

**BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD
GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL
NEWS MONITORING REPORT**

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17th April- 23rd April 2010

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

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SUMMARY

The GCC Secretary General Abdulrahman bin Hamad Al Atiya met her yesterday the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Sultanov. During the meeting, ways of bolstering GCC-Russian relations were reviewed. Visiting Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Abdulrahman Al-Atiyyah praised on Thursday the growing ties between the six members of the GCC and the Russian Federation. Al-Atiyyah hailed the talks as "important, constructive and comprehensive." "My visit to Moscow falls in the framework of first round of political dialogue between the GCC Secretariat and the Russian Foreign Ministry, aiming to promote cooperation in the political, economic, cultural and security domains," he said. The talks also dealt with Tehran's nuclear dossier, the GCC chief went on to say. He renewed the GCC's opposition to resort to military options in tackling the Iran-West nuclear standoff. "The GCC member states are of the view that the standoff can be solving only through political and diplomatic means. This conviction stems from the fact that the region suffered a lot from the ordeals of war," Al-Atiyyah explained. King Abdullah, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, begins Sunday his first-ever official visit to Bahrain since his ascension to the throne in 2005. The two-day visit is aimed at strengthening the ties between the two brotherly countries. During the visit, the King will hold talks with Bahrain's King Hamad Bin Isa Bin Salman Aal Khalifa on a host of issues. The two countries enjoy a unique relationship based on shared principles and similar views on a host of regional and international issues. Describing the King's visit as historic, Deputy Prime Minister of Bahrain Sheikh Muhammad Bin Mubarak Aal Khalifa said that the visit renews the brotherly ties between the two countries. "We consider this visit a strong indication of the deep, strong and solid relations between our two countries, especially as in Bahrain, there is a lot of love, appreciation and admiration for King Abdullah," he said. "We commend the measures taken by the King for the reformation and development of Saudi Arabia. He is a pioneer of reforms and is one of the most influential leaders of the world." King Abdullah, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, arrived here Sunday on a two-day historic visit to the Kingdom of Bahrain. At Sakhir Airbase, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques was received by King Hamad Bin Isa Aal-Khalifa of Bahrain. The King delivered a speech in which he highlighted the close relations between the two countries. He said his visit "says to others that we are one homeland and one people in good and bad times". The King also ordered the building of a SR1 billion medical city affiliated to the Arab Gulf University in Bahrain as a gift from the Saudi people to the people of Bahrain and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. Iran on Wednesday called on the United Arab Emirates to resolve the "misunderstanding" over the three Gulf islands through dialogue. "The misunderstanding among friends can be discussed within the framework of a bilateral dialogue," Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehman-Parast told the Muhr News Agency. Mehman-Parast was replying to press statements by UAE

Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nuhayyan who said that "an occupation of an Arab land is an occupation and not a misunderstanding and there is no difference between Israel's occupation of the Golan (Heights), south Lebanon, West Bank or Gaza and the Iranian occupation of the UAE islands." He said that the UAE minister's statements are "incorrect," adding that Iran has always strived for enhancing solidarity among Islamic countries to confront Israel. French President Nicolas Sarkozy informed Kuwaiti Prime Minister HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on Friday that France "would always be at Kuwait's side" in the event its security is threatened. HH Sheikh Nasser met with the French leader to discuss principally "the strategic partnership" that is being nurtured by the two countries, especially in the nuclear cooperation and other economic domains. Indeed, the two sides are signing a framework civil nuclear cooperation agreement during the Kuwaiti Prime Minister's visit, in addition to an accord on the environment and durable development and one on diplomatic cooperation. France and Kuwait opened the way for joint nuclear energy projects in the Gulf country, giving major French players a foothold months after they embarrassingly lost a big contract in the region. An agreement "to develop the peaceful use of nuclear energy" was signed in Paris by Kuwait's Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Mohammed Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and French government officials. This agreement will permit the development of cooperation between France and Kuwait in several areas of nuclear energy" including electricity generation, a French government statement said. Sheikh Nasser discussed nuclear cooperation yesterday with French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who hopes the new accord will "result in industrial cooperation," according to the presidency. Omani-Iranian relations are "deeply-rooted," visiting Omani Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yousif bin Alawi said Monday. "Nothing can spoil the warmth" of Oman's relation with Iran, the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) quoted Alawi as saying on the sidelines of meeting Advisor and Head of the Iranian Presidential office Esfandiar Rahim Mashai. There is a mutual desire to "boost bilateral relations between the two countries in economic, political, and cultural domains," he said. Bahrain and Saudi Arabia voiced here Monday willingness to cooperate with Iraqi authorities in the fight against terrorism, reiterating Gulf support for anti-terror efforts. This came in a joint statement at the end of the visit by Saudi King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz to Bahrain, saying that "both sides showed full satisfaction with the level of Saudi-Bahraini relations". They also welcomed relative improvement in the security situation in Iraq, it said. During his visit to Bahrain, the Saudi King met Bahraini Monarch Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa at Al-Sakhir Palace to discuss deep-rooted bilateral ties as well as Arab and international issues of common interest, according to the statement. "The two sides expressed much concern over and resentment at the continuing unjust blockade of Israel on the Palestinian people, especially in the Gaza Strip," it said. Bahraini Deputy Premier Sheikh Mohammed bin Mubarak Al Khalifa met here Friday with Iranian Assistant First Vice President Ali Agha Mohammadi who is currently visiting Manama. Ways of boosting relation between Bahrain and Iran in various fields were discussed during the meeting. Earlier, King of Bahrain Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa met with the Iranian official to discuss bilateral relations and other issues of common concern.

