

**Report # 109**  
**BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD**  
**GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL**  
**NEWS MONITORING REPORT**  
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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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## SUMMARY

### **International Front**

*Saudi Arabia's* Second Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Interior Prince Naif bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, who is on a visit to Qatar, said that Qatari-Saudi relations are deep-rooted in historical context and it would be further strengthened in future. Prince Naif said the process of Qatari-Saudi land and sea borders demarcation is fast progressing. Meanwhile, Somali pirates hijacked a *Saudi*-owned ship in the Gulf of Aden this week and said they had also seized a fishing vessel, in a sign the sea gangs are maintaining their lucrative business despite naval patrols. Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh signed the Riyadh Declaration on Sunday night. The declaration was signed after the two leaders held extensive talks. The declaration, termed a "New era of strategic partnership", will be implemented by the two countries for their economic, cultural, social and scientific development. It will identify the areas to harness energy resources as well as fight terrorism, drug trafficking and money laundering.

The 19th statutory conference of the Yemeni-Saudi Council was held in Riyadh in the Saudi Arabia, in the presence of the Yemeni Prime Minister, Ali Mohammad Mojawwar, and the Saudi Deputy Prime Minister, Prince Sultan Bin Abdul Aziz. The two sides signed nine agreements; four of which are to finance development projects in Yemen to an amount of USD 114,800,000. The amount of money obtained will be used to finance projects for generating power, water and sanitation systems, in addition to financing the Al-Hodaidah Hospital and equipping laboratories in the colleges of Engineering and Education in Ta'iz.

The Arab League council threw its weight behind the *UAE's* sovereignty over its three islands Greater and Lesser Tunbs and Abu Mousa and its peaceful measures and means to restore its occupied islands. Israel's Prime Minister will remain wanted in Dubai," the Dubai police chief said on Wednesday. "He currently has diplomatic immunity, but one day he will become an ordinary civilian, and will be arrested." UAE also condemned today brutal attacks and dangerous violations by Israeli settlers and occupation forces against the sacred Al Aqsa Mosque. "Bursting into the squares of Al Aqsa Mosque and its surrounding districts by the Israeli occupation forces and turning it into a military barracks is a dangerous, bared act and exposed Israel's frequent attempts to Judaize the holy city of Jerusalem," according to a statement issued by the UAE Foreign Ministry.

Kuwait's foreign minister has come under an unusual amount of criticism from a lawmaker angered by the official's siding with Libya in its visa standoff with Switzerland. Tripoli and Bern are embroiled in a bitter row sparked by the Swiss police interrogation of Hannibal Gaddafi, the son of Libya's leader Moammar Gaddafi, over allegations of abusing hotel staff. Iraq has

appointed Mohammad Hussain Mohammed Bahr Al Uloom as its ambassador to Kuwait, an Iraqi foreign official has said. The post has been vacant since 1990 when Iraqi troops invaded the northern Arabian Gulf emirate and set off the 1991 Gulf War.

Gulf States seek to exploit the advantages of nuclear energy in the pursuit of peaceful projects, a Kuwaiti specialist said here yesterday. Such projects are those useful in the generation of electric power and in the production of oil and gas, said Nader al-Awadhi, vice-president of the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR).

The *Yemeni* government yesterday apologised to families of 42 civilians killed in an airstrike that targeted Al Qaeda figures in southern Yemen in December. Deputy Prime Minister for Defence and Security Rashad al-Alimi made the apology in parliament, saying the government would pay compensation. An ad hoc fact-finding committee submitted to the parliament a report saying that 42 civilians, mainly women and children, were killed in the December 17 airstrike in the Al Maajala area of the southern Abyan province. The donors' conference for Yemen wrapped up its deliberations here on Sunday with some new promises and intense discussions on the pledges. Meanwhile, several major agreements to finance mainly infrastructure projects worth about SR2.5 billion in a staggered schedule were signed by the Kingdom during a Saudi-Yemeni Coordination Council meeting. Meanwhile on Saturday, Yemen declared a state of emergency in a southern province where separatists wanted to stage anti-unity demonstrations. Some 250,000 people who fled fighting in northern Yemen should not be sent home soon as basic services are lacking in the region although a ceasefire is holding, the United Nations refugee agency said on Tuesday. Yemen is a strategic country, but donors have yet to pledge any funds to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which is seeking \$39 million (Dh143.2 million) this year, it said.

### **Social Front**

The UAE reiterates that it considers the use of underage children for commercial camel racing to be exploitative. The UAE banned the use of child jockeys in commercial camel racing in 2002 and is committed to enforcing that ban. The ban was designed to put an end to the misuse of foreign-born children as jockeys specifically in commercial camel racing.

Some local newspapers noted recently that *Oman* is ranked fifth in the world in relation to deaths due to traffic accidents. However, it should be emphasised that the annual report issued by WHO in 2009 pointed out that the Sultanate ranked fourth in the Gulf and the 57th globally in terms of traffic accidents and the resulting mortality and injuries.

### **Political Front**

Kuwaiti Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Minister of Oil Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah said here Wednesday he was ready for a recently delayed interpellation lodged against

him by an MP. On the other side member of the Kuwaiti National Assembly (parliament) Saleh Ahmad Ashour called here on Wednesday for activating the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union (AIPU) in the coming period.

*Bahrain's* largest Shi'ite parliamentary bloc is demanding that the cabinet be chosen by its elected parliament, sparking a row with Sunni politicians that has drawn in foreign missions as well. The Al Wefaq bloc, with 17 of 40 seats in the assembly, said during its annual assembly last month that the power sharing envisioned in Bahrain's constitution had not yet been sufficiently brought to life.

### **Economic Front**

Saudi Arabia is considering building a new port in the Red sea city of Jeddah to handle rising imports such as wheat and barley under a food security plan. Egypt and Saudi Arabia will drive growth in steel consumption this year in the Middle East and North Africa region, where booming construction and infrastructure spending will lift demand. But demand in Dubai, once a major powerhouse with its insatiable steel appetite, is unlikely to rise in 2010, with banks still reluctant to lend for new construction projects in the indebted emirate and its warehouses filled with steel.

## **DETAILED REPORT**

### **GCC**

#### **Inter GCC Relations**

##### **Naif lauds close ties between Qatar, Saudi**

Saudi Arabia's Second Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Interior Prince Naif bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, who is on a visit to Qatar, said that Qatari-Saudi relations are deep-rooted in historical context and it would be further strengthened in future. Prince Naif said the process of Qatari-Saudi land and sea borders demarcation is fast progressing. The related documents would be mutually exchanged during the first session of the Common Coordination Council in Riyadh. The Qatari-Saudi Joint Technical Panel held eight meetings regarding this so far. Prince Naif said Riyadh will back other Gulf States for ensuring a peaceful settlement to Iranian nuclear issue. In an exclusive interview to Al Sharq, he said Saudi, like other GCC nations, wants to free the entire region from weapons of mass destruction and stressed the need for the region to stay strictly committed to the international resolutions and regulations that prevent proliferation of nuclear weapons. Riyadh's relations with neighbouring country Iran are based on mutual respect and non intervention in others affairs. It attaches great importance to Iranian cooperation with Arab counties, the Prince said.

