

**Report # 111**  
**BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD**  
**GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL**  
**NEWS MONITORING REPORT**  
**MADIHA KAUKAB**  
**13<sup>th</sup> March – 19<sup>th</sup> March**  
**PRESENTATION DATE: 24<sup>th</sup> March**

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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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**GCC**

**GCC corporate earnings fall by 5 percent in 2009**  
**Gulf region forms Aluminum Council**  
**GCC, Brazil trade at \$6.3b in 2009**

**YEMEN**

**GCC, Brazil trade at \$6.3b in 2009**  
**Yemen launches new airstrikes on Al Qaida hideouts**  
**Two top Al Qaida leaders killed in Yemen air strike**

**SAUDI ARAB**

**International Front**

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**UAE Forms Task Force to Study Currency Peg**

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**Kuwait to hold extraordinary session to discuss a no-confidence motion**  
**Kuwait lawmakers accused of abusing their posts**

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**Former German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder to visit Bahrain**  
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### **Political Front**

**Bahrain business community eyes formation of political society**

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**Bahrain MP calls for support of alcohol ban**  
**Bahraini husband in public appeal to his wife to forgive him**  
**Bahrain embassies warned not to offer scholarships without 'proper coordination'**  
**Bahrain slams attack on British embassy, pledges security for all diplomats**  
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**Bahrain hosts regional workshop on integrity in the private sector**  
**Bahrain's unemployment rate down to 3.7 per cent**

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**Jewel of Muscat berths at Kochi Port in India**

### **Social Front**

**Amitabh Bachchan open to acting in Middle East films**  
**Oman sees rise in number of traffic accidents**  
**Oman bans use of unapproved khanjar designs**

## **QATAR**

### **International Front**

**Qatar, Iran sign pact to fight crime**

## SUMMARY

### **Yemen Turmoil**

A senior Yemeni official said his nation's air force has launched a second day of strikes against Al Qaida hideouts. Saleh Al Shamsi, deputy governor of the southern province Abyan, said three air strikes were launched on Monday. He had no information on the targets but said an earlier strike on Sunday killed two Al Qaida members and injured others. Yemen's Defense Ministry said Sunday's pre-emptive strike was to forestall an imminent Al Qaida attack against a strategic site. Working with US intelligence officials, Yemen has recently boosted its counterterrorism efforts to fight its rising Al Qaida presence. An air strike on an Al Qaida position in southern Yemen on Sunday killed two top militants planning attacks, a Yemeni security official said. "The raids ... killed two leading Al Qaida elements who were planning terrorist operations against vital installations in Yemen," the official said in a statement. Residents earlier told Reuters that up to 20 people may have been killed in the raid in southern Abyan province. Meanwhile Yemen's northern rebels have freed 178 soldiers and civilians as part of a cease-fire agreement with the government. Ali Saleh Garsha, the official who mediated the release, said on Wednesday the captives were handed over to government officials in the northern province of Sa'ada a day earlier.

### **International Front**

Pakistani Ambassador to the *UAE* Khursheed Ahmad Junejo has urged the Pakistani community to join hands with the country's mission in the emirates in solving its problems. Speaking at a ceremony for induction of the new office-bearers of the Pakistan Social Centre Sharjah into office, Junejo said, "It is not possible for the missions alone to attend to all community matters.

*Kuwaiti* and Saudi Arabian citizens will be able to travel between the two countries using their identity cards instead of passports, the secretary-general of the Gulf Cooperation Council has said. "The two countries have completed all the measures to enable their citizens to move between the two countries using smart ID cards," Abdul Rahman Al Atiyyah was quoted as saying by Kuwaiti daily *Arrouiah*.

Kuwait has approved the nomination of Mohammad Hussain Mohammad Bahr Al Uloom as Iraq's ambassador, diplomats said on Wednesday. "We have endorsed his appointment and he is welcome here any time he wants to come," the unnamed sources were quoted as telling *Al Anba* daily.

A *Bahraini* labour official has denied claims that the employment office it had set up in Qatar has been closed. The office was established in 2007 in cooperation with the Qatari authorities to help Bahrainis willing to work in Qatar. Office activities reportedly came to a standstill, except for transactions with a few people signing up for positions in neighbouring countries.

A society dedicated to resisting the normalisation of ties with Israel has urged the upper chamber of the bicameral parliament to endorse a draft law to criminalise contacts with Israelis.

### **Political Front**

Kuwait's parliament is heading towards more divisions after a conservative lawmaker pledged to bring up in the parliament the issue of making the veil mandatory for elected and appointed officials. "It is obvious that according to the constitution that states that Islam is the country's religion, and to the rules, women elected to parliament or appointed as ministers should wear the veil," MP Mohammad Al Hayef said. Meanwhile, Kuwait's parliament will on March 25 hold an extraordinary session to discuss a no-confidence motion against the information minister submitted by ten lawmakers. "As per the parliament bylaws, a no-confidence request can be seen at least one week after it is presented; therefore, I suggest that we convene on March 25 to review it," Jassem Al Khurafi, the parliament speaker. In the mean time, Kuwait's former education minister has accused lawmakers of abusing their positions to ask for favours from ministers. "There are MPs who are blackmailing ministers. The minister has either to accept their demands, regardless of their legitimacy, or face grilling," Nouria Al Sbaih, said. "Such practices cannot be called democracy, and are blatant blackmail.

*Bahrain's* business community is mulling the formation of a political society that will allow it to enter the parliament and help promote its views and interests. The formation of the society is one of several options being considered by Bahrain Chamber for Commerce and Industry (BCCI) to have a greater say in the debate of the parliament's lower chamber, said Othman Shareef, the chamber's treasurer.

Bahrain's health minister and a lawmaker locked horns on Tuesday in a bitter standoff that sparked calls for calm and mutual respect by the parliament affairs minister and the speaker. Answering a parliamentary question about the performance of his ministry, Faisal Al Hamer, the health minister praised the competence and dedication of the mostly Bahraini staff and referred to the latest international recognition.

### **Social Front**

In *Saudi Arab*, The Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (SCTA), recently signed contracts worth SR145 million, to establish 4 new provincial museums in Saudi Arabia in Baha, Tabuk, Hail, and Dammam. The four museums are scheduled to be established over a period of two years.

The reform of the judicial system will only involve changes to technical procedures and will not affect the principles and basis on which the country was founded. These were the comments made Tuesday by Minister of Justice Dr. Muhammad Bin Abdul Karim Al-Issa, at his regular meeting with lawyers at the Riyadh Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Charities have called on government to take urgent action after it emerged that three ministries have compiled vastly different figures for the number of people who are disabled in the country. The Ministry of Planning and Economy has said the number is 140,000 while the Ministry of Health has estimated it is close to one million. The Ministry of Social Affairs has stated that it disburses assistance to about 250,000 males and females with disabilities.

Private recruitment offices in the Eastern Province have increased the waiting time for Indonesian housemaids from seven weeks to three months. Adib Abdul Jabar, formerly of the regional Chamber of Commerce's Recruitment Committee said that offices in the Eastern Province had put new measure into effect. According to Jabar, the move follows new procedures introduced by the Indonesian government such as a one-month training course for all maids coming to the Kingdom and new passport procedures.

In *UAE*, there was a 56 per cent decrease in the number of traffic accidents in 2009 compared to 2008 in Ajman, Colonel Ali Saeed Al Matrooshi, Director of the Traffic Department at Ajman Police said on the inaugural day of the GCC Traffic Week at Ajman City Centre. Meanwhile, there was an 18 per cent decline in the road fatalities and accidents registered in Ras Al Khaimah during last year compared to 2008, said Colonel Nasser Hassan Al Muraddad, Chief of the Traffic and Licensing Department in Ras Al Khaimah.

The Court of Cassation heard the closing arguments of the defence counsel on Monday, in the breach of trust case against Khalifa Bakhit Al Felasi, ex-UAE Minister of State, and two managers employed in his Dubai-based information technology firm. The final verdict will be given on April 12.

The UAE under the leadership of President His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan has an honorable record of religious tolerance and co-existence among all those living on its land, Chairman of the General Authority for Islamic Affairs and Endowments Dr. Hamdan Al Mazrouie said today.

A *Kuwaiti* conservative parliamentary bloc is putting pressure on the social affairs and labour minister to take stringent action against those who allowed a women's football team to take part in a regional tournament. "We strongly condemn and reject the participation of Kuwaiti women in international sporting events," MPs representing the Reform and Development bloc told Mohammad Al Afassi.

Pollution in sea water is killing Kuwait's fish, a researcher has warned. Baheeja Bahbahani, chairperson of the educational environment committee at the Faculty of Education, told Kuwait News Agency (Kuna) that seawater tests have indicated high percentages of toxins that are likely to cause mass fish deaths in summer and urged the authorities to act promptly and take precautionary steps to reduce marine contamination.

A *Bahraini* lawmaker has urged the country's civil society, political societies, media, and upper chamber to support a drive by the lower chamber to ban alcohol in Bahrain. "There is a pressing need to enact a law that protects the Bahraini society from the dangers and damages associated with alcohol," Abdul Halim Murad said.

The head of the Civil Service Bureau has urged embassies in Bahrain to coordinate with the competent authorities before sending public sector employees on training missions or granting them overseas scholarships.

Bahrain on Wednesday condemned the throwing of a small Molotov cocktail into the compound of the British embassy in Manama and assured all diplomatic missions and residents that it remains committed to their safety and security. The attack on the British embassy on Tuesday is not acceptable and the Kingdom of Bahrain will in no case whatsoever be lenient with this, Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmad Al Khalifa, the foreign minister, said.

Stunned Bahrainis were on Friday seeking information and answers in the aftermath of the arrest of a sitting minister, the first since Bahrain became independent in 1971. Still reeling under the dramatic developments around Al Wefaq and the ire it drew from some MPs and media people for its perceived faux pas at its annual general assembly.

### **Economic Front**

Aggregate earnings of *GCC* companies showed a second consecutive year of decline, Kuwait Financial Center (Markaz) said early this week. With 67 percent of companies declaring results so far, aggregate results show a decline of 5 percent for GCC as a whole for 2009 versus an 18 percent expansion in MSCI EM EPS, and a 9 percent contraction in S&P 500 EPS for the year. Two years ago, in 2008, the primary aluminum producers in the Gulf region announced the formation of an organization - known as the Gulf Aluminum Council (GAC) - that would represent, promote and protect the interests of the aluminum industry within the region. Since then, much work has been done to establish the various committees of the GAC and build the foundations for progress toward the association's goals. Brazil is a leading trading partner of the GCC region, with commercial activity between the South American country and the GCC alone increasing from \$2.4 billion in 2001 to \$6.3 billion in 2009. More than 30 Brazilian exporters representing over 100 leading Brazilian producers and manufacturers in the food & beverage, construction and construction materials, furniture and decoration, and auto parts sectors will be exploring various business and investment opportunities in the

Middle East during Brasil Trade 2010, which will be held in Dubai Festival City from May 9 to 11, 2010.

In *Saudi Arab*, the Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mazin Baterji, inaugurated on Tuesday the six-day Saudi Exhibition for Computing, Internet, Office Equipment, Business Communications and Mobiles (COMMTEL 2008). Hussien Bin Ali Al-Harhi, vice chairman of the Al-Wataniyyah Exhibitions, said investments in the information technology sector in the Kingdom exceeded SR20 billion and expected to increase in the few coming years to SR68 billion.

An \$8.8 million grain shipment is scheduled to leave the Port of Timaru this week bound for Saudi Arabia for use as stock and poultry feed, a local newspaper in Timaru.