The Vice President and Prime Minister of UAE and Ruler of Dubai His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, has issued a resolution, streamlining and specifying functions of the Federal Demographic Structure Council. As per the resolution, the council will report to the Cabinet and will be chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior. It will have five members and will enjoy corporate body status, as well as financial and administrative independence. The council will also have a Secretariat General to be in charge of administrative, financial and technical support of the council. The resolution stated that the Council's membership will consist of the Minister of Labour as Vice-Chairman, Minister of Economy, Minister of Social Affairs, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary-General of the Council as members. It specified the roles and functions of the Council to include studying and assessing the conditions of the demographics in the UAE and suggesting strategies of population policies and systems to enhance the role of citizen and preserve national identity to score desired balanced demographic structure. A senior Kuwaiti official yesterday asserted the right of all states and peoples to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and take advantage of advanced technology in this field. In a speech delivered at the nuclear disarmament conference taking place in Tehran, Nasser Mehareb, the Acting Director of the Kuwaiti foreign ministry's Department for International Organizations, said, "The State of Kuwait reaffirms that all states and peoples have the right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy and technology for peaceful purposes. Mehareb explained that the State of Kuwait strongly believes that the possession of any nuclear weapons does not bring security to any state, stressing that the proliferation of such weapons would increase tensions and conflicts between peoples, and could lead to a terrifying nuclear arms race in the region that would pose a threat to security and stability. Kuwait will in the next ten days deport thousands of foreigners, mainly Egyptians, after the authorities discovered that they were registered with bogus companies. "These expatriates have no legal status and their stay here is illegal since their companies do not exist," informed sources said. "The ministries of labor and interior are now coordinating their efforts to tackle the issue and deport the expatriates." Employees from both ministries who helped with the processing of the forged documents will be disciplined and legal action will be taken against the owners of the bogus companies, the unnamed sources said. Interior Minister Shaikh Rashid bin Abdulla Al Khalifa yesterday received UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay and her delegation, in the presence of Public Security chief Major-General Dr Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani and Under-Secretary Brigadier Tariq Bin Daina. He stressed Bahrain's keenness to protect human rights and freedoms under His Majesty King Hamad's reform project. He outlined Bahrain's democratic achievements and political and legislative reforms, including the abolition of State Security Law and State Security Courts, Public Prosecution autonomy, turning prisons into rehabilitation centres, authorising rights organisations to visit them and improving freedom of expression. He also highlighted the ministry's resolve to fight crime which is the biggest threat to human rights. The ministry is keen to bolster relations with the UN and its agencies, notably those concerned with rights, he said, stressing its commitment to the Constitution and human rights laws Under the patronage of H.E. the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor al-Thani, the First Gulf Forum of National Human Rights institutions will open here today, at the Ritz Carlton Hotel. The Forum is organized by the Qatar National

Human Rights Commission (QNHRC) in collaboration with the High Commission for Human Rights and the UN Centre for Studies and Documentation of human rights for South West Asia and the Arab region, with representatives of several agencies and organizations on human rights and other relevant authorities taking part. The two-day Forum, to be held under the slogan (Promotion and Protection of Human Rights ... Challenges, Achievements and Aspirations), aims to establish a Gulf network for human rights institution, support human rights institutions in the region and encourage the setting up of national institutions for human rights in countries that do not have these organizations. Among the senior participants in the forum is the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navanethem Pillay.

The combined economy of the oil-rich GCC states grew 5.5 percent last year. The collective gross domestic product (GDP) of the region having crossed the magical barrier of a trillion dollars in 2008, reached \$ 1,086bn at the close of last year, according to the annual report of the Gulf Organization for Industrial Consultancy (GOIC). The GOIC report added that the GCC economy was able to withstand the onslaught of the global financial crisis due to the intrinsic strengths of their economies and prudent fiscal and monetary policies. Qatar, according to this report, stood second in 2009 in the entire GCC region in terms of the size of investment in industrial projects, accounting for 11.5 percent in the total. Saudi Arabia will book a SR91 billion (\$24.3 billion) surplus this year based on an average oil price of \$75 per barrel, and will avoid a deficit if prices stay above \$60, a bank said on Tuesday. The Kingdom may end up spending 12 percent above the SR540 billion it budgeted for 2010 and get revenues 48 percent above the planned SR385 billion, said Said Al-Shaikh, chief economist at National Commercial Bank (NCB). "Oil prices, based on a modest recovery in global demand, are expected to average \$75 (per barrel) with Saudi production rising to 8.3 million barrels per day," Al-Shaikh told a conference. The government has said it expects to make a SR70 billion deficit in 2010, implying a conservative \$46 per barrel price for oil. With oil price hovering over \$ 80 a barrel, Bank of America Merrill Lynch (BofAML) has forecast bright economic indicators for the UAE in 2010. The investment bank put the oil price of about \$ 58 a barrel as essential for UAE economy to break even this year. The UAE's budgeted oil price is \$ 44 a barrel and the country's Minister of Economy Sultan bin Saeed Al Mansouri had earlier said oil contributes just 33 per cent to the country's economy. Considering it is the oil prices that BofAML has based its predictions on, the figures could turn out even better in the second half this year. The UAE's nominal GDP will stand at \$ 242 billion in 2010 and rise up to \$ 255bn in 2011, the report said. It was \$ 220bn in 2009. The price for Kuwaiti oil increased by USD 0.73 during Tuesday's trading and settled at USD 80.89 per barrel, said a statement by Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Wednesday. This increase is attributed to the resumption of flights in Europe after the volcanic ash cloud which came from Iceland seemed to wane. The current global price was slightly over what OPEC was aiming for with the organization looking for USD 70 to 80 pd as a high margin. Yesterday, Minister of Information and Minister of Oil Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah said that the price of oil would be up to around USD 90pd, saying that such was due to growth in world economy. The current price is a far cry from when the price of a barrel was at USD 32 back in December 2008. The oil price had reach its highest margin of USD 136 pd back in July of the same year. Oman

reduced its forecast fiscal deficit by nearly 84 per cent in 2009 as the Gulf country spent less than the 2008 record expenditure and revenues were much higher than had been expected, official data showed. Oman, which is not an Opec member, had forecast 2009 spending at a record RO6.4 million (Dh61.6 billion) compared with a budgeted expenditure of RO5.8bn in 2008. Revenues were also estimated higher at RO5.614m in 2009 against RO5.4bn in 2008. The increase in spending nearly doubled the forecast gap to RO810m in 2009 from RO410m in 2008. But figures released yesterday by the Ministry of National Economy showed the actual deficit last year stood at only around RO128.3m.

DETAILED REPORT

GCC

Iran, Mideast issues to figure in GCC-Russia talks

Iran's nuclear row and regional GCC issues are slated to come up for discussion during historic GCC-Russia talks in Moscow on Wednesday. The GCC Secretary-General, H E Abdurrahman bin Hamad Al Attiyah, told Al Sharq in an interview that he was heading to Moscow for a political dialogue between the GCC General Secretariat and the Russian foreign ministry.

"I am heading to Moscow on a three-day visit," he told the daily. According to Al Attiyah, during his visit he will be holding talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, First Deputy Chairman of the Federation Council, Alexander Torshin, President of the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Yevgeny Primakov, and Russia's Special Presidential Representative for the Middle East, Alexander Saltanov

Rights forum focus on GCC network

A network for human rights organisations in the GCC states was discussed at a two-day forum on "the role of national institutions in the protection of human rights in line with Paris Principles" in Doha yesterday.