##### **Gulf States for peaceful use of nuclear energy**

Gulf States seek to exploit the advantages of nuclear energy in the pursuit of peaceful projects, a Kuwaiti specialist said here yesterday. Such projects are those useful in the generation of electric power and in the production of oil and gas, said Nader al-Awadhi, vice-president of the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR). Other applications for nuclear energy, he noted, were also of great benefit in the fields of agriculture, especially in livestock production, and water and in fighting diseases such as cancer and heart ailments. Asked about the current extent of cooperation between the IAEA and Gulf states, al-Awadhi said it involved three areas. One being preparatory plans for the use of nuclear energy; another formulating legislature affecting the proper utilization of nuclear energy, and still another establishing effective programs to train Gulf citizens on harnessing the immense uses of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

## **Yemen Turmoil**

### **Yemen apologizes for killing civilians in Qaeda airstrike**

The Yemeni government yesterday apologised to families of 42 civilians killed in an airstrike that targeted Al Qaeda figures in southern Yemen in December. Deputy Prime Minister for Defence and Security Rashad al-Alimi made the apology in parliament, saying the government would pay compensation. An ad hoc fact-finding committee submitted to the parliament a report saying that 42 civilians, mainly women and children, were killed in the December 17 airstrike in the Al Maajala area of the southern Abyan province. "We apologize to those innocent citizens killed in the operation against al-Qaeda organization in Abyan," al-Alimi said in a statement during a parliamentary debate on the strike. "We work, and anyone who works makes mistakes," he said. Al-Alimi said President Ali Abdullah Saleh had made orders to the government to pay compensation. Authorities have said the airstrike targeted a meeting of leading Al Qaeda figures and that 30 Al Qaeda men were killed. Later officials said only two Al Qaeda members were killed in the raid. Sana'a has stepped up operations against al-Qaeda in the country since December, especially after the Yemen-based Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula claimed responsibility for the failed plot to blow up a US passenger jet as it prepared to land at Detroit on Christmas Day.

### **Yemen details plan to utilize donations**

The donors' conference for Yemen wrapped up its deliberations here on Sunday with some new promises and intense discussions on the pledges. Meanwhile, several major agreements to finance mainly infrastructure projects worth about SR2.5 billion in a staggered schedule were signed by the Kingdom during a Saudi-Yemeni Coordination Council meeting. The meeting, which was organized alongside the donors' conference, was chaired by Crown Prince Sultan, deputy premier and minister of defense and aviation. "The agreements that were signed to support projects in the fields of development, health, education, tourism and social insurance are evidence of the great support given by Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah and this support comes within the framework of regular consultations between the king and Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh," said Crown Prince Sultan. "The conference of the donor countries also confirms the Kingdom's keen desire to support the process of development in Yemen and our aim to mobilize international help," he added. In a joint communiqué, the two sides reaffirmed the GCC stand with regard to discarding all forms of terrorism. On the Iranian nuclear issue, the two sides emphasized the GCC position, while reiterating the legitimate rights of

countries to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. In the field of security, Crown Prince Sultan and the Yemeni premier welcomed existing cooperation between the two countries as per the provisions of an MoU signed in 2002.

### **State of emergency declared in southern Yemen province**

Yemen on Saturday declared a state of emergency in a southern province where separatists wanted to stage anti-unity demonstrations, official sources said on Saturday. "The city of Al Dhale'e was surrounded from all directions and all entrances were closed since early morning to prevent any armed outlaws from entering it to undermine the security," said the director of security in Al Dhale'e, Gazi Al Ahwal. Earlier, the governor of Al Dhale'e, Ali Kasem Taleb, said he had a meeting with the security officials and decided to prevent any citizen from walking around with guns. Sources said that elements from the separatist southern movement were planning to stage demonstration in Al Dhale'e on Saturday to deliver an anti-unity message to the international and Gulf donors who meet on the same day in the Saudi capital Riyadh for helping Yemen maintain its unity, security and stability. The separatists call themselves peaceful movement for returning the independent state of the south, which united with the north in 1990.

### **International donors in Riyadh to support Yemen**

A conference of international donors and regional partners of Yemen gathered here on Saturday to find the best ways to disburse aid to the impoverished country, battling terrorism and insurgency, and its effective utilisation. The two-day conference is also discussing the ways to effectively implement the resolutions of the London donors' conference held last month. The conference was being held under the shadow of concerns and doubts voiced by major Western donors about the competency of the Yemeni government in proper distribution of the aid for various purposes. Speaking to Gulf News, a top Yemeni source said that these donor countries have failed to fulfill their aid pledges made at an earlier conference held in London itself in 2006. "We had received less than 10 per cent of their pledges amounting to a total of \$4.7 billion made at the conference," the source said. Addressing the opening session of the Riyadh Conference, Yemeni Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs and Minister of Planning and International Cooperation Abdul Karim Al Arhabi said that the potential economic and security challenges faced by his country during the past years had virtually incapacitated the efforts of the government to create an investment-friendly environment to a great extent.

### **Seven killed in clashes between gunmen and security in south Yemen**

Boys dressed in flags of former South Yemen stand on the roof of a building during a rally in the southern city of Dale'e on Sunday. Security forces arrested 21 separatists trying to provoke rioting during demonstrations in a southern provincial capital as Yemen increased security to guard against attacks, the government said on Sunday. Image Credit: Reuters Sana'a: Seven people, including four soldiers, were killed when security forces raided a group of gunmen accused of supporting the separation calls in the city of Zenjubar, Abyan south of Yemen, local sources said Monday. The separatist group was led by Ali Saleh Al Yafe, a local weapons trader, who is accused by the security forces of providing the separatists with weapons, the sources said. The governor of Abyan, Ahmad Al Missari, however, said that only two soldiers were killed when the security forces stormed a hideout of a group of people wanted for security reasons.



### **Too soon to send displaced Yemenis back, UN body says**

Some 250,000 people who fled fighting in northern Yemen should not be sent home soon as basic services are lacking in the region although a ceasefire is holding, the United Nations refugee agency said on Tuesday. Yemen is a strategic country, but donors have yet to pledge any funds to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which is seeking \$39 million (Dh143.2 million) this year, it said. The government struck a truce on February 11 with Al Houthi rebels who have battled it since 2004 over religious, economic and social grievances in the mountainous north. The conflict created 250,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs). "There should be no rush in the return of the IDPs, otherwise the problems will remain and the instability might resume," Radhouane Nouicer, director of UNHCR's Middle East and North Africa bureau, said in Geneva. UNHCR is providing tents and other shelter materials to the uprooted and will gradually shift to helping them to go home.

### **11 Al Qaida suspects arrested, two killed**

A man was killed and a soldier injured in shoot-out between Al Qaida suspects and Yemeni security forces that raided a hideout in the Yemeni capital Sana'a arresting a total of 11 Al Qaida suspects, an official statment said Thursday. The operation was in Sawad Hanash in Sana'a where the eleven Al Qaida suspects were living in a house belonging to one of them. The owner of the house, father of one of Al Qaida suspect, fired at the security forces while surrounding the house injuring one soldier before he was killed by the security men, the statement said. In addition to fighting Al Qaida, impoverished Yemen is also trying to bring an end to a northern Shiite insurgency and faces simmering separatist tension in the south. The past few weeks have seen an increase in violence in the south, where secessionists protesting against the rule of President Ali Abdullah Saleh have clashed with police, resulting in deaths on both sides.

