit of QR1.52bn for 2009

Commercialbank posted net profit of QR1.52bn for the year ended December 31, 2009 compared to QR1.7bn in the corresponding period in 2008.

Net profit for the fourth quarter of 2009 was QR186m, 33 percent higher than the corresponding period in 2008.

“The year 2009 was a very challenging year for global financial markets but Commercialbank has delivered a resilient set of full year results despite the effects of the financial downturn,” said Commercialbank Chairman, Abdullah Bin Khalifa Al Attiyah.

Council for 5pc cap on bonuses

The Advisory Council yesterday unanimously approved its economic and financial panel's recommendation to impose a ceiling on the bonuses of board members of banks and shareholding companies.

Against the committee's original proposal to fix a cap of six percent, the Advisory Council, after discussions, decided to further trim down the bonuses and set the ceiling at five percent of the net profit of the companies.

Qatar banks fastest growing in GCC

The Qatari banking sector is currently the fastest growing among GCC economies, with over 30 percent year on year growth expected for 2010, George Nasra (pictured), IBQ Managing Director told a news conference here yesterday.

“We believe this momentum is likely to continue to continue in 2010 as recovery broadens out across the region,” he said.

He also pointed out that the largest part of lending from commercial banks was the private sector and consumers on the backdrop of the global financial downturn.

KUWAIT

Social Desk

16th Qurain Cultural Festival concludes

The 16th Qurain Cultural Festival recently wrapped up with big festivities, including a ceremony to honor Kuwaiti artist Abdelmihsin Al-Mhanna. A host of prominent artists attended the ceremony, led by Salih Al-Hureibi, Mohammad Al-Bloushi, Slaiman Al-Mulaa, and others and all performed well-known and loved songs by Al-Mhanna.

Government pledges cooperation with MPs to implement 5-year plan

Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, Minister of State for Development Affairs and Minister of State for Housing Affairs, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, has expressed optimism about the National Assembly's (NA) second reading of the five-year development plan.

The parliamentary committee is tasked with addressing the observations of the MPs and the government and presenting a report to the parliament before the second reading," he pointed out. "The government finalized a draft development program and it should be passed in synchronization with the state budget. If done, the annual program will be pegged to the state's budget for the first time in Kuwait's history," the minister explained.

Amir visits Sheikh Salem Al-Ali

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on Thursday visited His Highness the Chief of the National Guards Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah to congratulate him on his recovery and safe arrival back home from an overseas medical tour.

MP urges MEW to avert future blackouts in Jahra

MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri has criticized the recurrent power cuts that hit Jahra recently, calling on the Ministry of Electricity and Water (MEW) to work on fixing the problem urgently and return power to homes as soon as possible.

The Ministry should utilize all efforts in order to ensure that such incidents don't take place again in the future," said the MP, commending the efforts made by security officers in maintaining security and public control during the blackouts.

MP urges Cabinet to build new universities

MP Dulaihi Al-Hajri urged the cabinet to commit to execute development plans regarding establishing new public universities. His request came in light of the increased numbers of students seeking higher education and he asserted the importance of educational development, reported Al-Qabas.

Al-Hajri added that the country should develop universities equally between all the governorates in light of Kuwait University's inability to provide the necessary space.

Solidarity the focal point of Amir's speeches

As Kuwait marks the fourth anniversary of His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad's ascent to the throne as the 15th Amir of the State of Kuwait, it is clear to the nation that ensuring solidarity and the higher interests of the homeland are the core focus of his policies. Throughout his speeches, the Amir has stressed the principles of fraternity, respect, and diligence to further the state's interest.

In his speech marking the last ten days of Ramadan last year, His Highness stressed "Kuwait is what binds us together, what we all turn to in refuge, what our martyrs sacrificed their lives for and what many devoted countrymen give their lives for. Each and every one of us is responsible, and each shall be judged in this respect.

'Kuwait takes pride in human rights record'

Kuwait has a long record of achievements in the field of protection of human rights, said Dr. Saud Helal Al-Harbi, Chief of the Arab governmental expert group (AGEG) on execution of the Arab plan for human rights education.

Speaking here on Saturday on the sidelines of the fourth meeting of the group, Al-Harbi Director of the Curriculum Development Division of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education, said the protection of human rights is enshrined in the Constitution of Kuwait.

International Desk

US diplomat lauds Kuwaiti aid to Haiti quake victims

Economic Advisor at the US Embassy in Kuwait Oliver John lauded here yesterday the Kuwaiti contribution to the victims of the earthquake stricken nation of Haiti.

John said after meeting with Chairman of the Board for Kuwait Red Crescent Society

(KRCS) Barjas Al-Barjas that Kuwait was always on the frontline when it came to providing relief aid to countries affected by crises.