In a keynote speech, UN high commissioner for human rights Navanethem Pillay said that by establishing the UN centre in Doha, the UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights OHCHR ensures its commitment and readiness to co-operate and engage with the countries of the region, in order to further reinforce the efforts of promotion and protection of human rights. GCC Secretary General Abdullah bin Hamad al-Attiyah said in a speech presented on his behalf by Hamad bin Rashid al-Marri, that most of the human rights principles in international conventions were based on the Islamic teachings. He pointed out to the GCC decision to encourage the establishment of an independent civil human rights organisation, featuring all human rights institutions in member-states.

Al Atiya, Sultanov review GCC-Russian relations

The GCC Secretary General Abdulrahman bin Hamad Al Atiya met her yesterday the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Sultanov. During the meeting, ways of bolstering GCC-Russian relations were reviewed.

GCC, Russia eye closer ties -- Al-Atiyyah

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The talks also dealt with Tehran's nuclear dossier, the GCC chief went on to say. He renewed the GCC's opposition to resort to military options in tackling the Iran-West nuclear standoff. "The GCC member states are of the view that the standoff can be solving only through political and diplomatic means. This conviction stems from the fact that the region suffered a lot from the ordeals of war," Al-Atiyyah explained.

Europe ash cloud dents Gulf food supply

A Gulf Arab airline ditched a massive cargo of fresh fish and the desert region's supermarkets are fretting over fruit and vegetable imports trapped in a backlog of flights created by Europe's ash cloud. As European air space reopens to flights that were closed by the cloud of volcanic ash which drifted over from Iceland, retailers and consumers in Gulf Arab countries are literally taking stock as airlines scramble to shift a backlog of cargo and passengers that could take days or weeks to clear.

"The situation is really bad," said Gapesh Gerash, manager at Dubai-based Barakat Vegetables and Fruits, which imports 2,000 kg (4,409 lb) in air freight from Europe four times a week. The ash cloud highlights the heavy dependence on food imports from abroad for the Gulf's nationals and the foreign expatriates seeking a taste of home, from imported Dutch tomatoes to French cheeses and Belgian chocolates. Gulf supermarkets do rely in large part on Africa and Asia, but those imports cannot entirely make up for emerging shortages in European food supplies, especially for consumers seeking Western goods.

"We import the majority of our food from Europe, and right now the only option is some charter flights, but they are charging double the normal rate," Gerash said. Gulf Arab airlines could lose \$15 million a day over European cargo and passenger flight disruptions, said Abdul Wahab Teffaha, head of the Arab Air Carriers Organization. "The economic value is going to be astronomical," he said.

A planeload of more than 100 tons of fish due to be exported to Europe on Dubai government-owned Emirates, the Gulf Arab region's largest airline, had to be frozen by owners due to flight cancellations, the carrier said. Emirates, which is losing \$10 million

a day due to ash disruptions, said on Tuesday that 2,000 tons of cargo had been disrupted. Gulf states rely heavily on food imports from Asia, Europe, the United States and Africa, and have recently resorted to buying farmland in developing nations to ensure food security. "From a food and drink point of view, the fact that ... most of the Gulf region ... is so reliant on imports to meet domestic demand means it is more affected by the ash cloud in terms of stocking shelf space at grocery stores," said Shonil Chande, food and drink analyst at Business Monitor International.

GCC business confidence rises in Q1; Kingdom leads

Gulf business confidence rose in the first quarter of this year with Saudi at the top and the UAE at the bottom, but whether real signs of improvement are here to stay remains to be seen.

The HSBC Business Confidence Index rose 5.1 points to 85.3 points in the first quarter, its highest level in more than a year, the bank said on Thursday. "What we're seeing is real signs of improvement across the region," Tim Reid, HSBC's co-head of global banking for the Middle East and North Africa, said in a statement. "It remains to be seen whether this is sustainable, but the increase in people expecting profits to rise and companies staffing up would suggest that the future is more positive."

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The GOIC report added that the GCC economy was able to withstand the onslaught of the global financial crisis due to the intrinsic strengths of their economies and prudent fiscal and monetary policies. Qatar, according to this report, stood second in 2009 in the entire GCC region in terms of the size of investment in industrial projects, accounting for 11.5 percent in the total.

YEMEN

Yemeni kids smuggled to Kingdom to beg

A number of Yemeni nationals who are in the Kingdom illegally are forcing Yemeni children under nine years of age to beg at petrol stations along highways and expressways. This phenomenon is on the increase, according to residents of Makkah who have called on authorities to stop it.

A number of Yemeni children told Arab News that they had been forced to beg by adults under the pretext that they were their families. "We have yielded to them and are giving them the money we collect through begging," a Yemeni child said. Another child, who is

younger than nine, said he had come to the Kingdom with a large group of Yemeni men and women and that his father had instructed him to obey any orders given to him by the men and women. “My mission now is to beg for money by saying: ‘Please... give me SR10 to buy lunch for my mother and myself.’ This is during the day but in the evenings, I ask for money to buy dinner for the two of us,” he said. He said they started begging after Dhur prayer (midday prayer) and continued until late at night. “We give whatever we collect to the man who brought me here,” he added.

A girl who is younger than six was walking barefoot in the scorching sun. I gave her five riyals and asked her to tell me her story. She pointed to an old woman sitting some distance away and said that she was begging for her mother. I gave her an extra five riyals and asked her to tell me the truth. “In fact I do not know her at all. She forced me to say that she was my mother. I give her whatever I collect,” she said. The young girl said she lived on top of a mountain with a group of men and women. “Every morning a man takes us and places us at various spots. Every young girl is accompanied by an old woman who pretends to be her mother,” she said.

A young boy, barely six, had been burned by the sun. He was asking people to give him money to buy lunch for his old disabled father. I gave him three riyals and asked him to tell me who his father was and where he came from. “I came from Yemen. Please leave me alone now. They ordered me to beg for my father who is back at home,” he said before running away. It is usual at gas stations along the Haramain Expressway to see a Yemeni carrying a child, accompanied by a woman begging for money to buy food for the child.

I pretended to be a policeman and stopped one of the beggars and threatened to take him to the police station. He pleaded with me to leave him alone and I agreed if he would tell me the truth. He said: “We rent these children from their parents in Yemen and smuggle them with us through the mountains into the Kingdom. We then place them among petrol stations along the expressway. We divide them into groups and ask them to beg. They give us whatever they earn. I asked him if there was any sexual abuse of the children, and he denied it. However, when I gave him a stern look, he admitted that both children and women were constantly abused.