Last month, the government declared a truce in a long-running conflict with northern Shiite rebels, but analysts say it is only a matter of time before fighting starts again as the rebels' grievances have not been addressed.

## **SAUDI ARAB**

### **International Front**

#### **Somali pirates hijack Saudi ship**

Somali pirates hijacked a Saudi-owned ship in the Gulf of Aden this week and said they had also seized a fishing vessel, in a sign the sea gangs are maintaining their lucrative business despite naval patrols. Andrew Mwangura of the East African Seafarers' Assistance Program said the Saudi-owned 5,136 deadweight ton Al-Nisr Al-Saudi was seized Monday and was now off the Somali coast. The ship usually carries fuel oil but was empty when it was taken in the Gulf of Aden Monday. The crew members are believed to be safe, said a spokesman for the EU Naval Force Wednesday. It was not registered with maritime authorities and was outside the designated route patrolled by naval warships, said Cmdr. John Harbour. Saudi Aramco said Wednesday that the oil tanker captured by pirates does not belong to Vella International Marine Company Limited, an Aramco subsidiary. The tanker was found to be owned by a gasoline company based in Jeddah. Kamel Ori, the director of the company, said that they lost contact with the tanker

Monday and reported the incident to the Emirate of Makkah. The captain of the ship is Greek and the 13 crew members are from Sri Lanka, he said. The Yemeni coastal guard said that they did not receive a help call from the tanker bound to Jeddah from Japan.

### **The 19th Conference of the Yemeni-Saudi Council**

The 19th statutory conference of the Yemeni-Saudi Council was held in Riyadh in the Saudi Arabia, in the presence of the Yemeni Prime Minister, Ali Mohammad Mojawwar, and the Saudi Deputy Prime Minister, Prince Sultan Bin Abdul Aziz. The two sides signed nine agreements; four of which are to finance development projects in Yemen to an amount of USD 114,800,000. The amount of money obtained will be used to finance projects for generating power, water and sanitation systems, in addition to financing the Al-Hodaidah Hospital and equipping laboratories in the colleges of Engineering and Education in Ta'iz. Furthermore, the Saudi Arabia declared its willingness to finance the further Yemeni projects promised earlier in the London Conference for Donors. In addition to the Saudi Arabia, during the conference, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) approved the allocation of an amount of 3.2 billion to finance specific projects in Yemen, according to SABA News Agency. The conference was attended by delegations from the US Britain, Japan, European Union countries and representatives from the United Nations and the World Bank. During the conference, the government of Yemen presented their strategies to combat terrorism, unemployment and poverty. On the other hand, Abdul Kareem Al-Arhabi, the Deputy Prime Minister for Economy and International Cooperation, expressed his dismay over the unwillingness some donors have shown in fulfilling their promises to finance projects in Yemen.

### **KSA, Yemen ink pacts on security and economic development**

Security and economic development were the main topics of discussion at a meeting of the Saudi-Yemeni Coordination Council in Riyadh on Saturday. The meeting was jointly chaired by Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdul Aziz, Deputy Premier, Defense and Aviation Minister and Inspector General and Dr. Ali Muhammad Mujawwar, the Yemeni Prime Minister. It was the 19th session of the Saudi-Yemeni Coordination Council which took place at the Crown Prince's Palace. Addressing the session, the Crown Prince said the council meeting coincided with the meeting of the donors in Riyadh, which was another part of the Kingdom's efforts to ensure Yemen's continued development and security. He expressed his satisfaction at what has been achieved throughout the 35 years of the council's existence. He stressed the bonds between the two countries including their common faith, good neighborliness and kinship. He stressed that all these commonalities made it important to redouble efforts to promote development in both countries. He emphasized that one of the major mutual goals is comprehensive security for both countries. A number of agreements and executive programs were signed at the meeting, including an agreement on cooperation in tourism signed by Prince Sultan Bin Salman Bin Abdul Aziz, Chairman of the General Commission for Tourism and Antiquities and Abdul Hafez Nagi Al-Sama, the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers from the Yemeni side.

### **India Visit**

#### **Indian PM meets with Saudi oil minister**

Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh received at his residence at King Saud Palace here today Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources Ali Al-Naimi. During the meeting, they exchanged talks on oil and mineral resources in the two countries. They also reviewed the situations in world oil markets and the efforts being exerted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the stability of the market, as well as the Kingdom's desire and readiness for providing India with its present and future needs of oil. The meeting also dealt with joint investments between the two countries and their enhancement. On the other hand, the Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources Ali Al-Naimi met with Indian Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas Murli Deora. During the meeting, they exchanged views on the situations in the world oil markets and discussed cooperation between the two countries pertaining to petroleum and mineral resources and ways of their enhancement.

### **He affirmed close relations between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and India**

Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh signed the Riyadh Declaration on Sunday night. The declaration was signed after the two leaders held extensive talks. The declaration, termed a "New era of strategic partnership", will be implemented by the two countries for their economic, cultural, social and scientific development. It will identify the areas to harness energy resources as well as fight terrorism, drug trafficking and money laundering. Singh, who is on a three-day state visit, met with King Abdullah on Sunday night at Al-Yamamah Palace in the presence of Crown Prince Sultan, deputy premier and minister of defense and aviation, Second Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Prince Naif and senior government officials. Singh called for a comprehensive energy partnership between India and Saudi Arabia at a meeting earlier in the day with Saudi businessmen at the Council of Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry. "We should also establish new partnerships in the area of new and renewable energy through the sharing of clean technologies and joint collaborations," he said during his speech, which included a broad summary of opportunities to strengthen ties between the two countries in an increasingly integrated world economy.

### **Singh's Shoura address to focus on ties with KSA**

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's address to the Shoura Council on Monday at the conclusion of his visit to the Kingdom will focus on Indian foreign policy and strengthening relations with Saudi Arabia. The speech, which will be the first by an Indian prime minister before the Shoura Council, will also look at opportunities for investment in India and greater cooperation between the Saudi and Indian business communities in the light of the rapid economic transformation that has taken place in India. Prof. Zikrur Rahman of the India-Arab Cultural Center at New Delhi's Jamia Millia Islamia University said the occasion was also an "opportunity to address the Saudi public on political, economic and cultural transformations". The accords signed between the Kingdom and India during the visit will give great momentum toward expanding the base of the two countries' strategic relations," Rahman said. "King Abdullah is determined to find just solutions to issues in the region and the wider world and he has the world's respect," he added. According to one Indian politician, the two countries have a "strategic interest in the stability of South Asia and the Middle East, and a direct responsibility to seek peace in the regions."

Riyadh and New Delhi have both performed effective work in international anti-terrorism efforts," he said.

### **Indian PM on historic visit to Saudi Arabia**

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh arrived here on Saturday on a three-day historic visit. Ministers and senior officials greeted Singh at the King Khaled International Airport. The welcoming delegation included Crown Prince Sultan, deputy premier and minister of defense and aviation, Interior Minister Prince Naif, Riyadh Gov. Prince Salman, Commerce and Industry Minister Zainal Alireza, Culture and Information Minister Abdul Aziz Khoja, Shoura Council Chairman Abdullah Al-Asheikh, several members of the royal family, commanders of the armed forces, diplomats and senior members of the government. Singh was accompanied by his wife, Gursharan Kaur, Commerce and Industry Minister Anand Sharma, Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Murli Deora, Health and Family Welfare Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad, Deputy Foreign Minister Sashi Tharoor; National Security Adviser Shiv Shankar Menon and Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister T.K.A. Nair. The trip marks the first visit by an Indian prime minister since a visit by Indira Gandhi in 1982. "It was an unprecedented welcome to our prime minister," said Vishnu Prakash, joint secretary and spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs at a news conference.