Saudi Aramco and Petrochina are to be honored as refining & energy companies of the year at the 23rd annual presentation of Hart Energy Publishing's Refining & Energy Company of the Year Awards that will take place Wednesday (March 24) at the Sheraton Phoenix Hotel in Phoenix, Arizona. Accepting the award on behalf of Saudi Aramco will be Dawood M. Al-Dawood, vice president for Marketing, Supply, and Joint Venture Coordination, Saudi Aramco.

*The United Arab Emirates* University (UAEU) has signed three Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with three different specialized companies to transfer technology of date palm tissue cultivation. The UAE conventional banking market is not a concentrated market, as market concentration expressed as Herfindahl Index (HHI) is 1000, the Dubai chamber has recently conducted a study to assess the structure of the UAE banking sector in comparison to the GCC, to assess the efficiency of the UAE banking sector in comparison to the GCC and to examine the relationship between performance, market concentration and efficiency of the banks. Saudi conventional banking market is moderately concentrated; banking markets in Oman and Qatar are concentrated, the study said.

Dubai could soon offer a template for success for other vacation ownership destinations, according to David Clifton, managing director, Europe, Middle East & Africa, Interval International, talking on the opening day of the fourth annual Vacation Ownership Investment Conference - VOIC 2008, taking place this week at Arabian Court, One&Only Royal Mirage, Dubai, UAE.

The United Arab Emirates' decision to study a possible depegging of its currency from the tumbling US dollar might pressure other countries in the Middle East to follow suit. The central bank of the UAE has set up a committee to study a possible depegging of the dirham from the greenback, according to a report by Zawya Dow Jones on Monday.

A regional workshop aiming to provide an interactive forum to support public and private sector representatives to address integrity in the private sector was opened in *Bahrain*.

Unemployment in Bahrain has fallen from 3.8 per cent in January to 3.7 per cent in February, the labour minister has said. The figures are based on the monthly review prepared by the ministry on the number of people who receive monthly assistance or are on dole, Majeed Al Alawi said at the weekly cabinet meeting.



## DETAILED REPORT

### GCC

#### **GCC corporate earnings fall by 5 percent in 2009**

Aggregate earnings of GCC companies showed a second consecutive year of decline, Kuwait Financial Center (Markaz) said early this week. With 67 percent of companies declaring results so far, aggregate results show a decline of 5 percent for GCC as a whole for 2009 versus an 18 percent expansion in MSCI EM EPS, and a 9 percent contraction in S&P 500 EPS for the year. The visibility remains poor for Kuwait with only 20 percent of companies reporting their full year earnings so far. Fourth quarter earnings plummeted due to a correction in real estate prices in Qatar, UAE, and Kuwait. Furthermore, the debt crisis in Dubai led to greater provisioning by banks against credit losses and impairment in the value of investments and adversely impacted Banking earnings during 4Q09. On a YoY basis, the Financial Services and Real estate sectors' earnings took the largest hit, down 67 percent and 64 percent, respectively in 2009. GCC banks earnings declined 1 percent YoY in 2009 primarily due to last quarter dip in earnings. Meanwhile, conglomerates posted a profit of 971 million in 2009 compared to a loss of \$8 billion in 2008. The Telecom sector registered a 7 percent YoY decline in earnings in 2009. Saudi Arabia registered a YoY growth of 26 percent in its earnings. UAE's corporate earnings declined 32 percent due to Dubai's debt woes. The banking sector, which contributed 45 percent of overall corporate earnings, witnessed a YoY decline of 19 percent in 2009. The Real Estate sector's earnings declined 86 percent on a YoY basis in 2009. On a like-to-like basis (29 companies), Kuwait registered an earnings growth of 29 percent in 2009. Kuwaiti banks and financial services sector emerged out of the crisis and registered aggregate profits in 2009. A quantum jump in Ezdan Real Estate Company's Q4 2009 profits (\$2.3 billion) aided Qatar to record an earnings growth of 14 percent YoY in 2009. On a YoY growth basis, Bahrain was the worst performer for the year 2009 in the GCC region, this is particularly due to steep losses (\$728 million in 2009) reported by Gulf Finance House. Oman's Real Estate sector reported an earnings growth of 22 percent YoY in 2009. Nevertheless, 19 percent and 28 percent YoY fall in the Banking and Conglomerates sectors' respectively led to a 14 percent YoY decline in Oman's earnings.

#### **Gulf region forms Aluminum Council**

Two years ago, in 2008, the primary aluminum producers in the Gulf region announced the formation of an organization - known as the Gulf Aluminum Council (GAC) - that would represent, promote and protect the interests of the aluminum industry within the region. Since then, much work has been done to establish the various committees of the GAC and build the foundations for progress toward the association's goals. This development work has culminated in the establishment of official GAC headquarters in Dubai on Wednesday. The Board of the GAC comprises the chief executive officers of the six founding member companies, five of which have established smelters in the region, namely: Aluminum Bahrain (Alba), Dubai Aluminium Company (DUBAL), Emirates Aluminium (EMAL), Qatar Aluminium (Qatalum), and Sohar Aluminium

(Sohar), in Oman. The sixth member is Saudi Mining Company (Ma'aden), which has announced plans to develop a fully integrated complex in Saudi Arabia. Collectively, the operational smelters at Alba, DUBAL and Sohar produced more than 2 million metric tons of primary aluminum in 2009 - equating to 5.6 percent of the global market. Following the successful start-up EMAL and Qatalum, both of which produced their first cast metal in December last year, it is expected that the total production by GAC members will exceed 3 million metric tons in 2010. Ultimately, the region's production volumes could be doubled to 6 million metric tons per annum in the future, the exact timing being dependent the impact of market influences on the planned expansions of production capacity at the newcomer smelters (specifically Sohar and EMAL) and the commissioning date of Ma'aden (currently anticipated in 2013). Already, the Gulf region has the acknowledged potential to become a major producer in the global aluminum industry. This potential is already being realized through the above-mentioned growth in share of annual production, with the additional capacity coming on stream being well placed to meet increased demand for the metal worldwide. Moreover, by being equipped with new-generation technologies and adhering to the most stringent environmental protection standards, the smelters in the Gulf region are considered to be among the most energy-efficient and environment-friendly smelters in the world. The rapid infrastructural development taking place in the GCC countries is also expected to raise the level of aluminum product usage in the region to new heights, a factor that has spawned much discussion on the development of the downstream aluminum sector within the GAC member countries. Abdulla J.M. Kalban, president & CEO of DUBAL and Board-elected chairman of GAC), the council's main objectives will be to support the successful growth of the primary aluminum industry in the GCC by enhancing the working environment within the industry through the adoption of internationally-accepted and benchmarked safer work practices; reinforcing the regional industry players' commitment to protecting the environment and safeguarding the health and well-being of communities; and developing a talent pool.

### **GCC, Brazil trade at \$6.3b in 2009**

Brazil is a leading trading partner of the GCC region, with commercial activity between the South American country and the GCC alone increasing from \$2.4 billion in 2001 to \$6.3 billion in 2009. More than 30 Brazilian exporters representing over 100 leading Brazilian producers and manufacturers in the food & beverage, construction and construction materials, furniture and decoration, and auto parts sectors will be exploring various business and investment opportunities in the Middle East during Brasil Trade 2010, which will be held in Dubai Festival City from May 9 to 11, 2010. Brasil Trade 2010 noted that \$4.6 billion worth of goods were exported from Brazil to the GCC in 2009, highlighting the enormous business potential for importers in the region. High-quality stone, ceramic and non-ferrous metal products as well as coffee, poultry, sugar cane derivatives, fruit juices and several other food & beverage goods have traditionally offered the biggest trading potential for Brazil and the GCC. Moreover, trade activity for construction materials and food & beverage products grew by 19.09 per cent and 13.09 per cent respectively from 2005 to 2009. "Brasil Trade 2010 has been designed to serve as an exclusive business-to-business matchmaking event for leading traders from Brazil and the Middle East, providing the perfect avenue for concerned market players to

explore new partnership opportunities and close distribution agreements," Alessandro Teixeira, President of Apex-Brasil, organiser of Brasil Trade 2010, said. "Brazil's vast natural resources and an immense industrial park, with high tech centres, enable the country to consistently deliver high-quality and competitively priced export products all over the world, particularly in the area of construction and food & beverage, which are two very important sectors in the Middle East. Establishing a dedicated business-to-business forum is certainly an important step to reinforce and cultivate the trade relations between the two regions," he added. Brasil Trade 2010 will feature special presentations for Brazilian exporters and for hosted buyers, while one-on-one meetings will also be organised with hosted buyers and local UAE buyers. In addition, a hosted buyer's program has been incorporated during the three-day trade event for major importers from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Apex-Brasil mission comprehends a series of endeavors which include the promotion of exports of Brazilian products and services to foreign countries, the development of the internationalization of Brazilian companies and undertakings focused on attracting foreign investment into the country. At the moment, Apex-Brasil gives support to over 70 sectors of the Brazilian economy, ranging from agribusiness to machines, technology, architecture and civil construction, entertainment and services to fashion and industrial equipment. Every year, Apex-Brasil provides assistance to Brazilian companies' participation in more than 800 events -- both in Brazil and abroad. In order to strengthen the internationalization of Brazilian companies in the Arab countries, the Agency has a Business Support Centre in Dubai that provides local assistance to Brazilian companies.

## **YEMEN**

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### **Yemen launches new airstrikes on Al Qaida hideouts**

A senior Yemeni official said his nation's air force has launched a second day of strikes against Al Qaida hideouts. Saleh Al Shamsi, deputy governor of the southern province Abyan, said three air strikes were launched on Monday. He had no information on the targets but said an earlier strike on Sunday killed two Al Qaida members and injured others. Yemen's Defense Ministry said Sunday's pre-emptive strike was to forestall an imminent Al Qaida attack against a strategic site. Working with US intelligence officials, Yemen has recently boosted its counterterrorism efforts to fight its rising Al Qaida presence. Al Qaida's branch in Yemen has been linked to the failed bombing attempt on a Detroit-bound airliner on Christmas Day.

### **Two top Al Qaida leaders killed in Yemen air strike**

An air strike on an Al Qaida position in southern Yemen on Sunday killed two top militants planning attacks, a Yemeni security official said. "The raids ... killed two leading Al Qaida elements who were planning terrorist operations against vital installations in Yemen," the official said in a statement. Residents earlier told Reuters that up to 20 people may have been killed in the raid in southern Abyan province. Yemen has boosted security at oil and gas facilities after it declared open war on Al Qaida following the failed bombing of a US-bound plane on Christmas Day which was claimed by the group's regional wing in December. Western allies and neighbouring Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil exporter, fear Al Qaida is exploiting instability in impoverished Yemen to recruit and train militants for attacks in the region and beyond. "This area (in Abyan) had seen an appreciable rise in activity by Al Qaida elements, which was being monitored by security services," the website of the ruling party said. Yemen has repeatedly bombed suspected Al Qaida sites, but residents and opposition groups have said dozens of civilians, including women and children, were killed in a Dec. 17 strike in which authorities said more than 30 Al Qaida members died. Earlier in March, the government

expressed regret over the civilian deaths in that raid in south Yemen and said it would pay compensation to families of civilian victims.

### **Yemen's northern rebels free 178 soldiers, civilians as part of truce with government**

Yemen's northern rebels have freed 178 soldiers and civilians as part of a cease-fire agreement with the government. Ali Saleh Garsha, the official who mediated the release, said on Wednesday the captives were handed over to government officials in the northern province of Sa'ada a day earlier. Garsha said arrangements were under way to send them to Yemen's capital Thursday. The rebels have been fighting Yemen's weak government sporadically for years. The sides struck a cease-fire agreement in February. Under the deal, the militants agreed to disarm, release captured soldiers and property, withdraw from strategic positions, abide by the constitution and vow not to attack Saudi Arabia. The rebels took up arms complaining of neglect and sectarian discrimination.