SAUDI ARABIA

International Front

Abdullah receives KonoE

King Abdullah, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, receives the President of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Tadateru Kono, in Riyadh, Friday. The two discussed issues of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by a number of princes and senior officials. Later, Kono also met Prince Faisal Bin Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz, President of the Saudi Red Crescent Authority (SRCA) at his palace.

King begins first official visit to Bahrain

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Describing the King's visit as historic, Deputy Prime Minister of Bahrain Sheikh Muhammad Bin Mubarak Aal Khalifa said that the visit renews the brotherly ties between the two countries. "We consider this visit a strong indication of the deep, strong and solid relations between our two countries, especially as in Bahrain, there is a lot of love, appreciation and admiration for King Abdullah," he said. "We commend the measures taken by the King for the reformation and development of Saudi Arabia. He is a pioneer of reforms and is one of the most influential leaders of the world."

Cementing bilateral ties

King Abdullah, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, arrived here Sunday on a two-day historic visit to the Kingdom of Bahrain. At Sakhir Airbase, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques was received by King Hamad Bin Isa Aal-Khalifa of Bahrain.

The King delivered a speech in which he highlighted the close relations between the two countries. He said his visit "says to others that we are one homeland and one people in good and bad times". The King also ordered the building of a SR1 billion medical city affiliated to the Arab Gulf University in Bahrain as a gift from the Saudi people to the people of Bahrain and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

King receives grandfather's 140-year-old sword

King Abdullah, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, has been given the 140-year-old sword of his grandfather Imam Turki Bin Abdullah Al-Saud as a gift by the King of Bahrain Hamad Bin Isa Aal-Khalifa on his arrival in the city on an official visit. "On this occasion, and on behalf of Aal-Khalifa family, we are pleased and honored to present you with the 'Al-Ajrab Sword' which is the sword of your great grandfather Imam Turki Bin Abdullah Al-Saud. We have had the honor to keep the sword for almost 140 years since it was sent by Imam Saud Bin Faisal Al-Saud to Sheikh Isa Bin Ali Aal-Khalifa," King Hamad said.

The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques thanked the King for the sword and said: "The sword of Imam Turki, the founder of the Second Saudi State, which today you are presenting to your brother with its historical symbolism for us and for you, expresses the good values and ethics which protected and honored him when he came to his other homeland, Bahrain..."

KSA, India to ease visa regulations

Saudi Arabia and India agreed to simplify visa regulations for businessmen and entrepreneurs by granting long duration multiple entries. India's Minister of External Affairs Pranab Mukherjee held two-hour-long meeting with his Saudi counterpart Prince Saud Al-Faisal here, Sunday.

They agreed on a number of issues including liberalization of business visa regulations, setting up Saudi-India Fund and the enforcement of Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Treaty, said Rajeev Shahare, Minister and Deputy Chief of Mission at Indian Embassy.

“The climate is ripe for Saudi Arabia and India to have concrete proposals on a number of issues concerning the bilateral relations,” Shahare quoted Prince Saud as saying. The two sides underscored the importance of private sectors from both countries playing a key role by establishing a number of joint ventures, enhanced trade and investment activities, he said.

Social Front

Reverse discrimination: No room for Saudis!

Saudis hoping to rent houses and apartments are being turned away by landlords who fear they will not pay the rent and utility bills. These were the excuses that doorkeepers in Al-Rawda and Al-Salama districts gave to Badar Mohammad, a newly married Saudi who is still struggling to find an apartment.

Others would question him about who would be living in the flat before again telling him it was not available. “It was a Yemeni doorkeeper who told me that the owner of the building does not want to have any Saudis in his building because they don't pay the rent,” said Badar. “The doorkeeper said the building was new and he does not want anyone except expatriates living in it.” Badar said the doorkeeper told him the owner had a bad experience with a Saudi who rented out a villa and then did not pay the rent for four years. When the owner complained to the authorities the man did not leave. Finally he had to force him out, without receiving any money in return.

Family murders on the rise

Families and tribes are increasingly using violence to settle their differences, Riyadh daily reports. In the past when there was a problem between two members of the same family or tribe, elders would mediate to resolve the problem. This is not the case anymore. Earlier this year, a Saudi man killed his 44-year-old brother by shooting him five times because of a family dispute.

In February this year, a 60-year-old father in Hafr Al-Baten shot and killed his 22-year-old son using his own gun after the victim fought with his teenage brother. In Badr,

Madinah province, a 20-year-old man shot and killed his younger brother using his hunting gun late last year, again because of family differences. Muhammad Al-Malki of Jazan recalled how violence could erupt between tribes even for the smallest reasons. "A tribal member was murdered by another man from a neighboring tribe. No one could retaliate because the killer was a powerful man in his tribe," he said. He added that the victim's fiancée vowed revenge and promised to marry anyone that would slay the killer. Saleh Al-Dosi of King Abdulaziz University said that there was no official study that could offer an insight into what motivates people to kill other members of their families. "We feel sorry when we read in the newspaper stories about family members murdering each other. It could happen because of drugs or because of bad friends. Or it could be because weapons are available and people think this it is the best way to settle their differences." He said that a study into the problem is needed urgently.

15 gas stations on Makkah-Madinah Expressway closed

More than 15 gas stations with attached shops along the Makkah-Madinah Expressway were closed down for failing to observe a number of municipal conditions, including safety measures. The decision to close the gas stations was made by a committee consisting of representatives of the Khulais municipality, the police, the Transport Department and the Health Affairs Department in Makkah province. The conditions the stations were asked to observe included: asphaltting their grounds, expansion of entries and provision of safety measures in each station. Travelers going to Madinah have faced difficult times in having their cars filled with petrol. Owners of the gas stations were exasperated by the surprise decision which caused them huge financial losses.

'Exploitation' of women during Janadriya denied

There were no attempts to take advantage of women working at the Janadriya festival, according to the event's director-general on Monday. Saud Al-Roumi strongly denied allegations by some newspapers and web sites that there were "ethical violations" against women during the National Festival For Heritage and Culture.

"These allegations are totally untrue and uncalled for. There was nothing of the sort during the festival or after that," he told Arab News. Al-Roumi slammed claims published by Kuwaiti writer and poet Misfir Al-Dousari in a Kuwaiti newspaper. "Nobody will ever believe such claims, which are totally barren of truth. The festival was organized by the National Guard and all its activities and arrangements were reviewed by the deputy chairman of the Supreme Organizing Committee, Prince Miteb bin Abdullah," Al-Roumi said. He added that the organization of the festival was very thorough and consummate and that women played an effective role at the event.