France-Kuwait nuke deal caps leaders' talks

A French-Kuwaiti cooperative deal for peaceful nuclear development is the outgrowth of talks between French President Nicolas Sarkozy and His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in Kuwait last year, a French official said.

Economic Desk

Kuwait stocks turn bearish

The Kuwait Stock Exchange (KSE) along with most GCC stock markets ended yesterday's trading session in the red, reversing Monday's gains. Furthermore, the market witnessed losses in all indicators and a majority of the sectors backed by losses in several of the blue chip stocks.

Global General Index (GGI) shed 0.94 points (-0.51 percent) during yesterday's session to reach 183.39 points. Furthermore, the KSE Price Index decreased by 15.40 points (-0.22 percent) yesterday and closed at 7,068.60 points. Market capitalization was down KD153.96bn today to reach KD29.94bn.

Consumer confidence in Kuwait on the rise

Despite the global, regional and local economic challenges, a recent consumer survey indicates that consumer confidence in Kuwait is buoyant, with the mood increasingly optimistic. According to the MasterCard Consumer Confidence Index, compared to last period's survey results, consumer confidence in Kuwait has moved from neutral to optimistic.

Kuwait's money supply growth up 13.1% in Dec

Kuwaiti money supply growth (M3) accelerated to 13.1 percent at the end of December, from 11.4 percent in the previous month, data showed yesterday. M3, the broadest measure of money circulating in the economy, rose to KD24.89 billion (\$86.81 billion) in December, compared with KD22 billion a year earlier, the central bank said in a monthly bulletin.

Health Desk

Kuwaiti health delegation ends visit to Canada, US

Kuwaiti Minister of Health, Dr. Hilal Al-Sayer, and his delegation on Friday concluded their official visit to Canada and the United States. Al-Sayer said that the visit was a success, during which memorandums of understanding were signed in Canada with the

largest Canadian hospital and university, as well as in coordination with one of the largest US universities and hospitals.

He stressed the importance of such memorandums on the development of health services in Kuwait.

Kuwait, Canada sign cancer treatment deal

Visiting Kuwaiti Health Minister Dr Hilal Al-Sayer and Canada's University Health Network (UNH) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) aimed at developing the different cancer treatment services offered in Kuwait's hospitals.

Speaking following the signing ceremony here on Monday night, which was also attended by Kuwait's Ambassador to Canada Musaed Al Haroun, Dr. Al-Sayer said that the agreement included a ten-year strategic plan to raise Kuwait's health services to UNH-adopted standards.

OMAN

Social Desk

Regional workshop on information management

The National Committee of Civil Defence at the Royal Oman Police (ROP) will organise a three-day regional workshop on information management for best humanitarian work under the motto "Together in Management of Crisis and Disasters." The workshop will offer an opportunity to develop deeper understanding of the information status in a regional context, simulating the role that could be played by a group composed of governments, media means, international and non-governmental organisations and the United Nations (UN) to guarantee an effective use of information on preparedness and humanitarian response. The workshop will highlight the best practices pertaining to regional and national mechanisms on utilising information.

Talks held with Pakistani General

Lt Gen Malik bin Sulaiman al Maamari, Inspector General of Police and Customs, received at the General Command of Police in Al Qurum yesterday General Tariq Majeed, Chief of the Pakistani Joint Staff, who is currently visiting the Sultanate. During the meeting views were exchanged on a number of issues of common concern and means of enhancing bilateral co-operation. The meeting was attended by Lt Gen Ahmed bin Harith al Nabhani, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), Maj Gen Salim bin Mussalam bin Ali Qatan, Assistant Inspector General of Police and Customs, and senior officers from the Royal Oman Police.

GCC women artists forum's exhibition opened

Sayyid Abdullah bin Hamad al Busaidy, Chairman of the State Audit Institution, opened at the Omani Society for Fine Arts (OSFA) an exhibition held on the sidelines of Omani and GCC girls forum. The exhibition showcases 80 paintings and drawings made by 40 girls from the Sultanate and GCC states. The exhibition, the first one of its kind in the Sultanate, was very well received by the public, said Maryam bint Abdulkarim al Zadjali, Director of OSFA.

OSFA hosts first GCC Female Artists Symposium

The Omani Society for Fine Arts (OSFA) is hosting the first Gulf Co-operative Council (GCC) Female Artists Symposium here attracting 34 Omani and non-Omani resident artists and six Arabian Gulf artists, each charged with producing two paintings for the upcoming exhibition to be held under the auspices of Sayyid Abdullah bin Hamad al Busaidy, Chairman of the Internal State Audit, at the Society's art galleries in Shatti al Qurum.