## **SAUDI ARAB**

### **International Front**

#### **France sets up cultural pavilion at Janadriya**

A chorus of Pays-Basques singers greeted King Abdullah when he visited the French pavilion on the opening night of the Janadriya festival Wednesday. He was welcomed to the pavilion, decked out by mini-Eiffel Towers and French-style cafes, by French Culture Minister Frederic Mitterrand. In an address Mitterrand praised the King's promotion of traditional Arab culture, adding: "France, also with age-old traditions... shares with your majesty this unique message." France is parlaying its own music, film and museum-heavy culture for closer ties between the two countries. This, the government of President Nicolas Sarkozy hopes as well, will help French businesses secure more of the hundreds of billions of dollars Riyadh is spending on development projects. Sarkozy himself has pushed hard, visiting Riyadh three times in less than two years to see King Abdullah, and sending his ministers on regular visits. "France is not satisfied with the current level of the relationship," said Antoine Basbous, director of the Arab Countries Observatory in Paris. "There are two goals. One, good (political) relations which would allow France to become an interlocutor in the region," he said, adding the "second is commercial". Saudi Arabia is spending about 400 billion dollars in 2008-2013 on scores of huge infrastructure projects, attracting foreign economic suitors.

### **Social Front**

#### **SCTA inks SR145m contracts to establish 4 provincial museums**

The Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (SCTA), recently signed contracts worth SR145 million, to establish 4 new provincial museums in Saudi Arabia in Baha, Tabuk, Hail, and Dammam. The four museums are scheduled to be established over a period of two years. The signing ceremony was held at the headquarters of King Abdul Aziz Historical Center in Riyadh with representatives of four companies that will be executing the establishment of museums nationwide in attendance. Prince Sultan Bin

Salman bin Abdul Aziz, president of SCTA, in a statement, stressed on the important role of museums in introducing the history of the country, as well as its rich antiquities, reflecting the historical dimension of Saudi Arabia. Prince Sultan indicated that SCTA is currently carrying out a comprehensive development and rehabilitation program at the national museums, which will herald new shifts on many levels such the approach of receiving visitors, collaborating with schools, or opening them for cultural events to rise the intellectual role of tourism in society. In addition to these four provincial museums, seven other museums will be established throughout the kingdom. SCTA is working to establish two specialized museums - a museum for Islamic and National Heritage in Jeddah city and a museum of Holy Qur'an in Madina, which will be executed in collaboration with the Ministry for Islamic Affairs, Endowment, Dawa, and Guidance, SCTA and Al Madina Amara. Moreover, SCTA has licensed 40 private museums to be established according to the latest approaches and technologies in this field, in an effort to showcase and expose its heritage and antiquities to the entire world. Prince Sultan commented that the kingdom's antiquities which are currently discovered and displayed are not even 5 percent of the real stock of the undiscovered antiquities. Therefore, the new series of museums and heritage buildings, which include a chain of private museums, is an indication to a strong start for raising museum culture in society and giving greater attention by the SCTA to raise the level of interaction between citizens and museums.

#### **Judicial reforms stick to Kingdom's principles**

The reform of the judicial system will only involve changes to technical procedures and will not affect the principles and basis on which the country was founded. These were the comments made Tuesday by Minister of Justice Dr. Muhammad Bin Abdul Karim Al-Issa, at his regular meeting with lawyers at the Riyadh Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Other who attended the meeting included Minister of State Dr. Mutleb Bin Abdullah Al-Nufaisa, Chairman of the Human Rights Commission Dr. Bandar Al-Aiban and members of the chamber's Lawyers Committee. The minister said the ministry is still studying proposals to establish the Lawyers Commission and will submit the final report to the King. On women practicing law, he said the ministry has submitted a complete study on a plan to permit women lawyers to defend women.

#### **Vast differences in ministries' figures for persons with disabilities**

Charities have called on government to take urgent action after it emerged that three ministries have compiled vastly different figures for the number of people who are disabled in the country. The Ministry of Planning and Economy has said the number is 140,000 while the Ministry of Health has estimated it is close to one million. The Ministry of Social Affairs has stated that it disburses assistance to about 250,000 males and females with disabilities. At the Sheikh Ali Al-Abdullah Al-Jaffali Care and Rehabilitation Complex here on Tuesday, more than 100 persons representing 33 charities called on the Ministry of Planning and Economy to provide complete data on the number of persons with disabilities, including their type of disabilities. They said it will help charities and government institutions plan their programs properly. Participants at the third meeting of the charities have called for the establishment of an authority to deal with the care and protection of those people living with disabilities.

### **Court wants fraudster's sister arrested**

The sister of a Yemeni man accused of multimillion riyal fraud should be arrested on charges of being an accomplice to the crime, according to a court here. The Penal Court has sent a letter to the Emir's Office requesting the arrest of the sister of Yemeni national, Sulaiman Maroof, who is accused of defrauding an estimated SR250 million from investors in a share scam. The court stated in the letter that the woman must help to return the stolen money to the victims of the scam. The letter was issued after the court received a letter from the Investigation Department stating that it was unable to apprehend the sister. The department stated that its officers had met with the woman's father at the house where she lives. However, the father had allegedly refused to cooperate and say where she was. The court has called for the father to be punished. The penalty for failure to cooperate with authorities is 10 years in prison and/or a million riyal fine. "Investigations showed the woman lives with her father and that he knows where she is," the department's letter to the court stated.

### **Recruitment offices set 3-month maid arrival limit**

Private recruitment offices in the Eastern Province have increased the waiting time for Indonesian housemaids from seven weeks to three months. Adib Abdul Jabar, formerly of the regional Chamber of Commerce's Recruitment Committee said that offices in the Eastern Province had put new measure into effect. According to Jabar, the move follows new procedures introduced by the Indonesian government such as a one-month training course for all maids coming to the Kingdom and new passport procedures. "The new passport procedures take a week, and that other factors have prolonged the arrival time of Indonesian maids coming to the Kingdom," he said. Jabar added that the Indonesian government's increasing of recruitment fees was no surprise" given the "huge increase" in demand during Ramadan. Saudi Gazette reported Wednesday that Indonesia had increased recruitment costs for the maids from SR8,800 to about SR9,200, taking effect from April this year.

### **Partial demolition of Kingdom's first high school stirs debate**

The Education Administration here has started demolishing parts of the Kingdom's first high school Wednesday to make way for new developments at the institution – a move which has angered those arguing the site is of historical value. The school was established in 1936 by the country's founder King Abdul Aziz. It was first named the Scholarship Preparatory School and then renamed the King Abdul Aziz High School. The decision was taken after a period of debate. The Ministry of Education had previously rejected any demolition plans because it considered the school to be part of the country's heritage. However, Makkah's Education Administration Director, Bakr Basfar, said the demolition was later approved by the ministry. Changes would take place in a well-planned manner, he said. Basfar said that SR5 million has been allocated for the project. The changes would take place at certain parts where the space is needed for the expansion of the yard of the school and the Mina Elementary School in front of it, he said. The remaining parts of the old building will be used as an educational or administrative facility, he added. Several historians in Makkah have criticized the

decision and expressed their anger at the removal of the old building. They said it destroys part of the country's history.

### **Janadriya, a blend of past and present**

More than 400 literary men and thinkers from all over the world have been invited to participate in the festival. The participants will discuss a number of topics, including the vision of King Abdullah for dialogue and peace. Abdullah Al-Rabeah, Minister of Health, said that the festival represents a blend of the "glorious past, prosperous present and bright future." The festival embodies the Islamic and Arab identity of Saudi Arabia and strengthens its attachment to its heritage and cultural roots that will be passed on to future generations, he said. The Ministry of Health, for the past years, has actively taken part in the festival showcasing the development of health care in the Kingdom since the times of the late King Abdul Aziz, the minister said. Since the beginning of the festival 25 years ago, the Kingdom has been turned into a cultural lighthouse through a variety of cultural activities and a consolidation of the culture of dialogue, said Bandar Al-Qinawi, executive director of health care at the National Guard. The mission of the National Guard has gone beyond the military and has demonstrated social responsibility by turning the spotlight on the country's heritage and culture every year, he added. Suhaib Abdul Ghafar, secretary general of the Islamic Shariah Council in the United Kingdom, said that the festival reflects the true Islamic culture that grew in the Arabian Peninsula, making it a "great opportunity" for the world to learn more about early Islamic culture. Abdullah Kan'an, general secretary of the Jordanian Royal Committee for Jerusalem Affairs, said that this cultural event would show the "true and beautiful image of Islamic and Arab culture inspired by Islam, true Islam, not that of those who have distorted our culture and image." "Those extremists have hijacked the true image of Islam helping the enemy to target the culture and identity of the Ummah," he added. The festival carries a message of love, peace, and brotherhood to the entire world saying that "We are your partners in all fields". The Riyadh Literary Club will host the main poetry evening at 8:00 P.M. on Saturday with a participation of a galaxy of Arab poets. – Okaz/SG

### **EP Bangla Medical Camp detects health problems**

Many Bangladeshi workers suffer from high blood pressure, high sugar, and high cholesterol, according to the findings of a local hospital that conducted free medical examinations for the Bangladeshi community in the Eastern Province. More than 500 Bangladeshi workers took advantage of free medical examinations last week at the Bangladeshi Community Medical camp at the Mohamed Al-Dossary Hospital here. The event was organized by the Bangladeshi community in cooperation with the Mohamed Al-Dossary Hospital and the Bangladeshi Embassy in Riyadh. The medical camp was jointly opened by S. M. Haroon Ur-Rashid, Labor Counselor at the Embassy of Bangladesh in Riyadh, and Abdul Fettah Ennayal, Director General of Mohamed Al-Dossary Hospital. Of the 501 Bangladeshis who underwent a series of medical check-ups, 118 or 23.55 percent of them were found to be suffering from high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and high sugar, or a combination of the three. "The findings of the hospital are a serious reminder to our workers who have cholesterol, blood pressure, and sugar problems to seek a program of medical care," Ur-Rashid said. The majority of the



Bangladeshis who attended the medical camp were laborers; many of whom do not have access to a basic medical care program because they work independently without direct employers. Mohamed Al-Dossary Hospital has also conducted free medical check-ups for expatriate workers from the Philippines, India, and Pakistan. Those found to have high cholesterol, sugar and blood pressure levels were provided with information on how to deal with their medical problems.

### **Hospital cuts abused phones**

A hospital in Madina has disconnected its telephones on patient wards and admission areas after discovering that female patients had been on the receiving end of “nuisance calls”. The manager of King Fahd Hospital, Muhammad Al-Ayoubi, said that the measure had also been taken because patients had been calling home “after two o’clock at night”. “It’s to ensure that our patients enjoy the most comfortable conditions possible during their stay,” Al-Ayoubi said.

### **Economic Front**

#### **Investment in Kingdom’s IT Sector to reach SR68b**

The Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mazin Baterji, inaugurated on Tuesday the six-day Saudi Exhibition for Computing, Internet, Office Equipment, Business Communications and Mobiles (COMMTEL 2008). Hussien Bin Ali Al-Harhi, vice chairman of the Al-Wataniyyah Exhibitions, said investments in the information technology sector in the Kingdom exceeded SR20 billion and expected to increase in the few coming years to SR68 billion. The COMMTEL show is a place for businessmen and decision makers to gather and make deals that fulfill the needs of business, computer and software markets and also plays a role in showing the advancement in computerizing international commercial transactions. The exhibition this year witnesses a strong competition among communications companies with the latest breakthroughs in the sector on display, ranging from electronics, information technology, advisory services to satellite, telecommunications and internet. Office equipment companies and computer companies like Panasonic, Toshiba, HP, Acer and Sharp participate in the exhibition offering the latest laptops, printers, scanners and pocket PCs. Mahmood Ahmad, a salesman, said he participated in the exhibition for the first time and thought it was the best so far in the Kingdom. He added that the exhibition will witness more attendance in the next days as it offers competitive prices. Osama Al-Atiyah, a salesman at the National Computer Company said the company exhibits the latest security systems for the Saudi consumers. He said Saudi market is a developed one with the latest technology products.