King orders to build nuke, renewable energy facility

King Abdullah, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, Saturday ordered the establishment of a scientific center for civilian nuclear and renewable energy to meet rising demand for power and desalinated water. The King issued a Royal Decree ordering

setting up of the King Abdullah City of Atomic and Renewable Energy. Dr. Hashem Bin Abdullah Yamani has been named the president of the King Abdullah City of Atomic and Renewable Energy, Dr. Walid Bin Hussein Abu Al-Faraj will be the vice-president of the City and Dr. Khaled Bin Muhammad Al-Sulaiman has been named the vice-president for Renewable Energy Affairs.

The City's goal is to contribute to sustainable development in the Kingdom by using science, research and industries related to renewable atomic energy for peaceful purposes, to upgrade the standard of living and improve the quality of life in the Kingdom. The City will support scientific research and development.

Atomic City to fulfill KSA energy needs The Cabinet praised on Monday the Royal Order for the King Abdullah City Atomic and Renewable Energy saying that it would "boost development" and allow the Kingdom to "acquire the knowledge for the peaceful use of atomic energy."

The City would also, the Cabinet said, "produce the materials for the nation's medical and agricultural needs to be met". Chairing the meeting, Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdul Aziz, Deputy Prime Minister, Defense and Aviation Minister and Inspector General, spoke of the Medical City whose construction has been ordered by King Abdullah, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, at the Arabian Gulf University in Bahrain as a gift from the Saudi people to Bahrain, saying it would help improve medical services in the Gulf.

Economic Front

Kingdom's labor market less affected by financial crisis

Deputy Minister of Labor Abdul Wahid Al-Homaid said the Kingdom's labor market is less affected by the global financial crisis. Delivering the Kingdom's speech at the meeting of Labor Ministers from G20 countries in Washington on Wednesday, the minister reiterated Saudi Arabia's keenness in creating more jobs for its nationals and preserving their jobs through vigorous implementation of several measures, including Saudization.

The Saudi Press Agency reported on Thursday that Al-Homaid noted there had been a decrease in the percentage of unemployed Saudis during the financial crisis period comparing with the earlier period. "There was also a surge in demand for workers in the private sector during the crisis," he said while noting that the market did not witness any instances of mass sacking of workers as happened in several other countries.

Oil prices at \$75-\$80

Businesses expect oil prices will mostly hold their value in the next two quarters, bearing positively on Saudi Arabia, which derives almost 90 percent of state revenues from the export of oil. Higher oil prices tend to boost confidence in Saudi Arabia's nonoil sectors as well, while providing ammunition to continue fueling expansionary state spending.

Among the Kingdom's most-important nonoil sectors is petrochemicals, which also closely tracks trends in the global economy.

A majority of respondents, 61.2 percent, expect oil prices will range between \$75-\$80 a barrel during the forecast period. That price range has widely been cited as a "fair" price encouraging oil producers to invest in building oil and gas production capacity, while also keeping prices at reasonable levels for consuming nations struggling to put the recession behind them. In the first quarter, survey respondents had said they expected oil prices to rise above \$85 a barrel, which happened in early April for the first time in 18 months.

Saudi banks set to get positive rating

Capitalization underpins the credit ratings on Standard & Poor's rated banks in Saudi Arabia and will likely continue to be a rating positive this year, said Standard & Poor's Ratings Services in a report "S&P RAC Ratio Adds Insight On Saudi Banks' Risk Profiles - And Emphasizes Capital As A Supportive Rating Factor," published on Tuesday. "We consider that the capitalization of the banks we rate in Saudi Arabia ranges from adequate to solid and is a supportive rating factor," said Standard & Poor's credit analyst Nicolas Hardy. "Consequently, we think these banks carry sizable capital cushions to absorb unexpected losses."

Standard & Poor's introduced in April 2009 its new risk-adjusted capital framework (RACF) to assess financial institutions' capital adequacy and facilitate comparisons among countries and regions. The RACF aims to provide a measure that is independent from - national regulations, Basel II methodological options, and banks' internal risk measurement systems. Standard & Poor's notes, however, that capitalization is only one aspect of our overall rating methodology and that the RACF does not account for all risks. "Our RAC calculation illustrates Saudi banks' dominant exposure to corporate credit risk, and for some banks, the risks they bear associated with equity investments," said Hardy.

Saudi Telecom tumbles on Q1 results; TASI falls

Saudi Telecom Co. (STC) plunged to a 12-month low on Tuesday after its first-quarter profit missed estimates, weighing on the Saudi index, which made its largest fall since Dec. 9. STC dropped 8.3 percent to its lowest finish since April 5, 2009, a day after reporting a 29 percent drop in quarterly profit. Zain Saudi Arabia also fell 3.7 percent after posting a first-quarter loss.

The Tadawul All-Share Index (TASI) dropped 2 percent to close 6714.59 points, taking its losses to 2.6 percent since posting an 18-month high on April 11. Losses were seen across the board with only two sectors making gains. Transport and multiinvestment sectors made gains of 0.49 percent and 0.54 percent respectively. The losses ranged from 0.71 percent in the real estate development sector to 4.59 percent in the insurance sector.

The overall market breadth remained negatively biased with only 10 advancers against 125 decliners giving it an AD ratio of 0.08, the Financial Transaction House (FTH) said in its daily market commentary.

Kingdom likely to book SR91bn budget surplus in 2010

Saudi Arabia will book a SR91 billion (\$24.3 billion) surplus this year based on an average oil price of \$75 per barrel, and will avoid a deficit if prices stay above \$60, a bank said on Tuesday. The Kingdom may end up spending 12 percent above the SR540 billion it budgeted for 2010 and get revenues 48 percent above the planned SR385 billion, said Said Al-Shaikh, chief economist at National Commercial Bank (NCB). "Oil prices, based on a modest recovery in global demand, are expected to average \$75 (per barrel) with Saudi production rising to 8.3 million barrels per day," Al-Shaikh told a conference. The government has said it expects to make a SR70 billion deficit in 2010, implying a conservative \$46 per barrel price for oil.

UAE

International Front

UAE Donates ten Planes to the Lebanese Army

Under the directives of the UAE President and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, UAE yesterday donated ten Puma aircrafts to the Lebanese Army.

The hand over ceremony started with the arrival of the aircrafts, which were flown by Emirati and Lebanese pilots accompanied by the technical staff from both countries. During the ceremony, Staff Major General Fares Mohammed Al-Mazroui, Head of the Logistics Command of the UAE Armed Forces, delivered a speech in which he said that UAE is granting four Puma military aircrafts to the Lebanese Army upon directives from UAE President, in line with the on-going cooperation between UAE and Lebanon to improve the capabilities of the Lebanese Army.