Three speakers announced for Women in Business conference

The 2010 Women in Business conference promises to deliver another rich programme of inspirational international female role models with announcement of three confirmed speakers for the conference that take place on March 23-24. The conference is organised by Envent under the auspices of HH Sayyida Aliya bint Thuwaini al Said. The theme of the conference is 'Changing the face of business — Women as an economic force'.

OMS Board launches ongoing education website

The Omani Medical Specialty Board launched its ongoing professional education website at the Medical Simulation Centre in Al Athaiba yesterday. The ceremony was presided over by Mohammed bin Hassan bin Ali, Health Ministry Under-Secretary. Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Futaisi, CEO of the Omani Medical Specialty Board, said that the Omani Medical Specialty Board will host experts from countries with good reputation in advanced medical fields to ensure that health affairs directorates provided the best possible service to the public in the Sultanate.

International Desk

SQU official receives German delegation

Dr Hamad bin Sulaiman al Salmi, Deputy Vice Chancellor for Administrative and Financial Affairs at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) received Senator Dietrich Wersich, State Minister of Social and Family Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection in Hamburg, Germany and his delegation. The meeting discussed a number of joint scientific and research issues, which included enhancing scientific and research co-

operation between SQU and educational universities and institutions in Hamburg, particularly in medical sciences field.

Majlis chief gets Syrian message

Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Isa'ee, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura received a written message from Dr Mahmoud al Abrash, Speaker of the People's Assembly in Syria, dealing with bilateral relations between the two councils. The message was handed over by Farouq Qadour, Syrian Ambassador to the Sultanate, when he was received by Al Isa'ee yesterday. During the meeting, good bilateral relations binding the two brotherly countries and means of enhancing them in all fields, particularly in the parliamentary fields were reviewed, as well as issues of common concern were discussed.

Police chief receives UN delegation

Lt Gen Malik bin Sulaiman al Maamari, Inspector General of Police and Customs, received at the General Police Command in Al Qurum yesterday Abdulaziz al Rakban, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Rasheed Khalikov, Director of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) who are currently visiting the Sultanate to take part in deliberations of an international workshop on "Information Management for Best Humanitarian Work" which begins today.

The three-day workshop will be opened at Barr Al Jissah Resort and Spa, Muscat. The meeting reviewed relief aids offered by the UN to countries in emergencies. It will give details on how to conduct co-ordination tasks and train Omani teams in specific areas of relief.

Pakistan official visits SAF Museum

General Tariq Majeed, Chief of Joint Staff in Pakistan, and his accompanying delegation visited the Command and Staff College and the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) Museum. Commodore Mahfoudh bin Mohammed al Wahaibi, Commandant of the College of Command and Staff, briefed the guest about the college's facilities and programmes.

Gen Majeed and his delegation also visited the SAF Museum. They were briefed about the architectural designs of the Bait al Falaj Castle, which houses the museum, and the exhibits of the museum which depict the Sultanate's military history and development of the SAF during the reign of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces.

Oman-India ties poised for a big leap forward in 2010

Talks on India-Oman Joint Investment Fund with a seed capital of \$100 million that will go up to \$1.5 billion are now at the final stage, said Anil Wadhwa, Indian Ambassador to the Sultanate. India-Oman Joint Investment Fund assumes special significance because it is the first of its kind that India is setting up with any country in the world and will invest

in sectors that not only yield high returns, but also are vital to the two economies. The ambassador was speaking to the Observer on the occasion of India's 61st Republic Day.

OCCI chairman opens Iranian trade exhibition

Khalil bin Abdullah al Khunji, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) opened at Oman International Exhibitions Centre yesterday the 3rd Trade Solo Exhibition of Iran. The exhibition is being organised by Al Mamlaka for Organising exhibitions in collaboration with the Iranian Embassy in Muscat. Al Khunji said that such exhibitions would promote economic and trade relations between the Sultanate and Iran and attract investments.

Health Desk

Pledge to assess health, eco impacts of proposed Duqm coal power project

A two-day seminar on the use of coal in power generation concluded here yesterday with a pledge by authorities to fully study the environmental and health impacts of a coal-fired Independent Water and Power Project (IWPP) planned at Duqm. The assurance came in response to calls by some participants, representing the Majlis Addawla and Majlis Ash'shura, among other higher learning and public health institutions, for a comprehensive evaluation of the proposed project's potential adverse impacts.

The forum, held at Al Bustan Palace InterContinental, had been organised by the Ministry of National Economy in response to His Majesty the Sultan's directives espousing public debate on plans for the establishment of the country's first coal-fired power plant at Duqm.