### **Economic Front**

#### **Saudi Arabia mulls new port for food imports**

Saudi Arabia is considering building a new port in the Red sea city of Jeddah to handle rising imports such as wheat and barley under a food security plan, an official said Wednesday. Food security has topped the policy agenda in the Gulf Arab region following rampant inflation in 2008 that underscored the peninsula's dependence on imports and forced countries to invest abroad to ensure supplies of staples like rice and wheat. Saudi Arabia has emerged as global buyer of wheat and is also trying with the help of private Saudi investors to secure farmland in Africa and elsewhere abroad to import more food. "The new port is still under study and we are looking at various locations for a port to support Jeddah's Islamic port in food security imports," Khalid Bubshait, head of the Saudi Ports Authority, told Reuters in an interview. Jeddah Islamic Port (JIC) is the largest in the Kingdom with a capacity of 3.2 million TEUs (Twenty-Foot Equivalent Units), representing 73 percent of the country's container traffic. The port is expected to nearly double its capacity to 6 million TEUs by 2011 as it is undergoing expansion of its three terminals. JIC has faced some congestion in 2008 and 2009, resulting in hefty charges for many delayed ships as well as the diversion of some shipping lines to other ports. "This new port will deal with non-container imports like wheat and barley imports," Bubshait said, declining to give a cost estimate for the port. "The idea of this port is still under study and no decision has been taken yet. We haven't decided on the size or number of docks yet," he added. Since Saudi Arabia abandoned its wheat cultivation program two years ago, due to dwindling water resources, it became a major buyer of wheat from global markets. Experts expect Saudi Arabia to import 3 million tonnes of wheat per year from 2009 until 2016. Saudi Arabia has urged companies to invest in farm projects abroad. In April, Riyadh set up a company with capital of SR3 billion (\$ 800 million) to invest in farmland abroad, focusing on wheat, rice, sugar and soybeans.

### **Iran sanctions could hit major oil firms**

Earlier this month, Iran's ambassador to India said that his country continues to import gasoline from a private Indian oil refinery, even though the firm, Reliance Industries Ltd., had promised last year that it would stop gasoline exports to Iran, fearing U.S. sanctions. Amb. Seyed Mehdi Nabizadeh's remark has put Indian and foreign companies' trade relations with Iran in a difficult spot as the U.S. administration looks to step up trade sanctions against Tehran over its nuclear program. Reliance quickly denied the ambassador's assertion. RIL spokesperson Tushar Pania told IPS from Mumbai that the company had ceased exporting refined petroleum products to Iran as of last May. He declined to comment on whether RIL petroleum products make their way to Iran after being re-exported from third countries. In a statement released Feb. 9, RIL said its "contract with the buyers explicitly prohibits Iran as a destination for any cargo loaded at Jamnagar." Last December, the House of Representatives passed the Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act, which seeks to limit Iran's ability to import and produce refined petroleum products. On Jan. 28, the Senate passed the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act, which incorporates most of the provisions in the Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act. Representatives of the two chambers must now meet to agree on a compromise version that will be sent to the White House for President Barack Obama's signature.

### **Saudi Arabia, Egypt to drive Middle East steel demand**

Egypt and Saudi Arabia will drive growth in steel consumption this year in the Middle East and North Africa region, where booming construction and infrastructure spending will lift demand. But demand in Dubai, once a major powerhouse with its insatiable steel appetite, is unlikely to rise in 2010, with banks still reluctant to lend for new construction projects in the indebted emirate and its warehouses filled with steel. In 2009, North Africa's steel demand looked almost immune to one of the worst downturns in the \$ 500 billion global steel industry, which forced producers worldwide to nearly halve output as demand evaporated. Egypt's banks, flush with cash despite the credit crunch, and government stimulus spending on infrastructure, helped keep construction projects running, analysts say. Housing shortages in the region also kept demand buoyant. "In North Africa, lending is available, people do not have a major problem accessing the cash," said George Matta, chief marketing officer at Egypt's biggest steelmaker, Ezz Steel. "There are major infrastructure projects in Egypt due to housing demand and the government has been spending heavily in these areas," Matta said. Rising demand will allow steel producers to raise prices this year, analysts say, citing Saudi Arabia's SABIC (Saudi Basic Industries Corp.), and Turkey's Erdemir, alongside Ezz. Matta sees apparent steel consumption growing by 8-10 percent in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, after 2009's 1 percent dip.

### **International Front**

#### **Arab council backs UAE on islands issue**

The Arab League council threw its weight behind the UAE's sovereignty over its three islands Greater and Lesser Tunbs and Abu Mousa and its peaceful measures and means to restore its occupied islands. In a statement issued at the end of its 133rd meeting here yesterday, the council denounced Iran's continued occupation of the islands and breaching of the UAE's sovereignty in a way that threatens security and stability in the region as well as international security and

peace. The council also condemned Iran for building housing facilities on the UAE islands, conducting military manoeuvres on the islands and their territorial waters, air space and continental shelf and economic zone of the islands which are considered part and parcel of the UAE territory.

### **Immunity not forever, says Dubai Police chief**

"Israel's Prime Minister will remain wanted in Dubai," the Dubai police chief said on Wednesday. "He currently has diplomatic immunity, but one day he will become an ordinary civilian, and will be arrested." Lieutenant General Dahi Khalfan Tamim said he would ask Dubai Public Prosecution to seek the arrest of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with the help of Interpol. He further told Khaleej Times Dubai Police was tracking closely the movements of the 27 suspects in the killing of Hamas commander Mahmoud Al Mabhouh jointly with other countries whose passports were forged. Dahi Khalfan said the hotel where the crime took place could also appoint a Palestinian lawyer living in Israel and sue the Netanyahu government. "They should pay compensation to (the) hotel for affecting its reputation by killing somebody there." Dahi Khalfan said, "We are tracking the movements. We know that some of them have travelled from Israel to other countries while others have remained there." He said the UAE central bank was working with the US Federal Bureau of Investigation over the prepaid cards issued by MetaBank bank, which were used by 13 suspects. They had used them to pay for their travel and hotel expenses. Meanwhile, new agency Bloomberg quoted MetaBank as saying the suspected assassins "fraudulently" acquired prepaid payroll cards and stole identities to obtain jobs in US companies.

### **UAE says Rigi never laid foot on territory**

Despite the arrest of Jundallah ringleader Abdolmalek Rigi on a flight from Dubai, the United Arab Emirates has rejected reports that the terrorist had entered its territory. The UAE Foreign Ministry said Friday that Rigi, who was identified and detained by Iranian security officials on Tuesday, never lay foot on the sheikhdom's territory as he had only stayed at the Dubai International Airport for a few hours. "We dismissed out of hand reports that Abdolmalek Rigi was in our territory prior to his arrest," Saudi Arabia's Al-Arabia quoted the UAE Foreign Ministry as saying. Iranian observers believe the claims are aimed at undermining tireless efforts by the Tehran government to locate the whereabouts of Rigi. Abdolmalek Rigi was captured on Tuesday while aboard a passenger jet flying to Kyrgyzstan from the UAE. His plane was subsequently grounded in the Iranian city of Bandar Abbas.