UAE, Australia discusses cooperation

HE Mohammed Saeed Al Manei, Charge d'affaires of UAE Embassy in Australia held a meeting with HE Senator Kim Carr, Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research and discussed cooperation between the two countries, especially in the fields of science, research and industry.

They also discussed arrangements for Carr's two-day visit to UAE beginning on 19th of May. The visit comes within the framework of bilateral visits between the two sides to discuss means of cooperation in technical, scientific and research fields in addition to discussing the role of Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation, the International Renewable

Energy Agency (IRENA) and Masdar City in exploring opportunities and possibilities of cooperation between the two countries

Iran calls for dialogue with UAE over Gulf isles

Iran on Wednesday called on the United Arab Emirates to resolve the "misunderstanding" over the three Gulf islands through dialogue. "The misunderstanding among friends can be discussed within the framework of a bilateral dialogue," Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehman-Parast told the Muhr News Agency.

Mehman-Parast was replying to press statements by UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan who said that "an occupation of an Arab land is an occupation and not a misunderstanding and there is no difference between Israel's occupation of the Golan (Heights), south Lebanon, West Bank or Gaza and the Iranian occupation of the UAE islands." He said that the UAE minister's statements are "incorrect," adding that Iran has always strived for enhancing solidarity among Islamic countries to confront Israel.

UAE, Kenya discuss consular cooperation

HE Sultan Mohammed Al Qurtasi, Director of Consular Affairs, Foreign Ministry, received yesterday Kenya's Ambassador to the UAE H.E Mr. Mohammed Gello. They discussed a host of topics related to consular affairs.

Iran blocking aid to Emiratis on occupied islands: Abdullah bin Zayed

Iran is blocking the delivery of assistance to Emiratis in the UAE islands occupied by Iran, Foreign Minister Shaikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan said on Tuesday.

The Minister was answering questions by members at the Federal National Council (FNC). The council was convened to discuss foreign policies. "I urge Emiratis to think in a different way to support our citizens on the island of Abu Musa occupied by Iran. There are hundreds of families under occupation, which prevents contact with them and prevents them from communicating with their homeland," he said.

He said that it was almost impossible to deliver building materials and other requirements to them. "Iran also refuses to allow us to provide them with teachers, doctors and medical personnel," he added. He said part of the responsibility fell on the shoulders of the media for not shedding light on the situation of the UAE families under Iranian occupation, he said.

Abdullah bin Zayed, Ugandan FM review bilateral relations and cooperation

Foreign Minister HH Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan received yesterday at the Emirates Palace in Abu Dhabi, Ugandan Minister of Foreign Affairs Sam Kahamba Kutesa, who is currently on a visit to the country.

Sheikh Abdullah welcomed the minister expressing his hope that the visit would strengthen relations between the two countries in all fields. During the meeting, they reviewed bilateral relations and cooperation between the two countries and the ways to bolster them in various fields.

UAE's relations with Turkey, China discussed

The UAE's bilateral economic, trade and investment relations with Turkey and China have been discussed at two separate meetings in Abu Dhabi.

Director of Asian Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ahmed Abdullah Al-Musalli has received Ambassador to the UAE Gao Yusheng. The two sides discussed economic, trade and investment relations between the two countries as well as the situation in Yushu, China's Qinghai province, which was hit by a devastating earthquake on Wednesday.

UAE mission in Geneva offers help to nationals

The UAE Mission at the UN Office in Europe has received phone calls from UAE citizens seeking assistance after they were forced to extend their stay in Switzerland as their flights were cancelled due to the spread of volcanic ash cloud in Iceland.

The diplomatic mission has facilitated the stay of those citizens in hotels and coordinated with airlines concerned to follow up their reservations so as to ensure their travel back home.

Social Front

Braka marked site for first Nuclear power units

The Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation (ENEC) has identified Braka, near Ruwais in the western region of Abu Dhabi, as the preferred site for the first nuclear power station in the UAE. The power station will comprise four 1,400 megawatt plants for which a Korean consortium led by Korea Electric Power Corporation (KEPCO) has already been awarded a Dh75-billion contract. ENEC officials told a news conference here on Thursday they had already applied to the Federal Authority for Nuclear Regulation (FANR) for licence to start preliminary construction at the site by the Arabian Gulf.

UAE to review visa-on-arrival

The UAE will review its policy of issuing visas on arrival to citizens of 34 countries, Foreign Minister Shaikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan announced in the Federal National Council on Tuesday.

“The review of this issue will benefit the UAE and many other countries,” he said. “The review provides an opportunity to reconsider the political and consular procedures and demand provision of beforehand visas.”

He clarified that the UAE had benefited from the waiver policy over the past nine years, especially in the real estate and tourism sectors, and added, “The 90-day free entry facility attracts citizens of those countries to come to the UAE.”

Mohammed issues resolution on FDSC functions

The Vice President and Prime Minister of UAE and Ruler of Dubai His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, has issued a resolution, streamlining and specifying functions of the Federal Demographic Structure Council.

As per the resolution, the council will report to the Cabinet and will be chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior. It will have five members and will enjoy corporate body status, as well as financial and administrative independence. The council will also have a Secretariat General to be in charge of administrative, financial and technical support of the council. The resolution stated that the Council’s membership will consist of the Minister of Labour as Vice-Chairman, Minister of Economy, Minister of Social Affairs, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary-General of the Council as members. It specified the roles and functions of the Council to include studying and assessing the conditions of the demographics in the UAE and suggesting strategies of population policies and systems to enhance the role of citizen and preserve national identity to score desired balanced demographic structure.

Mohammed bin Rashid issues ordinance on special needs rehab centres

His Highness Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, issued an ordinance on the regulation of non-governmental institutions for the care and rehabilitation of disabled persons.

The ordinance aims to regulate private sector services provided to this category, contributing to the development of overall services for disabled persons and their effective integration into society, in accordance with the laws and regulations in force in the country. The institutions will come under the control of the Ministry of Social Affairs. The ordinance also defined the areas and goals to be achieved by the non-governmental institutions working in the field of giving care to and rehabilitation of disabled persons, including the provision of curative services as well as social and psychological rehabilitation, in addition to providing support services such as nursing, physiotherapy and speech therapy.

Economy Front

UAE to push for signing of EU-Gulf free trade deal

The United Arab Emirates plans to push for the signing of a free trade agreement between the European Union and Gulf states when it assumes the presidency of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in December, the country's Foreign Ministry announced on Wednesday.

The UAE's foreign ministry announced Wednesday that the small Gulf state will make the completion of over two decades of negotiations between the EU and Gulf states a key objective when it takes over leadership of the GCC later this year. The presidency of the GCC rotates each year between its six member states: Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The UAE will take over from Kuwait in December.