#### **Huge Shipment of Barley to arrive in the Kingdom**

An \$8.8 million grain shipment is scheduled to leave the Port of Timaru this week bound for Saudi Arabia for use as stock and poultry feed, a local newspaper in Timaru, central South Island of New Zealand reported on Tuesday. The cargo of 22,000 tons of seed barley aboard the Ikan Serong is the most expensive shipment to be exported through the port and is the first grain export in almost a decade, it said. About 20 different trucking companies are bringing the seed from around the central South Island grain growing area,

from the south of Christchurch into North Otago. The ship will see about 400 trucks bringing 10,000 tons of grain, with a further 12,000 tons coming from the port's silos, before it leaves. Barley crops are currently earning about \$400 a ton. PrimePort general manager marketing Bruce McDougall said the ship is being loaded at Timaru because it has the facilities to cope with the load. "Timaru has the only dedicated grain handling facilities in New Zealand and this is about the first export shipment for about seven years." "We will be (loading 24 hours a day) as long as trucks can keep up with our load rate. Loading on to the ship runs faster than we can unload the trucks," he said. Each truck carries about 25 tons of barley. However, only two trucks can unload their cargo at the same time. While at times there was a wait for trucks to unload the grain, McDougall said it was more economic to make them wait rather than the ship.

### **Saudi Aramco to be honored as 'Energy Company of the Year'**

Saudi Aramco and Petrochina are to be honored as refining & energy companies of the year at the 23rd annual presentation of Hart Energy Publishing's Refining & Energy Company of the Year Awards that will take place Wednesday (March 24) at the Sheraton Phoenix Hotel in Phoenix, Arizona. Accepting the award on behalf of Saudi Aramco will be Dawood M. Al-Dawood, vice president for Marketing, Supply, and Joint Venture Coordination, Saudi Aramco. The annual awards are part of Hart's Executive Briefing "Refining, Fuels & Biofuels Working Together Towards a Clean & Sustainable Future". This year's honorees are Saudi Aramco, the Energy Company of the Year Honoree, and Petrochina, the International Honoree. "For 23 years, we at Hart have had a long history of recognizing excellence in both Global Energy and North American Refining," said Frederick L. Potter, executive vice president, Hart Energy Publishing. "As the world demands more integration and excellence from the oilfield to global refining centers, these companies exemplify the traditions that are embodied in this prestigious award. They are dedicated to further investment in the refining and energy sectors, improving the quality of their products, and raising the financial, environmental, and health-and-safety performance of their refining and energy operations." In 2009, Saudi Aramco demonstrated a strong commitment to excellence. For 75 years, Saudi Aramco has been committed to increasing its oil production capacity to supply its customers. Hart recognition clearly understands that true energy security requires surplus capacity to effectively supply global customers and meet changing global needs. Over the last five years Saudi Aramco has spent more than \$62 billion to increase its production capacity to more than 12 million b/d. In mid-2009, it brought on stream the Khurais Field, a 1.2-million bbl/d Arab Light oil field,. In terms of capacity, it is the 4th largest oilfield in the world and represents a major investment by Saudi Aramco. The PetroRabigh project demonstrates the commitment to continued investment by Saudi Aramco. It is a major integration of refining, gas and petrochemicals. The total project is still under construction/development, but in May 09 it officially began operations with a segment starting up.

## **UAE**

### **International Front**

#### **UAEU signs MoU to develop palm dates field**

The United Arab Emirates University (UAEU) has signed three Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with three different specialized companies to transfer technology of date palm tissue cultivation. The MoUs also call for strengthening cooperation in scientific researches, technical development fields and providing technical assistance to establish a laboratory for tissue culture. The signing was attended by H.E. Shaikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Chairman of UAEU, H.E. Dr Hadeef bin Jua'an Al Dhaheri, Minister of Justice and H.E. Dr. Rashid Ahmed bin Fahad, Minister of Environment and Water. The first MoU is signed for five renewable years with the American company 'Phoenix Agrotech, second for one renewable year with The Malaysian company ICGT, formerly known as the Asian Center for Genetic Technology, and the third MoU is signed with the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia.

#### **Ambassador Calls on Pakistanis to Help Missions Solve Their Problems**

Pakistani Ambassador to the UAE Khursheed Ahmad Junejo has urged the Pakistani community to join hands with the country's mission in the emirates in solving its problems. Speaking at a ceremony for induction of the new office-bearers of the Pakistan Social Centre Sharjah into office, Junejo said, "It is not possible for the missions alone to attend to all community matters. Many of its problems can be easily solved if the Pakistani associations all over the UAE make their solution their mission." Junejo, who is expected to leave the UAE soon at the end of his assignment, said, "Before I go, I will try to fulfil my promises to the community. We are doing our best to solve the problems." These include the re-opening of the Pakistani community centres, problems faced by schools, and shortage of space at the embassy and at the consulate.

### **Social Front**

#### **New Membership Plan for Dubai Press Club**

The new categories include Practising Membership for journalists working in the print, broadcast and online media; Affiliate Membership for media professionals in the media departments of government organisations, diplomats, freelance journalists and public relations professionals; Visiting Membership for journalists visiting the UAE for short term; Photographer Membership for photographers, and Student Membership for media students. A special category, Family Membership, is also on offer as part of the new DPC initiative. Maryam bin Fahad, Executive Director, DPC, said: "The new membership programme reflects qualitative changes, as the framework of the membership is expanded to include media professionals from all platforms. In addition, lecturers and media students, PR professionals and media consultants in governmental bodies as well as private companies related to the media industry are also covered in our comprehensive membership programme. "Moreover, the membership offers extensive services including priority to members to participate in training programmes, workshops, events and other

major initiatives organised by Dubai Press Club throughout the year. The membership also entitles journalists to gain exclusive access to the facilities and services of the International Association of Press Clubs (IPAC), which include 26 press clubs worldwide.”

### **Safety Steps Reduce Accidents in Ajman**

There was a 56 per cent decrease in the number of traffic accidents in 2009 compared to 2008 in Ajman, Colonel Ali Saeed Al Matrooshi, Director of the Traffic Department at Ajman Police said on the inaugural day of the GCC Traffic Week at Ajman City Centre. “The accidents resulted in the death of four people in 2009, while eight people died in 2008. In the past five years we have not witnessed any school bus accidents,” he said. The deployment of more patrols and operation of more radars and cameras are among the main factors that contributed to the decrease in accidents. Run-over cases claimed the lives of many pedestrians, mainly labourers. The road barriers have helped in reducing the number of accidents, he added. The traffic week campaign in the emirate is being held under the patronage of Shaikh Ahmed bin Humaid Al Nuaimi, Director of Ajman Economic Department. During the week, inspections will be carried out in cars for tyre condition, seat belt usage and other safety aspects.

### **UAE Launches Biotech Initiative**

Grass, plants and trees, including the date palm, are the subject of a new initiative meant to develop a biotechnology programme in Abu Dhabi. In this respect, a collaborative agreement has been established between the UAE University, the Ministry of Presidential Affairs and the University of California, Davis (UCD). “The objective of this programme is to generate stress-tolerant plants, trees and grasses for numerous urbanisation and biotechnology programmes in the UAE, and it also includes the development of a training programme,” explained Linda Katehi, chancellor of UCD. “The majestic date palm trees lining the road from Abu Dhabi airport to the hotel are a wonderful testament to the profound vision of the founder of this country, the late Shaikh Zayed,” said Katehi in her keynote speech at the prize ceremony for the Khalifa International Date Palm Awards. “The Award is well-respected in the international community and the UAE will continue to lead the way in the support of regional and international efforts in date palm cultivation, due to its economic importance in fighting hunger and eliminating poverty in many countries across the globe.” Coinciding with the awards ceremony, the Fourth International Date Palm Conference also started on Monday, organised by the UAE University in collaboration with Khalifa International Date Palm Awards and Date Palm Friends Society.

### **Appeals Court Gives Longer Jail Terms to Three in Human Trafficking Case**

The Court of Appeals sentenced an electrician, his wife and a company PRO, all three of them Iraqis, to 10 years’ imprisonment each for human trafficking followed by deportation. However, the court upheld the verdict of acquittal given by a lower court to the fourth defendant, also an Iraqi woman, who was accused of not reporting the involvement of the three convicted persons in the racket despite being aware of it. On December 22, the electrician and his wife were each sentenced to three years in jail by the Court of First Instance for human trafficking. The PRO was jailed for one year and all three were sentenced to be deported after they had served their sentences. The fourth

defendant was acquitted of the charge of not reporting a crime. The Iraqi couple was accused of 'buying' a teenaged girl, a compatriot, and coercing her into prostitution. According to the Public Prosecution arraignment sheet, the Iraqi couple bought the 17-year-old Iraqi girl from her parents in Iraq for four million Iraqi dinars and brought her into the UAE. The PRO is accused of aiding and abetting the couple in committing the crime. The victim, an unemployed girl, told prosecutors she was living with her parents in Iraq when an Iraqi housewife (the defendant) offered to buy her for four million Iraqi dinars. Once the transaction had been made, the housewife took the girl to her sister's house and had a forged passport made for her which said that the girl was her daughter. The girl also recounted how the woman's husband sent them visas and welcomed them on their arrival to Sharjah airport. "I was taken to the house of the PRO in Ajman and then lived with the couple in the same emirate. Since my arrival, I was made to attend night parties and forced to have sex for money," the teenager claimed.

### **18 Per Cent Decline in Road Accident Fatalities in RAK**

There was an 18 per cent decline in the road fatalities and accidents registered in Ras Al Khaimah during last year compared to 2008, said Colonel Nasser Hassan Al Muraddad, Chief of the Traffic and Licensing Department in Ras Al Khaimah. He was speaking during the inauguration of the 'Be Aware of Others' Faults' campaign to mark the occasion of the 26th GCC Traffic Week on Sunday at the RAK Cultural Centre, which was organised under the patronage of Major-General Shaikh Taleb bin Saqr Al Qasimi, Director General of the Ras Al Khaimah Police. The campaign, which started on Sunday will run up to May 31 and aims at promoting a culture of awareness that other people commit mistakes on the road. Al Muraddad said that the emirate witnessed a decrease in the road fatalities revealing that 80 people were killed in 930 traffic accidents across the Emirate last year, compared to the 97 deaths recorded in 2008. He attributed the decline to the increase in the safety awareness among motorists and the strict enforcement of traffic law, especially the black points system and hefty fines. "The deployment of more police patrols and the operation of more radars and cameras on the roads are among the key factors that have contributed positively in the decreasing number of accidents in the Emirate," said Al Muraddad.