### **Arab union passes draft condemning Mabhouh's killing in UAE**

The political affairs and parliamentary relations committee of the 16th Arab Inter-parliamentary Union (AIPU) conference passed on Wednesday a draft resolution condemning the assassination of Hamas commander Mahmoud Al Mabhouh in the UAE. The conference, currently on session here, considered the crime as a violation of the sovereignty and security of the UAE and international law and norms. The motion called for supporting UAE's efforts to bring those murderers to justice. According to the resolution, the conference holds the view that this criminal act needs cooperation of all countries in order to encounter this criminal gang and prosecute them as existing laws. The committee also approved a draft resolution backing the UAE's full

right to its three islands - Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa - occupied by Iran and supporting all peaceful measures the UAE is taking to restore its sovereignty over its islands. The resolution called on Iran to translate its desire to improve relations with Arab countries into practical, tangible deed and respond to sincere, serious calls made by the UAE for settling the dispute through peaceful means either by serious direct negotiations or resorting to the International Court of Justice.

### **Nuclear Energy Front**

#### **Wide range of opportunities seen in UAE-US nuclear deal**

A 50-member US delegation on Thursday ended its trade mission to the United Arab Emirates after exploring opportunities in the UAE's peaceful, civilian nuclear energy programme. The trade mission was co-sponsored by the Nuclear Energy Institute (NEI) and the US-UAE Business Council, and certified by the US Department of Commerce's Foreign Commercial Service. The trip included briefings from Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation (ENEC), the UAE's Nuclear Energy Programme Implementation Organisation, as well as officials from the Korea Electric Power Corporation (KEPCO). KEPCO leads the consortium selected to build the UAE's nuclear energy plants. The consortium includes Pittsburgh-based Westinghouse, a Business Council member. In addition, speakers from the Abu Dhabi Economic Development Office, the US Embassy in Abu Dhabi, and Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce provided guidance on how to do business in the country. On a trip in the region, US Secretary of Energy Steven Chu held a private discussion with the group. He highlighted a range of energy cooperation between the two countries, particularly in nuclear and renewable energy. "What emerged from the meetings is the wide range of opportunities, even beyond the boundaries of the nuclear energy facilities," said Danny Sebright, president of the US-UAE Business Council.

### **Social Front**

#### **Iris scans checks entry of illegals into UAE**

Since its installation in 2002, the Iris scan technology has helped prevent over 235,000 people from entering the UAE illegally, police announced yesterday. The technology has been highly successful in securing UAE's borders and entry points, Major General Ahmad Nasser Al Raisi, the Director General of Abu Dhabi Police Central Operations said in a press statement. In order to apply the system on the passport counters at various entry points, studies to use new cameras to capture the image of the iris from a distance is currently under way. "Iris scan system currently used at various ports of the country has achieved amazing results and proved high efficiency in arresting deported people of different nationalities who attempted to enter UAE after forging their passports and obtaining new visit or work visas", he said. Before the implementation of the iris scan, a foreigner expelled from UAE could go back to his country, change his name, get a new passport and return to the country. The challenging situation led to the use of iris prints which, being unique to each individual, helps identify such cases in real time.

#### **Dubai policeman charged with assaulting student**

A police corporal has denied punching a Saudi student in the face with a knuckleduster and injuring him because he was chatting with two girls in a gas station, a court heard yesterday. Prosecutors accused the 22-year-old Emirati corporal of assaulting the student and permanently damaging part of his face after punching him with a knuckleduster and cursing him. "I am not guilty. No, I didn't beat him ... but yes, your honour, I cursed him," argued the defendant, M.A. when he appeared before the Dubai Court of First Instance. According to the arraignment sheet, prosecutors charged M.A. with assaulting and injuring the 24-year-old student, N.D., and cursing and dishonouring him in public. Medical reports confirmed that the claimant sustained two per cent permanent disability in his nose and the bones of his face. N.D., who was present in courtroom four, approached Presiding Judge Hamad Abdul Latif Abdul Jawad and requested an adjournment until he lodges a civil compensation claim against the suspect.

### **Human Rights Front**

#### **UAE committed to ban on child jockeys in camel racing**

The UAE reiterates that it considers the use of underage children for commercial camel racing to be exploitative. The UAE banned the use of child jockeys in commercial camel racing in 2002 and is committed to enforcing that ban. The ban was designed to put an end to the misuse of foreign-born children as jockeys specifically in commercial camel racing. This practice has now been eradicated and any violation will be prosecuted. However, it remains lawful for Emirati children to ride camels and to take part in some traditional amateur events. British media reports this week referred to the Sweihan festival in Abu Dhabi, which includes a number of activities and events highlighting traditional culture. The festival is equivalent to a British country show and includes bi-annual camel races for different age groups. This traditional event should not be confused with commercial camel racing, where the government has prohibited the use of children as jockeys.

#### **UAE condemns Israel's gross violations against Al Aqsa Mosque**

The UAE condemned today brutal attacks and dangerous violations by Israeli settlers and occupation forces against the sacred Al Aqsa Mosque. "Bursting into the squares of Al Aqsa Mosque and its surrounding districts by the Israeli occupation forces and turning it into a military barracks is a dangerous, bared act and exposed Israel's frequent attempts to Judaize the holy city of Jerusalem," according to a statement issued by the UAE Foreign Ministry. The statement reiterated the UAE's support for solidarity of the Palestinian people stationed inside the Mosque and its squares and the old city. "Resistance of the Jerusalem citizens in the face of the assault confirms their determination to defend the holy shrine by their bodies," the ministry said. The Ministry noted that Israel had used to defile the Al Aqsa Mosque, and Islamic and Christian sacred shrines in the holy city in a flagrant defiance to the sentiments of both Muslims and Christians in different parts of the world. The Ministry added that aggressions perpetrated by the settlers who are acting on instructions by the Israeli government and its schemes to link Islamic holy places in Jerusalem, and other areas in the occupied Palestinian territories with the Israeli culture and Jewish occasions signal a flat forgery and a bare theft of the Arab-Islamic history in occupied Palestine. The Ministry described such acts on orders of the Israeli government as a blatant challenge to the international legitimacy and dangerous breach of resolutions of the UN Security Council and UN General Assembly.



## **KUWAIT**

### **International Front**

#### **Kuwait's foreign minister criticised for siding with Libya**

Kuwait's foreign minister has come under an unusual amount of criticism from a lawmaker angered by the official's siding with Libya in its visa standoff with Switzerland. Tripoli and Bern are embroiled in a bitter row sparked by the Swiss police interrogation of Hannibal Gaddafi, the son of Libya's leader Moammar Gaddafi, over allegations of abusing hotel staff. The row has spilled over to the European Union after Bern imposed a ban on around 180 Libyan officials, including members of the Gaddafi family. The Swiss decision meant that that no Schengen country may issue visas to those people on the grounds that Switzerland is a member of the Schengen area. Meeting reporters in Kuwait City, Shaikh Mohammad Sabah Al Salem said on Tuesday that he found Switzerland's attitude towards Libya "bizarre." "The Swiss ban means that leading Libyan personalities such as Dr Ali Triki, the president of the United Nations General Assembly, who is required to make frequent trips, cannot travel to Switzerland," he said.