"There will be a new meeting in mid-June 2010 where some problems could be solved," a European official close to the negotiations told The Media Line on the condition of anonymity. "We will have more technical meetings until then but its still to early to say if things can get wrapped up."

Mohammed bin Zayed issues resolution to establish Bureau for financial policies and budgeting in Abu Dhabi

General H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, crown prince of Abu Dhabi, deputy supreme commander of the UAE Armed Forces and chairman of Abu Dhabi Executive Council has issued resolution no. 24 for 2010 on the establishment of the Financial Policies and Budget in Abu Dhabi. According to the resolution, the Bureau shall report to the Crown Prince '&' Chairman of the Executive Council. The resolution named H.E. Dr Ahmed Mubarak Al Mazrouei as Chairman of the Bureau. H.E. Hamad Al Hurr Al Suwaidi and H.E. Riyad Abdul Rahman Al Mubarak were also named as members.

The Bureau is mandated to oversee all matters pertaining to the financial policies and the general budget of the government entities, including those affiliated to the Crown Prince. It shall act as a conduit between the Department of finance and the Executive Council. The Bureau shall submit findings of studies and recommendations to the Executive Council for approval.

IMF raises UAE outlook

The International Monetary Fund on Wednesday raised its economic growth forecast for the UAE to 1.3 per cent from 0.6 per cent in 2010, and said the Middle East and North Africa region is coming out of the global economic recession "at a good speed."

In the second analytical chapter of its World Economic Outlook, the Washington-based Fund said the UAE, the second biggest Arab economy, would be held back by "a vulnerable financial sector and weak property market." The upward revision on UAE's growth prospects comes just three months after the Fund forecast a 0.6 per cent growth for the country's gross domestic product (GDP).

The IMF also warns of less credit availability from banks in the Gulf, saying the full effects from the debt crisis of massive conglomerate Dubai World may not be felt for some time. The IFM report also warns that a possible repricing of quasi-sovereign debt “could have a lasting effect on financial systems, corporate sectors, and, more generally, economic activity in the area.”

IMF doubles UAE growth to 1.3% in 2010

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) yesterday more than doubled the growth projections for the UAE economy for 2010 to 1.3 per cent from 0.6 per cent it had announced in January.

In its latest World Economic Outlook, the IMF said vulnerable financial sectors and weak property markets are hindering growth. It projected that consumer prices will jump from one per cent in 2009 to 2.2 per cent this year and rise to three per cent next year. The UAE also maintained its ranking among net creditors. Commenting on Dubai World's debt, the IMF said that impact has so far been relatively limited, but full impact may not be felt for some time. The IMF forecasts are much lower than UAE Economy Minister Sultan bin Saeed Al Mansouri's projection of three per cent growth for the current year.

Emirates Airlines puts volcano cost at \$ 65 mln

Emirates Airlines said on Tuesday that it has lost about 65 million dollars after cancelling 250 flights due volcanic ash over Europe. “We’re down to about 60 million dollars of income depletion, and we’ve got the five or six million dollars we’re spending” on accommodation for stranded passengers, said the airline’s president, Tim Clark. “Emirates has actually had to cancel about 250 of its flights” so far, he told a news conference. There were up to “100,000 passengers on the (Emirates) network who have been disrupted and “we’ve now had about 2,000 tonnes of cargo disrupted,” Clark said.

UAE's fiscal balance forecast at 12.3% of GDP

With oil price hovering over \$ 80 a barrel, Bank of America Merrill Lynch (BofAML) has forecast bright economic indicators for the UAE in 2010. The investment bank put the oil price of about \$ 58 a barrel as essential for UAE economy to break even this year. The UAE's budgeted oil price is \$ 44 a barrel and the country's Minister of Economy Sultan bin Saeed Al Mansouri had earlier said oil contributes just 33 per cent to the country's economy.

Considering it is the oil prices that BofAML has based its predictions on, the figures could turn out even better in the second half this year. The UAE's nominal GDP will stand at \$ 242 billion in 2010 and rise up to \$ 255bn in 2011, the report said. It was \$ 220bn in 2009.

UAE banks seek entry into Libyan market

Libya's Central Bank said three European banks and three Arab banks from the Gulf region had qualified for joint-venture bank licence bids, state news agency Jana reported. European banks Unicredito SpA, HSBC Holdings Plc and Standard Chartered Plc were picked to submit bids alongside Arab banks Qatar Islamic Bank, Mashreq Bank and National Bank of Dubai. The central bank has set June 15 as the deadline for the six to submit the required documents.

"The central bank will name the winners of the bank licences after examining the documents," it added in a statement carried late on Sunday by the state news agency Jana, monitored in Rabat. The central bank had said in early February it would allow foreigners to open joint-venture banks with local investors for the first time in 40 years.

Libya nationalised all banks, whether owned by foreigners or locals, early in 1970 after Muammar Gaddafi came to power. But Libya, home to Africa's largest proven oil reserves, has been slowly moving to open its banking system to foreign investors since emerging from international isolation over the past seven years.

UAE airline Etihad plans to start Iraq flights

Etihad Airways said Sunday it plans to launch regular flights to Baghdad next week, one of a growing number of carriers betting that Iraq's fragile security gains will lead to an uptick in travel.

The Abu Dhabi-based carrier plans to start service from its base in the United Arab Emirates capital beginning April 26, provided it can secure government and regulatory approval. Initial plans call for five return flights a week to Baghdad using Airbus A320s. Additional flights to the northern city of Irbil are slated to start in June.

Airlines are slowly returning to war-ravaged Iraq as security improves and business begins to pick up after years of bloodshed. Pilots no longer have to execute dramatic corkscrew landings to avoid ground fire, and the once dangerous road from Baghdad International Airport is now largely secure.

UAE planning to increase petrol prices

The UAE would save hundreds of millions of dirhams in subsidies if petrol prices matched international markets, an oil official said yesterday. The UAE's state-run fuel retailers plan to boost petrol prices by 11 per cent this week, UAE state news agency WAM said.

Petrol in the UAE is subsidised at the pump, with the government covering losses refiners make on the sales at state-mandated prices. Retailers aim to liberalise prices slowly, WAM said, to cut losses made through subsidies gradually. "This will for sure reduce some of our losses which were at least in the hundreds of millions of dirhams in 2009," the official at a state retailer said.

UAE Minister of Economy invites Spanish investors to explore opportunities in UAE

The UAE Minister of Economy His Excellency Sultan Al Mansouri, said the UAE is a strategic hub for foreign investments and the national economy has proven its strength over the past 38 years and is very well positioned on the world economic map.