### **Spreading Green Cheer in the UAE**

A date with research is leading to a rapid greening of the desert. We're talking date palms, and a project which is driving a green revolution of sorts by adding 500,000 such trees every year. Begun in scenic Al Ain, this effort to make the sands give way to the palm of the land is bearing fruit 17 years after it took root. Dates are sweet and succulent fruits steeped in the finest of Arab and Emirati traditions and have become one of the pillars of food security in the region. But this is about more than just food security, it is quiet going back to basics, which is making the desert bloom, thanks to the Date Palm Research and Development Project. The figures since 1993 are overwhelming — 42 million date palms planted with new, resilient and homegrown varieties being added to the landscape, and spreading rapidly with every passing year. As things now stand, the area under date palm cultivation in the country is 1,853,295 acres. Professor Abdelouahhab Zaid, Director and Chief Technical Adviser of the Date Palm Research and Development Project, is convinced that the future lies in agriculture. Research on a

tree common to the UAE and so intrinsic to its culture, but which many take for granted, is like a natural progression for him. “Every year, 500 hectares are being taken up for growing these palms,” he says with pride. Not an easy task, but the 100 researchers at the project affiliated with the UAE University are up to it.

The UAE government is keen to promote local farming in these times of economic upheaval. Zaid does not have an exact estimate for palm research, but puts the figure at “not less than Dh10 million annually”. The wise professor gives credit where it is due as the federal strategy for agriculture is paying dividends. “The President, High Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan (may God protect him) has supported the development of the palm farmers and this has encouraged citizens to pay attention to agriculture.” The government actively supports the project which also sells date saplings at reduced rates to municipalities, organisations and citizens every year. About 150,000 palm saplings have been nurtured and sold so far this quarter. A molecular biology lab established recently will soon be able to determine the varieties of date palm using a technique of genetic fingerprinting. Some 20 varieties of date palms have been developed by tissue culture and promoted by researchers of the project.

### **Cassation Court Verdict in Case against Ex-minister on April 12**

The Court of Cassation heard the closing arguments of the defence counsel on Monday, in the breach of trust case against Khalifa Bakhit Al Felasi, ex-UAE Minister of State, and two managers employed in his Dubai-based information technology firm. The final verdict will be given on April 12. Counsel Samir Jaafar, representing Al Felasi, presented before the court panel a congratulatory note sent by the complainant Maysoun Jamal, a Lebanese businesswoman, to Al Felasi on his appointment as minister on February 19, 2008. The note, he said, “Is solid proof that they were on good terms.” Jaafar said the note, sent after about eight months after the signing of the agreement of cession of Maysoun’s shares in the firm, on June 24 of 2007, was a clear indication that she held no grudge against his client. The Court had earlier modified the charge from fraud to breach of trust against 51-year-old Dr Al Felasi. The former minister is accused of deceiving the Lebanese businesswoman who is the legal heir of Global Information Technology Company. Al Felasi is accused of misleading her into signing a cession bond of her shares in the company by claiming that he was a 51 per cent partner in the company, rather than a sponsor. Maysoun has consistently been claiming Dh500 million as civil compensation. The court panel, presided by Judge Mohammed Nabil Riyad with six other member judges on the bench, was examining the merits of the case in which the Court of Appeal had acquitted Al Felasi twice of the charge of fraud in May and in November. It had also cleared the ex-minister’s son, and the two managers of his company of charges of criminal complicity. However, the Court of Cassation had later ordered a re-trial overturning the appellate court’s decision. Abdelmonem Suwaidan, the lawyer of the two managers, an American general manager and an Indian finance manager, argued that his clients did not have anything to do with the signing of the cession of shares agreement. It was the second time the Court of Appeal heard the ex-minister’s case after the Court of Cassation ordered its re-examination by the lower court.

### **Europe-Abu Dhabi Tourism Prospects Rebound**

Abu Dhabi's tourism industry looks set for a resurgence of interest from European markets after its most successful showing at ITB Berlin – one of the world's leading travel fairs. Abu Dhabi mounted its largest ever ITB pavilion with 53 companies from the emirate demonstrating huge expansion of the destination's tourism proposition. Abu Dhabi's product line up at the pavilion was 10% bigger than last year and comprised hotels, transport providers and tour operators. 'The results justified the investment,' said Mubarak Al Nuaimi, International Promotions Manager, Abu Dhabi Tourism Authority (ADTA), which spearheaded the pavilion. 'We are convinced we have made significant headway in achieving our 2010 target of 1.65 million hotel guests by the end of this year.' At the show Lufthansa German Airlines, which currently operates a daily Frankfurt-Abu Dhabi service, said it's investigating the feasibility of stepping up its frequency to twice-daily while Swiss International Airlines says it's considering launching a service from Zurich to the UAE capital. And the German Travel Association, which includes the Who's Who of the country's travel & tourism industry, said it's considering Abu Dhabi as the host destination for its annual general meeting in 2012. Meanwhile, the world's largest tour operator, TUI, expressed interest in bespoke tours to Abu Dhabi and Al Ain for members of its elite Porsche Travel Club, which would include a track day at Yas Marina Circuit. The Al Ain Wildlife Park & Resort, which used ITB for its international trade fair debut, reported strong interest from tour operators. 'We generated a lot of positive response for our planned desert safari wildlife park, and believe the development will open up increased MICE activity,' said Nabil Zakhour, Advisor PR and Media Communication, Al Ain Wildlife Park & Resort. 'Operators are really interested in alternative and unusual venues for conferences, meetings and incentives and we've also had inquiries from small boutique travel groups now wanting to include the 'Oasis City' of Al Ain on itineraries for the Middle East.' Confirming the German market is back online, Sinan Bozkurt, Assistant Director of Sales for the Shangri-la Qaryat Al Beri, said that ITB was filled with good appointments with existing clients: 'Thanks to the pro-activity of ADTA in raising the destination's profile and key events such as the F1 and FIFA World Cup UAE, we are seeing increased bookings from our established contacts as awareness of the destination continues to grow.'

### **UAE has honourable record of religious tolerance**

The UAE under the leadership of President His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan has an honorable record of religious tolerance and co-existence among all those living on its land, Chairman of the General Authority for Islamic Affairs and Endowments Dr. Hamdan Al Mazrouie said today. "The UAE is today serving as a real, living melting pot for interaction of cultures, languages and ethnics of about 200 nationalities, Al Mazrouie said in an address before the extraordinary meeting of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) on inter-faith dialogue and cooperation for peace and development. "The UAE has enacted legislations that guarantee and protect religions, respect traditions and norms and allow freedom of religious rituals with fair and transparency that do not spur rise of religious, ethical or sectorial fanaticism,' he added. ""The religious co-existence in the open sky of the internet and thousands of TV satellite channels and advanced communications has become one of the most pressing issues that

should be taken care of. Modern technology carries good and bad ideas and principles more faster than books and other publications, he noted. He added some of these ideas disrespect religions and disseminate terrorism, fanaticism and chaos in communities. "Islam preaches security and peaceful co-existence and the UAE experiment in upholding these values is rich given the fact that it is hosting workers of 203 nationalities and at the same time preserves its national identity," he said, noting that despite this cultural diversity, there is no fear from openness so long as Islam acts as a real guarantor. According to him, the wise policy of the UAE leadership on preventive security and the moderate, neutral foreign policy which culminated into sealing of a series of agreements with friendly labour-sending countries have also contributed to creating an environment of cooperation and religious, cultural, economic, and security co-existence in the UAE as per testimonies of leaders of other faiths including the Vatican.

### **Dubai Launches Three-year Drive in Schools to Stem Diabetes Cases**

To stem the projected increase of diabetes in the UAE, the Dubai Health Authority has launched a three-year-long comprehensive programme targeting the new generation. The multi-tiered awareness programme titled 'The Right Beginning' will be based on the outcomes of research and training projects in schools, shopping malls as well as among healthcare providers, teachers and parents. Experts at the launch of the programme on Wednesday estimated that 35 per cent of the UAE population was at the risk of becoming diabetic in another 10 years. "To stabilise the trend, we are focusing more on children and schools since they are an easy target," said Dr Ali Marzooqi, Director of Health and Safety at the authority. "It is difficult to bring (about) changes in the lifestyle of adults." Citing a projection report for the GCC region, experts said that \$5 billion was expected to be spent on treatment of diabetes by 2020. "Eighty per cent of our health spending is on managing complications related directly or indirectly to diabetes, including cardiac conditions," said Qadhi Saeed Al Murooshid, Director-General of the authority. The programme, being held in cooperation with Sanofi Aventis Pharmaceuticals, will promote a healthier lifestyle among schoolchildren through the education system. "We will implement new measures in schools such as removing vending machines selling junk food," said Al Murooshid. "It is difficult to control children from demanding but we can prevent them from accessing foodstuff that can lead to an increase in the condition," he said. The yearlong pilot phase of the project will commence next month, targeting five schools each from the public and private sectors. It will be expanded later. Children aged 8-15 years will be assessed for their knowledge on the disease and will also undergo physical check-ups to identify emerging risk factors in each child. "The outcome of this research activity will help us design interventional methods that will later be translated into law," explained Dr Ziad Najjar, Public Health and Health Promotion Consultant at DHA. He, however, said diabetes management was only a part of a five-year strategy targeting cardiovascular diseases that would also include management of hypertension, tobacco control, obesity, and cholesterol levels.

### **Around the UAE on a Jet Ski in 20 Hours**

Watching Majid Al Ameri twisting and twirling in and out of the waves, one would think that water is his real home. And Gulf waters will be indeed his home for the next 20 hours or so, as Majid will be the first to attempt 'riding' the entire UAE coast on a jet ski!



The 28-year-old UAE national is departing today morning from Kalba, on the Fujairah border with Oman, and 20 hours and 680 kilometres later, he plans to reach Abu Dhabi waters, this time on the border with Saudi Arabia. "This is a task that has never been done before," Majid told Khaleej Times. The reason he challenged himself with such a physical quest is not only for a personal record, but to raise funds for charity, or more precisely, the Future Centre for Special Needs. To make a donation to the Future Centre, sms 4643 and Dh5 will be automatically be taken from the mobile phone credit or be added to the monthly bill. "After seeing and reading about many races and missions people accomplished all over the world, I thought of doing something myself," said Majid. Why particularly jet ski? Well, because, as he puts it, "boats are boring" or not as physically challenging as the jet ski. "Boats are nice, but too easy, while the jet ski requires a lot of tension, of physical strength. It's like the difference between driving a car and riding a bike," he explained. No wonder, Majid went through an intensive training programme in the past two months, not just practising his jet ski, but running and swimming daily, although this is pretty much what he has been doing most of his life.

### **Economic Front**

#### **UAE Banks most Efficient in GCC**

The UAE conventional banking market is not a concentrated market, as market concentration expressed as Herfindahl Index (HHI) is 1000, the Dubai chamber has recently conducted a study to assess the structure of the UAE banking sector in comparison to the GCC, to assess the efficiency of the UAE banking sector in comparison to the GCC and to examine the relationship between performance, market concentration and efficiency of the banks. Saudi conventional banking market is moderately concentrated; banking markets in Oman and Qatar are concentrated, the study said. The HHI is a measure of the size of firms in relationship to the industry and an indicator of the amount of competition among them. It is defined as the sum of the squares of the market shares of each individual firm. The study results revealed that the UAE conventional banks outperformed the GCC banks performance in all key business areas. That is, the compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 14 percent in real assets, 18 percent CAGR in real loans, and 17 percent CAGR in real deposits compared to GCC's CAGR of 9 percent, 8 percent and 5 percent respectively. The potential strengths in these key performance areas imply that the UAE banks have clear competitive edge amongst GCC banks to prudently expand from the deposits mobilized from the private sector in the UAE. In the UAE, only Abu Dhabi conventional Bank, National Bank of Abu Dhabi, and the National Bank of Dubai were among the efficient conventional banks. Interestingly, these banks managed to keep their efficiency level throughout the 2001- 2005 period, and were joined briefly by the Commercial Bank of Dubai in 2003. Comparatively, the conventional banks in the UAE enjoyed a higher average efficiency score than other GCC countries as a whole in 2001. However, country-wise, Kuwait is the most efficient country (with an average of just above 95 percent efficiency), significantly higher than that of the other countries, including the UAE.