#### **Iraq appoints ambassador to Kuwait after a 20-year hiatus**

Iraq has appointed Mohammad Hussain Mohammed Bahr Al Uloom as its ambassador to Kuwait, an Iraqi foreign official has said. The post has been vacant since 1990 when Iraqi troops invaded the northern Arabian Gulf emirate and set off the 1991 Gulf War. The Iraqi nominee is the son of Shiite scholar and politician Mohammed Bahr Al Uloom and the brother of the former oil minister, Ebrahim Bahr Al Uloom. "We are now waiting for the approval of the Kuwaiti government as per the international protocol," Mohammed Al Haj Humood, the foreign affairs undersecretary, told Kuwaiti daily Al Jareeda. "Mohammed Hussain Bahr Al Uloom is in a long line of eminent individuals from an illustrious and well-known family who long struggled against the Baath party and the Saddam Hussain regime." The new ambassador would tackle the pending issues between Kuwait and Iraq after the general elections and the composition of the new government, Al Haj Humood said.

#### **Kuwait welcomes Iraq envoy after 20-year hiatus**

Kuwait has welcomed the nomination of an Iraqi ambassador as "a good move" that indicates a clear recognition of its sovereignty. Iraq on Tuesday said that it appointed Mohammad Husain Mohammad Bahr Al Uloom as its ambassador to Kuwait, a post that has been vacant since 1990 when Iraqi troops invaded the northern Arabian Gulf emirate and set off the 1991 Gulf War. Kuwait's foreign minister, Shaikh Mohammad Sabah Al Salem, said that the nomination after a 20-year hiatus was a good move, while a foreign ministry official denied pressure from either Baghdad or Tehran on Kuwait City to approve the nomination. "The nomination of Mohammad Husain Mohammad Bahr Al Uloom was in consultation with the Kuwaiti foreign ministry," the official said. "The designated envoy has had good positions towards Kuwait. He and his family lived here for some time and have several investments. The envoy also enjoys good relations with Kuwaiti nationals," the official was quoted as saying by Kuwaiti daily Al Watan. The official said that the announcement of the nomination as Kuwait celebrated its liberation

anniversary from the 1990 Iraqi invasion was "a coincidence and did not aim to provoke or send signals to the families of POWs and martyrs."

### **Political Front**

#### **Kuwait oil minister says he was ready for interpellation**

Kuwaiti Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Minister of Oil Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah said here Wednesday he was ready for a recently delayed interpellation lodged against him by an MP. Speaking to reporters at the parliament, the minister, who also doubles as Minister of Information, said it is the government which had asked him to put the interpellation on the back burner. Earlier on Tuesday, the National Assembly (parliament) gave the thumbs up to a request by Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah for postponing the grilling filed against him by MP Ali Al-Diqbasi till March 16. Reiterating great governmental support for him, the minister said the query for information would lead to revealing many things which concern MPs and Kuwaiti people. Challenging the move by voicing readiness to rebuff the questions, he dismissed reports suggesting that he could lose the information portfolio over the grilling.

#### **Kuwait urges empowerment of AIPU**

Member of the Kuwaiti National Assembly (parliament) Saleh Ahmad Ashour called here on Wednesday for activating the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union (AIPU) in the coming period. Speaking to KUNA on the sidelines of the 16th AIPU conference, Ashour said the union needs to hold more intensive meetings to coordinate the stances of the national parliaments of the Arab countries towards several important issues. "On top of these issues are the statutes of the AIPU which should be dovetailed with that of the Organization of Islamic Conference Inter-Parliamentary Union (OIC-IPU)," he pointed out. "Members of the committee on legal and human rights affairs have discussed a range of issues such as the launching of the electronic Arab parliament and the contacts among the Arab parliaments," he said noting that the two issues will be referred to the AIPU executive committee for further debate. "The conferees have also discussed the suggestion of launching an Arab center for legal and legislative studies, with a budget amounting to USD 150, 000, a well as Lebanon's bid to host the center," Ashour said. "Kuwait delegation backs Lebanon's bid and suggests launching the center in 2010 instead of next year as originally planned," he disclosed.

### **Social Front**

#### **American admits to making hoax bomb calls in Kuwait to speed up divorce**

A disgruntled American is behind the spate of hoax bomb calls that gripped Kuwait in the past few weeks, a Kuwaiti paper said. Orlando Turner, a former resident of Kuwait, said that the threats were meant to put pressure on Kuwaiti authorities to speed up the settlement of divorce proceedings with his soon-to-be ex-Filipino wife who wants custody of their 11-month-old daughter, Al Watan Daily reported on Sunday. First revealing himself on a YouTube video under the name 'jackofalltrades98', Turner claimed to know the truth about the bomb threats that had caused several buildings in Kuwait to be shut down and evacuated. Turner said that he was behind nine of the ten bomb threat calls in 2010, but he did not claim responsibility for the Kuwait Stock Exchange hoax call, the paper said. "The first location was the Sultan Centre in

Salmiya," he said, before mentioning Johnny Rockets in Salmiya, the Al Manshar Hotel in Fahaheel, the Sheraton Hotel in Kuwait City, the Philippines Embassy, Kuwait International Airport, a Ruby Tuesday's in Mahboula, and a Mr Baker in Mahboula. Over an internet phone call, Turner explained his actions as driven by as an attempt to see his daughter, at the centre of a custody battle with his wife, whom he met and married in Kuwait, as they go through divorce proceedings in Kuwait. Turner's marital problems appear to have started when the couple took in a runaway maid to help his wife who was pregnant with their baby.

## **BAHRAIN**

### **International Front**

#### **Bahrain foreign minister defends holding meeting with US Jews**

Bahrain's foreign minister, Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmad Al Khalifa, has denied media reports that his meeting last month with Jews in the US was a secret, insisting that the American society was now ready to listen to Arab views. "The meeting was never a secret. I have mentioned it on my Twitter, which allows many people around the world to follow and to interact with me," Shaikh Khalid said. "I received a dinner invitation from American citizens who were Jews. There was no Israeli present at the meeting," the minister told Al Wasat daily. According to Shaikh Khalid, diplomats often receive invitations from all the components of the US society. "I will not hesitate to hold similar meetings with Americans. Such meetings are not based on religion and a diplomat meets all components of society. At such meetings, we must have views to share with others. The US society is now ready to listen to the Arab view that is committed to the Arab League and to the Arab peace initiative," he said.

For the foreign minister, there is a strong need to convey the Arab view to all parties concerned with the conflict in the Middle East, and he blamed "attempts to abort putting across the Arab views on ways to achieve peace". Newspapers and agencies have claimed that Shaikh Khalid made the secret visit to the office of a Rabbi to meet Israelis. However, Shaikh Khalid, one of two Bahraini ministers using Twitter, scorned the tendency of the reports.