BAHRAIN

Social Desk

Bahrain Air Show a roaring success

BUSINESSMEN and spectators at the first Bahrain International Air Show (BIAS) yesterday hailed it as a roaring success. The three-day event ended at the Sakhir Airbase, with another sell-out crowd of more than 5,000. Business leaders got the chance to meet some of the biggest names in aviation.

"We're delighted to support His Majesty's mission and vision to have the show. It's a wonderful environment to connect with customers," Boeing Middle East president Paul Kinscherff said, all praise for the extravaganza.

New fund for women

THE Supreme Council for Women (SCW) will launch a new fund to support women today at its premises.

The event will be held under the patronage of Her Royal Highness Princess Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa, wife of His Majesty King Hamad and chairwoman of the Supreme Council for Women and in the presence of Prince Talal bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, president of the Arab Gulf programme for United Nations Development Organisations.

Ministry staff member is called to court

JUDGES have ordered an Interior Ministry employee to testify in the trial of a court clerk accused of accepting bribes, after he failed to appear in the witness stand yesterday. The two-member defence team demanded the chance to cross-examine him after he failed to show up in the High Criminal Court.

They had requested the chance to question him during a previous hearing, but were told their request never went through.

Shura divided on Ministry's probes role

A DIVIDED Shura Council yesterday voted to remove authority from the Labour Ministry to supervise probes involving companies and their workers. Members were at odds over the ministry's interference in such disputes, with several saying that the government had no right to interfere in their internal issues.

Labour Minister Dr Majeed Al Alawi said that the ministry's presence was needed to ensure companies were aware of procedures and ensure transparency. "The amendment carried out by parliament to my original drafted-article is beneficial as it would ensure that as observers we would ensure fairness and that both employer and employee rights are protected," he said.

Tourism warning

Tourism officials were warned by HRH the Premier yesterday to avoid malpractices that harmed Bahrain's image.

His Royal Highness Prime Minister Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa issued stern directives as he chaired a meeting to discuss internal, regional and international events. "The government is keen to project a positive image about Bahrain and promote its status as a tourism destination," he said.

Key studies to boost Bahrain's trade push

Findings from a series of studies conducted in conjunction with the United Nations will help improve Bahrain's worldwide trading capabilities, it was declared yesterday.

They will offer Bahrain a more focused approach to handling World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiation rounds and Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), said Industry and Commerce Minister Dr Hassan Fakhro.

He was speaking during the official launch of the studies, which form part of a new collaboration project by the Industry and Commerce Ministry and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The project, entitled; "Enhancing Institutional

Capacity for Global Economic Environment and Governance," is aimed at developing Bahrain's international trade and building a more competitive national environment.

International Desk

Bahrain base for top Russian firm

A MAJOR Russian consultation company is set to open an office in Bahrain as part of an expansion into the Gulf, it has been announced.

The Agency for Financial Monitoring and Information (AFMI) chose Manama based on its position as the financial centre of the Middle East and the number of varied investment opportunities available, said officials.

Bahrain-Russia keen to boost investments

Bahrain and Russia have expressed their keenness to enhance co-operation in the trade, industrial, economic and financial fields. They also emphasised the importance of encouraging investments by both public and private sectors, and of promoting co-operation in the energy and gas sectors.

The main directions of the bilateral co-operation has been presented in the draft "road map" of joint activities between Russia and Bahrain which will be further discussed.

Economic Desk

Bahrain 'is a leader in deep gas exploration'

Bahrain has acquired a great deal of experience in the gas industry, particularly in deep gas exploration.

That was the message from Oil and Gas Affairs Minister and National Oil and Gas Authority chairman Dr Abdulhussain Mirza to delegates at the opening of the Society of Petroleum Engineers first Deep Gas Conference and Exhibition (DGAS) at Gulf Hotel

Sumitomo awarded \$7m deal

Bahrain Financial Harbour Holding Company (BFHHC) has awarded Sumitomo Corporation a BD2.78 million (\$7.37m) contract.

The deal is for the procurement, assembly, installation, testing and commissioning of a second 66KV substation to be built this year at the Bahrain Financial Harbour (BFH) complex.

According to the terms of the agreement, Sumitomo Corporation, one of Japan's largest trading firms, will supply the new city substation plant in collaboration with Japan AE Power Systems Corporation.

US trade ties discussed

Industry and Commerce Minister Dr Hassan Fakhro yesterday received US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, Holly

Vineyard. She thanked the government and the ministry for their efforts to promote economic and trade co-operation.

Dr Fakhro stressed the strong economic relations which culminated in the signing of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA). He highlighted growing co-operation between Bahraini and American investors and businessmen. "Such co-operation is key to promoting ties and optimising FTA dividends," Dr Fakhro said.