### **Dubai to become Global Model for Resort Projects**

Dubai could soon offer a template for success for other vacation ownership destinations, according to David Clifton, managing director, Europe, Middle East & Africa, Interval International, talking on the opening day of the fourth annual Vacation Ownership Investment Conference - VOIC 2008, taking place this week at Arabian Court, One&Only Royal Mirage, Dubai, UAE. We chose Dubai as the host city for VOIC 2008 for a number of good reasons. Dubai is destined to be one of three super cities for vacation ownership in the world. Dubai is rapidly becoming a city like no other; with key strategic initiatives set to continue to create a tourism destination that is a global prototype for other cities to follow," Clifton said in his opening speech at the industry conference. Over 15 million annual tourists are expected by 2015 in Dubai with 20 percent expected to stay in villas or apartments rather than hotels. Clifton cited developments such as Dubailand and Bawadi as being instrumental in the future success of vacation ownership in the emirate. Dubai will become the tourism and vacation ownership capital of the world in the years to come, as the numerous incredible projects, such as Dubailand, Bawadi and those by Emaar and Nakheel, continue to unfold before our eyes," he said. Clifton also said that the emirate's carefully crafted tourism promotion has helped to create a brand easily recognizable across the globe. "Dubai's goal is to be the number one tourism destination in the world. Tens of million of tourists from all over the world will come here for a variety of holiday and leisure experiences," Clifton said. He also remarked that the emirate's vacation ownership market could even oust Florida in the US from its number one position as the global leader in timeshare sales. People want to come here and experience what Dubai has to offer. Surpassing established tourism destinations like Florida is a mammoth task; but if any city can do it Dubai can," Clifton said. Several other regional destinations have been tipped for vacation ownership growth at the conference.

### **UAE Forms Task Force to Study Currency Peg**

The United Arab Emirates' decision to study a possible depegging of its currency from the tumbling US dollar might pressure other countries in the Middle East to follow suit. The central bank of the UAE has set up a committee to study a possible depegging of the dirham from the greenback, according to a report by Zawya Dow Jones on Monday. This committee will help coordinate any delinking of the dirham and is expected to report its finding at the end of the year, the report said. "This pegging system is undermined by the unsustainable combination of falling dollar and rising oil," said Ashraf Laidi, chief foreign exchange strategist at CMC Markets US. "As long as the two go together, the GCC countries will find no choice but to reconsider their currency regimes," Laidi said. "The most likely outcome is to move toward a basket of currencies." Crude-oil futures soared more than \$3 a barrel on Monday to surpass \$108 for the first time, before closing above \$107 a barrel as the dollar remained weak against other currencies. See Futures Movers. "This pegging system is undermined by the unsustainable combination of falling dollar and rising oil." The Gulf Cooperation Council aims to strengthen economic cooperation in the world's main oil-producing region. Five GCC members - Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain - peg their currencies to the dollar, setting an official reference rate at which central banks buy and sell. Last May, Kuwait abandoned its peg and now links to a currency basket that includes the euro, the Japanese yen and

Britain's pound sterling in addition to the dollar. "This is something that is not surprising at all," said Kathy Lien, chief strategist at Forex Capital Markets LLC, about the UAE's decision to study a possible depegging of its currency from the dollar. "Overall, this is something that will take a few months to occur at the soonest," Lien said.

## **KUWAIT**

### **International Front**

#### **Kuwaitis, Saudis to use ID to travel between the two countries**

Kuwaiti and Saudi Arabian citizens will be able to travel between the two countries using their identity cards instead of passports, the secretary-general of the Gulf Cooperation Council has said. "The two countries have completed all the measures to enable their citizens to move between the two countries using smart ID cards," Abdul Rahman Al Atiyah was quoted as saying by Kuwaiti daily *Arrouiah* on Sunday. The Gulf Arab states had established a customs union in 2003, but had decided in 2005 to delay its full implementation for two years to the end of 2007. "With this agreement, all GCC countries have realised their plan to have their citizens use only IDs to travel around the Council," he said. Under an agreement reached by the six GCC countries, their citizens are allowed to travel freely in the council and are entitled to receive the same benefits as nationals of the country where they apply for a job. The Council, which includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, has stepped up measures towards greater unity by setting up a common market and launching a monetary union and eventually a single currency. A decision by Saudi Arabia in August to suspend the travel agreement with the UAE that allowed Emiratis to use their ID cards was not reciprocated by the UAE. Despite the restriction, UAE President His Highness Shaikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan issued a directive allowing Saudi nationals to continue to enter the UAE using only their ID cards.

#### **Kuwait accepts nomination of Iraqi envoy after 20-year hiatus**

Kuwait has approved the nomination of Mohammad Hussain Mohammad Bahr Al Uloom as Iraq's ambassador, diplomats said on Wednesday. "We have endorsed his appointment and he is welcome here any time he wants to come," the unnamed sources were quoted as telling *Al Anba* daily. Initial news of his appointment last month were warmly greeted by Kuwait and Shaikh Mohammad Sabah Al Salem, the foreign minister, 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 it. The Iraqi 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 Mohammad Bahr Al Uloom and the brother of the former oil minister, Ibrahim Bahr Al Uloom. The new ambassador would tackle the pending issues between Kuwait and Iraq after the general elections and the composition of the new government, Mohammad Al Haj Humood, the foreign affairs undersecretary, had told Kuwaiti daily *Al Jareeda*. "Mohammad Husain 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 Husain regime. We are keen on starting a new chapter in the diplomatic, cordial and constructive relations between Iraq and Kuwait and based on mutual respect and appreciation," he said. Al Haj Humood said that he expected the ambassador to take up his post in Kuwait City two weeks after the Kuwaiti official approval.

## **Political Front**

### **Row over veil for appointed and elected officials likely to hot up**

Kuwait's parliament is heading towards more divisions after a conservative lawmaker pledged to bring up in the parliament the issue of making the veil mandatory for elected and appointed officials. "It is obvious that according to the constitution that states that Islam is the country's religion, and to the rules, women elected to parliament or appointed as ministers should wear the veil," MP Mohammad Al Hayef said. "The government is not able to apply the law or to impose the veil on its minister, Moudhi Al Humood. The government seems not able to choose a veiled ministry. Therefore, we will take up the issue to the parliament and allow the nation to see how the law is being broken," he said at the weekly parliamentary session. However, MPs Abdul Rahman Al Anjari and Aseel Al Awadhi rejected Al Hayef's claims while Justice and Endowments Minister Rashid Al Hamdan refused the pressure on the government and insisted that there were other parties concerned. "From the religious point of view, the Endowments' fatwa says that the veil is mandatory. However, the Constitutional Court is in charge of explaining the regulations in the electoral law," he said. "In all cases, the government cannot on its own decide on the issue. We have one minister, but you have four women MPs. It is a common responsibility that we should shoulder together," he said. The issue of women MPs and ministers not wearing the veil inside the parliament has grated with Islamist lawmakers since 2005 when the Kuwaiti parliament voted 35-23 to give women the right to vote and run for parliament. The situation was compounded when four women were elected in May 2009 to the parliament for the first time, with two of them refusing to wear the headscarf. The results set the women and liberals on a collision course with conservative MPs who boycotted the swearing-in ceremonies of the women lawmakers.

### **Kuwait to hold extraordinary session to discuss a no-confidence motion**

Kuwait's parliament will on March 25 hold an extraordinary session to discuss a no-confidence motion against the information minister submitted by ten lawmakers. "As per the parliament bylaws, a no-confidence request can be seen at least one week after it is presented; therefore, I suggest that we convene on March 25 to review it," Jassem Al Khurafi, the parliament speaker, said on Tuesday. Shaikh Ahmad Al Abdullah Al Sabah, a senior member of the ruling family, was questioned earlier on Tuesday over issues that included failure to impose monitoring laws on licensed print and broadcast media. Opposition MP Ali Al Deqbasi charged that certain newspapers and private television channels have been "targeting Kuwait's national unity and its constitutional parliamentary system." "Kuwait was subjected to a media campaign more dangerous than terrorism ... The campaign was launched by suspicious newspapers and TV channels and targeted national unity and the parliamentary system," Al Deqbasi, a member of the Popular Action Bloc, said, adding that the minister deliberately failed to apply articles of the law.

MP Waleed Al Tabtabai said the information ministry could not afford to remain idle while corrupt programmes were attempting to poison the nation. "The ministry must take prompt action against anyone who seeks to erode national cohesion or harm relations with sisterly and friendly countries," he said. The grilling was triggered by a television show aired in December in which hosts denigrated Bedouins, who make up half of the native population of 1.1 million and half of the parliament, and doubted their loyalty. The talk show aired by Al Sur private station said that many Bedouins broke the law by holding the dual citizenship. Several rallies were staged by disgruntled activists and MPs amid calls to quiz the prime minister if no action was taken against the "offensive" station. Shaikh Ahmad took the station off the air and the authorities briefly detained its owner, Mohammad Al Juwaihel, who denied any wrongdoing. However, his brutal arrest sparked calls by the parliament speaker to the nation to avoid being carried away by emotion and to treat all parties in the standoff fairly and according to the laws. In his defence, Shaikh Ahmad, who is also the oil minister, categorically denied the allegations, and insisted that he had taken all necessary measures to apply the law against violators. He said the information ministry has filed 162 cases against publications and 47 cases against television channels to the public prosecution since the start of 2007. In a reconciliatory mood, Shaikh Ahmad pledged to take "the necessary action to address some of the issues raised by the MPs during the grilling." "I shall, with your support, seek to fulfill the tasks I have been entrusted with and I will work hard to address the issues raised in your remarks," he said.

### **Kuwait lawmakers accused of abusing their posts**

Kuwait's former education minister has accused lawmakers of abusing their positions to ask for favours from ministers. "There are MPs who are blackmailing ministers. The minister has either to accept their demands, regardless of their legitimacy, or face grilling," Nouria Al Sbaih, said. "Such practices cannot be called democracy, and are blatant blackmail," the former minister was quoted as saying by Al Qabas daily on Wednesday. Kuwaitis must be highly selective in choosing their representatives and must stress competence and not tribalism and sectarianism, she said. "The people of Kuwait should be the ones who assess the performance of any minister or lawmaker." Nouria has had a stormy history with conservative MPs who opposed her nomination in April 2007 as Kuwait's first woman education minister and shouted and jeered as she took the oath of office after she refused to wear a headscarf in parliament. One MP, Dhaiffallah Bou Ramia, was forced by parliament Speaker Jassem Al Khurafi to sit down after he stood and shouted during the ceremony. Sharing her experience with a group of university students, Nouria said that she was pleased with her two-year experience in the government despite all the constant attention and regular scrutiny she was under.

### **Social Front**

#### **Storm over women's football team in Kuwait**

A Kuwaiti conservative parliamentary bloc is putting pressure on the social affairs and labour minister to take stringent action against those who allowed a women's football team to take part in a regional tournament. "We strongly condemn and reject the participation of Kuwaiti women in international sporting events," MPs representing the

Reform and Development bloc told Mohammad Al Afassi. Pictures: UAE's female footballers make history in cup. "Their latest presence in the football championship in Abu Dhabi was illegal and a waste of money as well, and we want action against those who let it happen," they said at a meeting with the minister. The bloc said that it did not mind the involvement of Kuwaiti women in activities "as long as there was a total respect of norms, values and traditions." In its first participation in a football tournament in Abu Dhabi last month, the inexperienced Kuwaiti team suffered losses on the pitch and endured attacks by disgruntled lawmakers. MP Mohammad Al Hayef initiated the harsh criticism following news about the first match in which the Kuwaiti women were crushed 17-0 against a much stronger Palestinian squad in the Third West Asian Women Soccer Tournament in Abu Dhabi. "Women's matches are part of the chaos to dilute the values and identity of Kuwait," the Al Hayef said.