### **Political Front**

#### **Al Wefaq, British ambassador under fire for meeting on Bahrain**

Angry lawmakers from two major parliamentary blocs have criticised both country's largest bloc and the British ambassador to Bahrain for holding a meeting allegedly on the political situation in Bahrain. MPs from Al Asala accused Al Wefaq, which has 17 of the 40 seats in the lower chamber, of plotting a constitutional coup after it called for a change in the constitution mechanism of the cabinet. "Urging the formation of government in a way other than stipulated in the constitution amounts to an open call for a constitutional and political coup," said Al Asala Society, the flag bearers of the Salafi movement in Bahrain. "The reactions that followed the conference reflect the deep chasm between Al Wefaq and other mainstream official and national forces regarding the constitution, the National Action Charter and the legitimacy of the political

regime," Al Asala said. Al Menbar, the third largest bloc in the parliament, said that there was a need to "respect the constitution fully and to foil any attempt to foment sedition in the country."

### **Shia calls for elected Bahraini govt spark row**

Bahrain's largest Shi'ite parliamentary bloc is demanding that the cabinet be chosen by its elected parliament, sparking a row with Sunni politicians that has drawn in foreign missions as well. The Al Wefaq bloc, with 17 of 40 seats in the assembly, said during its annual assembly last month that the power sharing envisioned in Bahrain's constitution had not yet been sufficiently brought to life. This drew harsh criticism from Sunni politicians, one of whom also assailed the British ambassador for meeting deputies from Al Wefaq shortly after its assembly and warned against foreign meddling. Majority Shi'ite Bahrain, home to the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, is ruled by the Sunni Muslim al-Khalifa family but has an elected parliament. The Shi'ite population complains of discrimination in jobs and services. Officials deny this. "The national charter that 98.4 percent of people voted for (in 2002) clearly states that Bahrain is transferring into a constitutional monarchy," Khalil al-Marzooq, speaker of the Shi'ite opposition Al Wefaq's parliamentary bloc, told Reuters. Marzooq said that as such the cabinet should be formed by parliament. It is currently appointed by Bahrain's king, with about half the members coming from the royal family. Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa started a reform process in the early 2000s that led to a new constitution and parliamentary elections in 2002 and 2006. Bahrain's next parliamentary elections are expected in November, and observers say the debate on the constitution is part of arm wrestling between Shi'ite and Sunni blocs ahead of the polls. The country's elected parliament is the only one in the Gulf Arab region besides Kuwait's assembly, but its bills need to pass an upper house that is appointed by the king. Ultimate power in the country rests with the ruling family. "We're not challenging the al-Khalifa family, we deny this. Nothing has been said against this family or any other," Marzooq said. The demands by Al Wefaq were met with stark criticism from Sunni groups such as the Al Menbar society. "The current constitution is a national achievement that must not be compromised; it is the legal reference for (relations) between the rulers and the ruled and it needs to be respected and cannot be violated except through the constitutional framework," it said in a statement. Bahrain's sectarian balance is a concern to nearby top oil exporter Saudi Arabia, which has a Shi'ite minority in its eastern provinces. Bahrain has strong commercial and political ties with Saudi Arabia. The Shi'ite demands added a diplomatic dimension this week when Adel al-Mouawda, one of eight deputies in the Sunni Al Wasalah bloc, warned the British embassy in Manama against meddling in Bahrain's internal affairs. The British ambassador to Bahrain had met with Al Wefaq's parliamentary bloc a few days after its annual assembly. "His meeting with Al Wefaq bloc is a clear abuse of the diplomatic relations between member states of the United Nations," Mouawda was quoted as saying by the official Bahrain News Agency (BNA). He said such meetings were "against the unity and cohesion of the Bahraini people". The British mission in Manama denied it was interfering in Bahrain's internal affairs. Bahrain's Foreign Minister Sheikh Khaled bin Ahmed al-Khalifa this week also met foreign ambassadors to Bahrain, urging them to adhere to international diplomatic conventions. "We are looking forward to achieving another success in our democratic march by organising the legislative polls this year," he was cited in the local press as saying after the meeting.

### **Wage 'charm offensive' in elections Bahraini women urged**

Female candidates are being urged to wage a "charm offensive" in Bahrain's parliamentary elections campaign. They should use their "secret weapons", says American writer and lecturer on Islam and the Middle East culture Dr Amal Sedky Winter. She said that women are seen as more honest than men and they bring a soft touch to social programmes. "Female candidates should benefit from that and address their audience through that notion," said Dr Winter. She said that traditional views are one of the main obstacles Bahraini women need to overcome to guarantee a successful election campaign, according to a visiting scholar. The difficulty facing candidates is that power is usually given to men, which is the case in most parts of the world, said Dr Winter. She said that women need to focus on the problems the area they represent is facing and not only win sympathy of women. Dr Winter, who is also a part-time faculty member in the Graduate School of Education at the American University in Cairo, is currently conducting a workshop to aid women planning to run for parliament and municipal elections.

The three-day event is organised by the Supreme Council for Women in co-operation with the US Embassy at the Council headquarters in Riffa. Dr Winter said that Bahraini women had multiple problems with strong traditional values and the overpowering of men in their society. "Their traditions do not encourage women to show power," she said. She praised the competence of Bahraini women compared to the countries where she had guided women to run election campaigns throughout her 25 years of experience, including Kuwait, Jordan and Egypt. "Politics is not for the weak of heart," said Dr Winter. "Women should not get discouraged if they didn't win and waste their resources they've built with their experience." "Very seldom does one win from the first time they enter elections."

## **Social Front**

### **Police free Chinese supervisors in Bahrain's first ever hostage rescue**

Police on Saturday morning conducted the first ever hostage rescue operation in Bahrain's modern history and successfully rescued nine Chinese supervisors held by angry labourers at a resort construction site in the coastal village of Zallaq, 40km south of Manama. The operation followed an all-night-long siege of the site where the Chinese labourers working held the architects and foremen and demanded that they should be replaced for allegedly ill-treating them.

The interior ministry and an official from the Chinese embassy negotiated with the labourers, but could not reach a deal, sources said, prompting the police to launch its operation and free the hostages. Two labourers are believed to have been slightly injured in the drawn storming. The Sofitel Thalassa Zallaq Beach Resort scheduled to be ready this year includes a 263-room five-star hotel, rooftop luxury suites, a spa, restaurant, conference hall and a marina.

### **Gulf Air to recruit more Bahraini women as cabin crew**

Gulf Air officials have expressed confidence that their breakthrough move to recruit Bahraini girls to work as flight attendants is gaining momentum in a region that is not yet accustomed to seeing local women among cabin crews. Samer Majali, the Chief Executive Officer, encouraged Bahraini girls to apply for the position, saying that the new cabin crew career path would be suitable for them. The company would not for instance require the Bahraini stewardesses to take overnight flights. "We have taken into consideration the local cultural and social aspects while

asking Bahraini females to come and work for Gulf Air as members of cabin crew, where the job demands odd working hours," Majali told a gathering of University of Bahrain students expected to graduate soon. "We have worked out flexible working hours for them whereby they will not be required to take overnight flights. They can look forward to an exciting and rewarding career with Gulf Air," the Jordan-born CEO said as he sought to allay possible personal and family concerns. Gulf Air has enlisted the support of Tamkeen (Empowerment) in its initiative to encourage Bahraini girls to join the carrier in customer-related positions. "Bahrain has been at the vanguard of educational progress in the region since the establishment of the Gulf's first public education system in 1919. This is something from which Gulf Air has benefitted over the past 60 years and something I hope will continue for the next 60," Majali said. "We are committed to investing in education and developing Bahraini talent. To achieve this goal we have been working closely with Tamkeen to create as many job opportunities as possible for qualified Bahrainis."