### **Kuwaitis from unrecognised universities to sit for assessment exams**

Kuwaiti nationals who graduated from universities that failed to meet Kuwaiti education standards will have to sit for an assessment test as a first step to have their degrees recognised, the education minister has said. Successful students will be allowed to go through a special programme to ensure their qualification and have their degrees endorsed by the ministry. A special academic accreditation committee has been formed to oversee the new measures and draw up a list of the overseas universities to be endorsed by the Kuwaiti education ministry, said Moudhi Al Humood. The list will be announced in June. The decision seeks to block moves by Kuwaiti lawmakers to force Al Humood to change her stance on rejecting degrees from universities that failed to achieve the standards required by the education ministry. Kuwait has been rocked by scandals about bogus and "easy" degrees awarded by universities in several countries in the Middle East, Asia and Eastern Europe. Some students obtained their Masters' degree in less than three months, while others received their academic credentials months before sitting for the exams or without taking the required courses. Al Humood's decision to tackle the fraud and to stop endorsing suspicious degrees has triggered a standoff with lawmakers who sought to defend the students. However, MP Aseel Al Awadhi, one of the four women in the parliament, said that Al Humood would not reverse her position on the "suspicious" degrees.

### **Al Uloom to open a new chapter in Iraq's ties with neighbouring state**

Kuwait has approved the nomination of Mohammad Hussain Mohammad Bahr Al Uloom as Iraq's ambassador to Kuwait, diplomats said on Wednesday. "We have endorsed his appointment and he is welcome here any time he wants to come," the unnamed sources were quoted as telling Al Anba daily. Initial news of his appointment last month were warmly greeted by Kuwait and Shaikh Mohammad Sabah Al Salem, the foreign minister, 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 it. The post has been vacant since 1990 when Iraq invaded the state. The nominee is the son of Shiite scholar and politician Mohammad Bahr Al Uloom and the brother of the former oil minister. The new ambassador will tackle pending issues between Kuwait and Iraq after the general elections and the composition of the new government, Mohammad Al Haj Humood, the foreign affairs undersecretary, told the daily Al Jareeda. "Al Uloom is in a

long line of eminent individuals from an illustrious and well-known family who struggled against the Baath party and the Saddam regime. "We are keen on starting a new chapter in the diplomatic, cordial and constructive relations between Iraq and Kuwait based on mutual respect and appreciation," he said.

### **Environmental Front**

#### **Kuwait's polluted seawaters a threat to marine life**

Pollution in sea water is killing Kuwait's fish, a researcher has warned. Baheeja Bahbahani, chairperson of the educational environment committee at the Faculty of Education, told Kuwait News Agency (Kuna) that seawater tests have indicated high percentages of toxins that are likely to cause mass fish deaths in summer and urged the authorities to act promptly and take precautionary steps to reduce marine contamination. The pumping of wastewater into the sea has resulted in a rise in the percentage of sulfur, ammonia, phosphate, and bacteria, she said. Another cause for grave concern is that the tests have also indicated a significant drop in the oxygen content in water, a factor that could escalate a high human health risk for water distillation plants using sea water, Kuna reported on Sunday, quoting the researcher. The wastewater from domestic and industrial waste contains chemicals that are likely to cause a number of diseases, including Typhoid and cholera. According to Bahbahani, bacteria contaminate the sea creatures, which include those sometimes eaten by humans in raw form, like shellfish. There are also risks to the biodiversity and the negative impact on coral reefs, she said. "We call upon environmental agencies and researches centers to take precautionary measures like environmental monitoring. They can use the sea creatures as a sign of the pollution in the sea," she said. According to Behbahani, environmental planning should be part of the comprehensive developing plan of the country.

### **BAHRAIN**

#### **International Front**

#### **Bahrain denies closure of Doha employment office**

A Bahraini labour official has denied claims that the employment office it had set up in Qatar has been closed. The office was established in 2007 in cooperation with the Qatari authorities to help Bahrainis willing to work in Qatar. Office activities reportedly came to a standstill, except for transactions with a few people signing up for positions in neighbouring countries. "The labour ministry has not cancelled the office, even though it is still assessing the merit of the Qatar employment project," Sabah Al Dossari, the labour assistant undersecretary for labour affairs, said in a statement. "Our focus right now is on local strategic projects to help further reduce unemployment figures, mainly among university graduates, and to improve wages," he said. Al Dossari said that the labour ministry has not received requests from Bahraini graduates to take up positions in Qatar. "We are confident that the office work will be reinvigorated when the causeway linking Bahrain and Qatar is ready as it will greatly facilitate movement between the two countries and vastly reduce living costs for Bahrainis," Al Dossari said. Around 2,500 Bahrainis currently work in Qatar, according to figures from the labour ministry. "We are

pleased that they are working without encountering any problem," the ministry said. Al Dossari said that Bahrain was not negotiating deals with other Gulf Cooperation Council countries to open employment offices in their capitals.

### **Former German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder to visit Bahrain**

Former German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder is heading a 25-member high-level trade delegation to Bahrain on a visit that starts on Tuesday with a focus on commerce and investment ties. Schroeder will deliver a speech at the Bahrain-Germany Business Forum, alongside Bahrain's trade and commerce minister, and will tour several business and industrial facilities. Political and trade relations between the two countries have been steadily progressing and last month, Dr Hubert Lang, Germany's ambassador to Bahrain, stressed his country's readiness to provide facilities for Bahrain's private sector. Cooperation includes the construction of the first German school and a specialised German orthopaedic hospital.

### **Owners of Bahrain majlises seek recall of UK ambassador**

The woes of the British ambassador to Bahrain have been compounded following new calls to have him leave the country made by 240 owners of majlises to the local authorities. In a petition published in the Arabic press, the signatories said that they were speaking on behalf of the Bahraini street and wanted the diplomat to get transferred elsewhere for "interfering in the country's internal affairs". "As representatives of the Bahraini street and as the loyal citizens of Bahrain whose allegiance is to God, then to HM the King, we condemn the interference of the British ambassador in our domestic affairs and demand that the authorities expel him from the country," the petition said. "The ambassador has not respected international and diplomatic laws and traditions and has clearly abused the sovereignty of the Kingdom, the will of the people and international laws."

### **Community leaders want British envoy Bowden to leave Bahrain**

More than 200 community leaders on Tuesday made new calls for visiting British ambassador Jamie Bowden to leave the country. In a petition published in the Arabic press, 240 majlis owners said that they wanted the diplomat to get transferred elsewhere for "interfering in the country's internal affairs." "We condemn the interference of the British ambassador in our domestic affairs and demand that the authorities expel him from the country," they said in their petition. "The ambassador has not respected international and diplomatic laws and traditions and has clearly abused the sovereignty of the Kingdom, the will of the people and international laws," they said. "We cannot remain silent after what the British ambassador did. We consider his behaviour as a violation of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, especially Article 41," they said. Bowden last month came under fire following a meeting with members from Al Wefaq Society, the country's largest political formation, which called for changes in Bahrain's government system.

### **Lawmakers urged to endorse Israel anti-contact Bill**

A society dedicated to resisting the normalisation of ties with Israel has urged the upper chamber of the bicameral parliament to endorse a draft law to criminalise contacts with



Israelis. "With the end of the current parliamentary term weeks away, we urge the Shura Council to take up the draft law submitted by the lower chamber on criminalising cooperation with the Zionist entity," said Abdullah Abdul Malek, the spokesman of the Bahrain Society for Resisting Relations with the Zionist Enemy. "Failure to address the issue now means that the draft law will be dropped since it cannot be transferred to the next parliament's term," he said in a statement.

## **Political Front**

### **Bahrain business community eyes formation of political society**

Bahrain's business community is mulling the formation of a political society that will allow it to enter the parliament and help promote its views and interests. The formation of the society is one of several options being considered by Bahrain Chamber for Commerce and Industry (BCCI) to have a greater say in the debate of the parliament's lower chamber, said Othman Shareef, the chamber's treasurer. "There are several ideas being debated right now, and we hope that we will have a final decision within two weeks in order to select our candidates and announce the programme way ahead of the elections date," he said. An ad-hoc committee has been set up to coordinate ideas and action for the elections. The candidates will not be BCCI members and Othman Shareef said that he would not run even if he is pressured by the chamber. "The committee is tasked with presenting views on the elections and on the selection of the candidates and constituencies. The BCCI will not be involved," he said.

### **Bahrain's health minister and a lawmaker locked horns on Tuesday in a bitter standoff**

Bahrain's health minister and a lawmaker locked horns on Tuesday in a bitter standoff that sparked calls for calm and mutual respect by the parliament affairs minister and the speaker. Answering a parliamentary question about the performance of his ministry, Faisal Al Hamer, the health minister praised the competence and dedication of the mostly Bahraini staff and referred to the latest international recognition. On Saturday, Al Hamer said that the Salmaniya Medical Complex, the Psychiatric Hospital and 22 primary health care centres have received an Accreditation Canada (AC) certification. However, Mohammad Al Mezal, representing Al Wefaq, the largest parliamentary bloc, doubted the recognition, saying that it was not based upon the merit of the ministry, but on how much money was paid to receive the citation. Al Hamer reacted angrily to the charges of corruption and told the MP that he chose to be blind to the ministry's achievements that have reached impressive heights. "We cannot accept the misleading information that you included in your intervention and we cannot accept your shouting, either," Al Hamer said. Al Mezal retorted that the minister was lying blatantly and that he was seeking to brighten up the ministry's image.

## **Social Front**

### **Bahrain MP calls for support of alcohol ban**

A Bahraini lawmaker has urged the country's civil society, political societies, media, and upper chamber to support a drive by the lower chamber to ban alcohol in Bahrain. "There

is a pressing need to enact a law that protects the Bahraini society from the dangers and damages associated with alcohol," Abdul Halim Murad said. "The arguments that the ban would harm the local economy and deter investors are totally fallacious. Countries progress and prosper thanks to their investments in knowledge, industry, financial services and technology, not through alcohol," said the MP representing Al Asala, Bahrain's largest Salafi group. The lower chamber last week voted unanimously for a total ban on the import, sale, production and consumption of alcohol in Bahrain's territory "on land, sea and in the air". However, the bill will have to be approved by the more liberal upper chamber amid expectations that it would be blocked. Under the proposed legislation, violators would face up to three years in jail and a fine of up to 500 Bahraini dinars, or both, and the punishments would be doubled for repeat offenders. Several people have said that the bill to ban alcohol was introduced by the lower chamber for electoral purposes with the next legislative elections due in October or November. However, Abdul Halim denied the claims, saying that the bill was first submitted five years ago and did not seek to take advantage of people's strong emotions and gain political mileage.

### **Bahraini husband in public appeal to his wife to forgive him**

A Bahraini husband took out an ad in a local paper to appeal to his wife to forgive him and return home. "Dearest Om (Mother of) Saleh...I beg you to come back home and I hope to please you and make up for the past days...Your loving husband," Abu Saleh wrote, ending the message with red roses to express his love. The ad was published in Al Waqt newspaper. The ad is unprecedented in Bahrain's history and a rare occurrence in conservative societies where family matters are kept strictly private. "We were initially shocked by this unprecedented request from a husband to his wife and the pledge to compensate for past mistakes that have seemingly caused a family rift," Radhi Al Mousawi, Al Wqat deputy editor, said. "However, we salute the man's courage and bravery to declare his love and admit his mistakes publicly even though we live in a male-dominated society that is prone to accuse women and to forgive men for their mistakes." Al Mousawi said that a man with such noble emotions and deep love deserves a new chance and pleaded with Om Saleh to go back to her husband.

### **Bahrain embassies warned not to offer scholarships without 'proper coordination'**

The head of the Civil Service Bureau has urged embassies in Bahrain to coordinate with the competent authorities before sending public sector employees on training missions or granting them overseas scholarships. "We have received complaints from government employees about their colleagues being sent on training workshops or academic scholarships, fully funded by foreign embassies or private sector companies, and without coordination with the Civil Service Bureau," Ahmad Al Zayed said. "We urge the embassies, ministries, private and public institutions and employees to coordinate with the relevant authorities before moving ahead with the training or the scholarship," he said. Those who refuse to coordinate would face disciplinary action, Al Zayed said. "We will bring together all human resources and training heads in the public sector, including those working in the foreign ministry, for a meeting to discuss the issue and review disciplinary action," he said, but without explaining why the foreign ministry was singled

out. Several Manama-based embassies dispatch Bahraini men and women to take part in training sessions organized in their home countries.

### **Bahrain slams attack on British embassy, pledges security for all diplomats**

Bahrain on Wednesday condemned the throwing of a small Molotov cocktail into the compound of the British embassy in Manama and assured all diplomatic missions and residents that it remains committed to their safety and security. The attack on the British embassy on Tuesday is not acceptable and the Kingdom of Bahrain will in no case whatsoever be lenient with this, Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmad Al Khalifa, the foreign minister, said. Bahrain remains committed to the safety and protection of all diplomatic missions in compliance with the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, he said in a statement carried by the Bahrain News Agency (BNA). The attack on the British embassy will not affect the deep and robust relations between Bahrain and the United Kingdom, the minister said. Bahrain will take whoever is behind the attack to court in line with the law, Shaikh Khalid said. The minister assured all diplomatic missions accredited in Bahrain as well as all residents that the kingdom is committed to their safety and security. Bahraini daily Al Ayam said the public security had been informed by the British embassy that an explosive device had been hurled at the embassy building in central Manama. The attack did not result in any material damage, according to the report. Al Ayam said the police arrested a suspect who confessed that he threw the Molotov cocktail and transferred him to the public prosecutor for investigation.

### **Bahraini minister arrested on charges of money-laundering**

A Bahraini minister has been arrested on charges of alleged money-laundering, making him the first minister to be detained by Bahrain since it became independent in 1971. The minister who was not named but referred to as an official by the interior ministry was arrested on Thursday evening following months of investigations and close monitoring. No figure was released about the amount of money involved in the laundering. Al Waqt daily said that the National Security Agency (NSA) on Thursday accompanied the minister from his home to his office where agents conducted a thorough search and called in his aides for further investigations. The minister was quizzed by the NSA and later by the interior ministry's anti-economic crime unit. In a brief statement, the interior ministry said that an official has been arrested on the charges of money-laundering operations inside Bahrain and abroad. Brigadier Rashid Bu Humood, the ministry's assistant undersecretary for legal affairs, said that the authorities first noticed the suspicious activities in early 2009 and kept monitoring the suspects activities, meetings and communication with his aides and with the contacts abroad. Bahrain in 2001 became the first country in the Arabian Gulf to issue a law that laid down the "legal principles and framework to ensure the disclosure of any suspicious financial activity."

### **Money laundering scandal grips Bahrain**

Stunned Bahrainis were on Friday seeking information and answers in the aftermath of the arrest of a sitting minister, the first since Bahrain became independent in 1971. Still reeling under the dramatic developments around Al Wefaq and the ire it drew from some MPs and media people for its perceived faux pas at its annual general assembly and the subsequent onslaught on the British ambassador to Bahrain for his alleged interference in

Bahrain's domestic affairs, Bahrainis were not ready for the news that a minister who enjoyed the full trust of the leadership would be detained on charges of alleged money laundering. Although the interior ministry statement about the arrest on Thursday evening mentioned an official, Bahrainis learned from the country's various online forums that the man held by the security authorities was State Minister Mansoor Bin Rajab. "We are shocked by the arrest because we are not used to the idea of a minister being arrested. We really do not know how to think because it all novel to us," said Tariq, an accountant. "I still hope that he can clear his name because we are rather used to seeing him in a leading position and as a leader of a religious community centre," he said.

## **Economic Front**

### **Bahrain hosts regional workshop on integrity in the private sector**

A regional workshop aiming to provide an interactive forum to support public and private sector representatives to address integrity in the private sector was opened in Bahrain on Tuesday. The two day gathering that brings together representatives from Bahrain, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Egypt, seeks also to improve and identify ways to address integrity challenges in line with international instruments and good practices, including the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC). The role of governments in strengthening integrity in the private sector and means to improve public-private cooperation on corporate integrity will also be reviewed by the participants.

### **Bahrain's unemployment rate down to 3.7 per cent**

Unemployment in Bahrain has fallen from 3.8 per cent in January to 3.7 per cent in February, the labour minister has said. The figures are based on the monthly review prepared by the ministry on the number of people who receive monthly assistance or are on dole, Majeed Al Alawi said at the weekly cabinet meeting on Sunday. Unemployment reached 2.8 per cent among women and one percent among men. However, Al Alawi said that Bahrain has 12,256 employment and 3,124 training opportunities. Bahrain has taken steps to tackle its unemployment problem and has brought down its jobless rate from 16 per cent in 2002. The key project was the establishment of the Unemployment Insurance System (UIS), a unique feature in the Arab world. The system allows unemployed citizens, who are registered with the ministry, to receive financial assistance for six months based on their qualification and experience. During the period, they have to look for a job with the help of the ministry and in some cases they join a training programme. More than 13,000 job seekers have found employment through the project.

## **OMAN**

### **International Front**

#### **Jewel of Muscat berths at Kochi Port in India**

Tom Vosmer, the Jewel of Muscat designer and Project Director, overcame with emotions as the wind-powered sailboat, built in Oman, berthed on Monday at the Kochi Port in south of India. "I have few tears in my eyes," Vosmer told Gulf News over phone from Kochi as he choked with emotions at the sight of the ninth century replica merchant

vessel at the Indian port. "She is in fine shape and I am really happy to see her anchored at the first call of port," he enthused. Vosmer, an archaeologist, could not board the Jewel of Muscat when it left Omani shores due to bad back but flew to the Indian port to receive the boat that he has nurtured as his own child right from the first day of construction at the sleepy fishing hamlet of Qantab. The sailboat, a gift from Sultan Qaboos to Singapore and built with the help of wood and coconut ropes, is on a 3000-mile voyage from Muscat to Singapore where it will be converted into a museum. It is a model of the wreck of a timber-and- coconut rope dhow, salvaged in 2004 in Indonesia's Belitung Straits. The discovery of the wreck excited maritime scholars, who viewed it as solid proof of a maritime silk route from West Asia to China. The salvaged boat had a cargo of 60,000 ceramic plates and pots from the Tang Dynasty, which are currently kept in Singapore. "The replica dhow with the discoveries of Tang Dynasty would be kept in a museum in Singapore," added Vosmer. Vosmer added that the sailboat will be taken out of the water for a full hull inspection, and the necessary maintenance.

### **Social Front**

#### **Amitabh Bachchan open to acting in Middle East films**

India's iconic film star - Amitabh Bachchan - has said he is open to act in any film made in the Middle East Region. "Sure why not. If there is something constructive and there is a viable proposition I will surely act in them." Bachchan said in reply to a question if he would consider offer to act in a film made in the region. In a brief interaction with media on his arrival at the Muscat International Airport on Friday, Bachchan also had a good word to say about the Muscat Film Festival. "No place is small for any kind of international event," he said referring to Muscat Film Festival during which Bachchan will be honoured. "Every place has its own importance," he stressed, adding that the central location of Muscat was very important. "The fact that it is so close to India and many other western countries, it is always welcome to have an international (film) festival here Muscat)," he reckons. "Films are an entity that promote integration, happiness, friendliness amongst people and I do believe it is one of the greatest integrators of the world today," he said about the world cinema in general. He reiterated that the films bring people together. "Therefore, he added, any form of international film festival is always very welcome." This is my very first visit to Oman. I feel honoured and delighted, as the Muscat International Film Festival committee has decided to honour me with a lifetime achievement award. "I am very humbled and grateful. I feel the honour is more for the Indian film industry rather than me individually."

#### **Oman sees rise in number of traffic accidents**

Oman on Sunday marked the start of the GCC Traffic Week, even with statistics showing that 68 people died and 694 were injured in 543 road accidents across the country in February. Although the number of road accidents in 2009 dropped by 509 from 3,994 in 2008, the number of deaths rose from 951 to 953. The number of injuries resulting from road accidents dropped by 775 in 2009 compared to 2008, which saw 10,558 injuries. "The week-long event here seeks to spread public awareness about road safety by focusing on the role of the driver," said Rashid Al Abry of the Royal Oman Police's (ROP) public relations department. He said that one of the most important principles of

road safety is "preventive driving" which combines between awareness about others' mistakes and respect of traffic regulations. He said the theme of this year's Traffic Week would focus on awareness on the road.

A traffic exhibit will also be held at the City Centre. Dr Ali Bin Soud Al Bimani, Vice Chancellor of the Sultan Qaboos University, will preside over the opening of a traffic exhibition at City Centre in Seeb district. The exhibition will display the facilities of the Royal Oman Police, the Mobile Ambulance Unit and the Directorate-General of Traffic, as well as the Directorate-General of Scouts and Guides and the Emergency Medicine Council, according to a statement from the ROP.

### **Oman bans use of unapproved khanjar designs**

Oman has banned use of designs and materials of the samples of Omani khanjar without due clearance from relevant authorities. The khanjar is the traditional dagger of Oman. Sheikha Aisha Bint Khalfan Al Siyabiah, Chairperson of the Public Authority for Crafts Industries, has issued an order banning the use of designs and materials of the samples of Omani khanjar without the authority's permission, according to a report in the local Arabic daily 'Al Watan'. Anyone violating the order will be punished as per the law of the authority. The decision comes in the light of the government's efforts to preserve the Omani identity and heritage, says the report. "The decision is an important step towards the preservation of our national crafts," the daily quoted Suleiman Bin Hamdan Bin Naser Al Harthi, Director General of Craft Licenses and Protection. He added that no craftsman or producer will be allowed to use the Omani design samples without the authority's permission. However, there was no explanation given by the Craft Licenses and Protection department official on the order. At the same time Al Harthi has appealed to all craftsmen to seek the authority's permission if they wish to manufacture any product for private use.

## **QATAR**

### **International Front**

#### **Qatar, Iran sign pact to fight crime**

Qatar and Iran have signed a security pact to enhance cooperation in the fight against organised crime, fraud, human and drug trafficking, the Arabic daily Al Rayah reported on Wednesday. The agreement was signed by Shaikh Abdullah Bin Nasser Bin Khalifa Al Thani, Minister of State of Interior, and the Iranian Interior Minister Mustafa Mohammad Najjar. Addressing a press conference after the signing, the Iranian minister said that the two countries have good and stable relations and are keen on improving them in the fields of security, culture, politics and economy. Tehran is willing to sign similar agreements with other GCC countries, he said, pointing out that Iran has signed agreements with Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman and Turkey, and was set to sign an agreement with Pakistan. "I believe that Iran has to improve its relations with GCC countries and increase cooperation in border protection and provide a secure atmosphere and stability in the region. This security pact sets grounds for such cooperation and for stability," said Najjar.