### **Move to recruit Bahraini women cabin crew gathers momentum**

Gulf Air officials have expressed confidence that their breakthrough move to recruit Bahraini girls to work as flight attendants is gaining momentum in a region that is not yet accustomed to seeing local women among cabin crews. Seeking to encourage Bahraini girls to apply for the position, Samer Majali, the Chief Executive Officer, said that the new cabin crew career path would be suitable for them. The company would not for instance require the Bahraini stewardesses to take overnight flights. "We have taken into consideration the local cultural and social aspects while asking Bahraini females to come and work for Gulf Air as members of cabin crew, where the job demands odd working hours," Majali told a gathering of University of Bahrain students expected to graduate soon.

## **QATAR**

### **International Front**

#### **Qatar-US partnership 'cementing relations'**

Qatar and the US continue to benefit from a number of partnerships between government, businesses and civil society organisations, according to a US government official who is in Qatar to discuss various tie-ups and future plans. Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, Tamara Wittes, was speaking at US Ambassador, Joseph LeBaron's residence yesterday, where she told reporters that the US would be continuing to work with organisations in Qatar and the region to promote political participation and offer assistance regarding issues on local agendas. Wittes explained that she is also visiting Qatar to follow up Secretary of State Hilary Clinton's recent visit to the country and her participation in the US-Islamic Forum – something she argues indicates the US administration's commitment to broader participation with the region and the Muslim world. She also mentioned the upcoming Forum on the Future, the seventh edition of which is set to be hosted in Qatar later this year, and co-chaired by Qatar and Canada. Wittes explained that she had held meetings with the organisers to discuss the plans and offer advice on any issues – meetings she claimed had been very successful. Speaking about the current partnerships between the US and Qatar, Wittes mentioned the sister school network, which

presently includes two schools from Washington and Boston, who have joined with the Doha Independent Secondary School and the Yarmook Preparatory School for Boys.

### **Qatar seeks Gaza war justice**

Qatar has stressed the need to make serious efforts to ensure accountability and justice for the grave breaches of international humanitarian law and human rights committed during the Israeli military offensive in the Gaza Strip in December 2008 and January 2009. The Israeli military operation caused extensive loss of life and vast destruction, from which the besieged Palestinian civilian population, including children and women, continue to suffer, said Qatar's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, H E Nassir Abdulaziz Al Nasser, while delivering a statement before the UN General Assembly for the introduction of draft resolution L.48 on the follow-up to the report of the UN Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Strip, known as the Goldstone Report. Al Nasser said, "our meeting today constitutes yet another crucial step in the international community's efforts to uphold international law and in its struggle to end impunity, to deter future violations of international law and in its struggle to end through the exertion of serious efforts aimed at ensuring accountability and justice." The draft resolution "represents an important procedural follow-up to resolution 64/10, bearing in mind that the Secretary-General, in his report to the General Assembly, stated that 'no determination can be made on the implementation of the resolution by the parties concerned'," Al Nasser said. "As such, we believe it is necessary for the Assembly, in promoting accountability and justice, to once again call upon the concern parties to comply with the calls made in its previous resolution in this regard", he added. The draft takes note of the secretary-general's report of February 4, 2010, which was submitted pursuant to resolution 64/10, which reiterates the call upon Israel to conduct investigations that are independent, credible and in conformity with international standards into the serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law reported by the Fact-Finding Mission towards ensuring accountability and justice.

### **Oil and Gas**

#### **Qatargas delivers 80 LNG cargoes**

Qatargas has presented a paper on its prestigious Qatargas 2 project at FLAME 2010, Europe's premier gas conference, being held in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Presenting the paper titled "Qatargas 2 First Full LNG Value Chain Project", Alaa Abu Jbara, Marketing Director Qatargas, said: "Since its inauguration last year, Qatargas 2 has delivered some 80 LNG cargoes to markets in the UK, North America and Asia. This project is the fulfilment of the first ever successful operation and delivery of LNG cargoes through a full value chain. It took a pioneering approach by utilizing not only one but two 7.8 m tonnes per annum (mtpa) trains coupled with utilising of the Q-Max and Q-Flex LNG vessels." He added: "This was a major undertaking of new technology and a business model from the well head to the market. This is indeed the first time that a full value chain operation has been conceived, designed, constructed, commissioned and successfully produced LNG." Abu Jbara noted that the Qatargas 2 project execution was a major tribute to the designers, project engineers and construction professionals who overcame all of the new challenges associated with this mega value chain project. The project scope, he added, required not only the construction of the two mega trains but all of the necessary complementary equipment to support this massive operation. The integration of these new facilities into the

existing plant operations as well as utilising synergies to save on costs, were crucial element to the success of this project. Flame 2010 offers a platform to meet and discuss some of key challenges and opportunities facing the LNG industry.

## **OMAN**

### **International Front**

#### **Belarus keen to forge tie-ups with Oman**

An official session of talks between the Sultanate and Belarus was held at the State Council yesterday. The Omani side to the talks was led by Dr Yahya bin Mahfoudh Al Mantheri, chairman of the State Council and the Belarus side was led by Boris Batura, chairman of the Council of the Republic at the National Assembly of Belarus. The session reviewed the existing bilateral relations, ways of developing it further, especially in the parliamentary fields, in addition to exchanging points of views on issues of common interest. On the sidelines of the talks, the two sides signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation between the two councils in parliamentary fields. The official visit to the Sultanate comes in response to an invitation extended by the State Council.

### **Social Front**

#### **Sultanate fourth in the Gulf in regard to traffic accidents**

Some local newspapers noted recently that the Sultanate is ranked fifth in the world in relation to deaths due to traffic accidents. However, it should be emphasised that the annual report issued by WHO in 2009 pointed out that the Sultanate ranked fourth in the Gulf and the 57th globally in terms of traffic accidents and the resulting mortality and injuries. The World Health Organisation adopted the study according to the world population of 2007. The report noted that the population of the Sultanate during 2007 amounted to 2,595,133. The number of the registered vehicles reached 629,670. The number of deaths touched 798, which equals 21.3 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants.

### **Economic Front**

#### **Oman, Belarus ink pact to form business council**

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and Belarus Trade and Industry Chamber yesterday signed an agreement establishing an Omani-Belarusian Businessmen Council on the sidelines of the Omani-Belarusian Forum. The forum on the OCCI premises was attended by a delegation led by Boris Batura, chairman of Belarus National Assembly Council. The agreement was signed on behalf of OCCI by Khalil bin Abdullah Al Khonji, OCCI chairman and by Vasily Romanov, chairman of Belarus Trade and Industry Chamber. Boris Batura said that leadership of both the countries are interested in promoting bilateral cooperation not only at the political level, but on the economic and trade fronts. He affirmed that businessmen in both countries are keen to attend the forum. He pointed out that Belarus is keen on promoting joint economic and investment ties as it has recently improved the investment environment and developed rules and regulations to attract local and foreign investment. Investment in the areas of energy,



petrochemicals, communications, construction, agriculture, industrial products and foodstuff, in addition to improving transportation infrastructure are available, he added.