He was addressing a special meeting with more than 50 key Spanish investors and entrepreneurs at the head quarters of the Confederation of Employers and Industries in Madrid in the presence of Jose Maria Lacasa, Secretary General of the Confederation.

Mr Al Mansouri said that the first meeting of the UAE-Spanish Joint Economic Committee is a milestone development in the UAE-Spain bilateral trade relations. "We have agreed on strategic areas of cooperation in major fields such as heavy industries, small and medium businesses, clean energy, and the need to adopt an open skies policy. We are looking forward to share our experience with Spanish businesses especially in the field of investments, as they already have huge experience in investing in the Latin American countries," he added.

KUWAIT

International Front

Sarkozy vows to stand by Kuwait in the event it is threatened

French President Nicolas Sarkozy informed Kuwaiti Prime Minister HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on Friday that France "would always be at Kuwait's side" in the event its security is threatened. HH Sheikh Nasser met with the French leader to discuss principally "the strategic partnership" that is being nurtured by the two countries, especially in the nuclear cooperation and other economic domains. Indeed, the two sides are signing a framework civil nuclear cooperation agreement during the Kuwaiti Prime Minister's visit, in addition to an accord on the environment and durable development and one on diplomatic cooperation.

Kuwait, France sign nuclear energy deal

France and Kuwait opened the way for joint nuclear energy projects in the Gulf country, giving major French players a foothold months after they embarrassingly lost a big contract in the region.

An agreement "to develop the peaceful use of nuclear energy" was signed in Paris by Kuwait's Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Mohammed Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and French government officials. This agreement will permit the development of cooperation between France and Kuwait in several areas of nuclear energy" including electricity generation, a French government statement said.

Sheikh Nasser discussed nuclear cooperation yesterday with French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who hopes the new accord will "result in industrial cooperation," according to the presidency.

Al-Huwailah praises Kuwaiti-Jordanian bilateral ties

Kuwaiti National Assembly Supervisor Dr. Mohammad Hadi Al-Huwailah praised here on Saturday cooperative relations between Kuwait and Jordan to serve the interests of the two brotherly peoples. In a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) during a luncheon held here today by Kuwaiti Ambassador to Jordan Sheikh Faisal Al-Hamoud Al-Malik Al-Sabah in honor of the delegation of the visiting 3rd Parliamentary Friendship Group, Al-Huwailah praised the role played by the Kuwaiti diplomatic mission here in bolstering relations between Kuwait and Jordan under the wise leaderships of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and King Abdullah II.

Kuwaiti Amir to visit Germany on April 25

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is set to pay a several-day state visit to Germany on April 25. During his stay in Berlin, HH the Amir is expected to meet senior German officials on ways and means of promoting and developing Kuwaiti-German cooperative relations and issues of mutual interest. The visit caps strong and distinguished relations between Kuwait and Germany in various domains.

Social Front

Kuwaiti Defence Minister assures MPs on jet deal

Defence Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah yesterday assured the National Assembly's interior and defense committee that Kuwait will not sign a deal to purchase a number of French-made Rafale warplanes before completing all constitutional and legal requirements and getting the approval of the Audit Bureau. The assurances came during a meeting between the minister, accompanied by the chief of staff and high-ranking army officers, and committee members and other MPs, government spokesman and Communications Minister Mohammad Al-Busairi told reporters after the meeting.

The defense minister assured the committee that the deal has not been signed and that it is still in the preliminary stages of offer and technical assessment by the ministry of defense," Busairi said.

Al-Zalzalah says Palestinian casue is given priority by Kuwait

The Palestinian cause along with restoring the rights of the Palestinian people, restoration of the Syrian Golan Heights and Lebanese Shebaa Farms are all one of the priorities of

the State of Kuwait, head of the Kuwaiti-Syrian parliamentary friendship group and Kuwaiti MP Dr. Youssef Al-Zalzal said here Tuesday. This assertion made by Al-Zalzal came during a joint meeting held here today between the Kuwaiti-Syrian parliamentary friendship group at the Kuwaiti National Assembly, and the Syrian-Kuwaiti parliamentary fraternity committee and the Arab and foreign affairs committees at the Syrian People's Assembly (parliament). "We in Kuwait in addition to our ties of love and fraternity with our Arab brothers, there is a cause which combines all of us and without solving it we will not have the state of stability we wish and this cause is Palestine," Al-Zalzal added.

Success of NPT Review Conf. next month depends on implementing its goals: Kuwait

Kuwait on Monday said the success of the Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), scheduled to be held here on May 3rd, will be measured by the implementation of its goals, mainly the access to the Treaty by non-state parties, such as Israel.

Addressing a panel of a General Assembly one-day thematic debate on "Disarmament and World Security" called for by Assembly President Ali Treki, Kuwaiti Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi said "we believe that the success of the upcoming Conference will depend on the implementation of some of its goals and reaching some other goals, mainly the access to the Treaty by non-state parties".

Khorafi warns against debate on constitution

National Assembly Speaker Jassem Al-Khorafi yesterday rejected a debate raging over yet-to-be presented proposals to amend the constitution, saying that such amendments should not be rejected before they are presented. The speaker was commenting on statements by liberal MP Ali Al-Rashed, who this week told a local television station that he is preparing amendments to the constitution, which has never been amended since it was issued over 48 years ago.

Rashed had previously raised the issue saying that the constitution must be amended to accommodate new developments in the Kuwaiti society, adding that some of the amendments he would propose will be to raise the membership of the Assembly and change voting patterns. Rashed's calls have been strongly criticized by several opposition MPs who stressed that the constitution prevents any amendment unless it is for more freedom and expansion of public participation and democracy. But Khorafi said the debate is unfounded and unnecessary since the amendments have not yet been proposed, adding that the constitution allows amendments if they are to expand freedom.

All states must have access to peaceful nuke energy: Kuwait

A senior Kuwaiti official yesterday asserted the right of all states and peoples to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and take advantage of advanced technology in this

field. In a speech delivered at the nuclear disarmament conference taking place in Tehran, Nasser Mehareb, the Acting Director of the Kuwaiti foreign ministry's Department for International Organizations, said, "The State of Kuwait reaffirms that all states and peoples have the right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy and technology for peaceful purposes.

Mehareb explained that the State of Kuwait strongly believes that the possession of any nuclear weapons does not bring security to any state, stressing that the proliferation of such weapons would increase tensions and conflicts between peoples, and could lead to a terrifying nuclear arms race in the region that would pose a threat to security and stability.

Kuwait set to deport scores of foreigners

Kuwait will in the next ten days deport thousands of foreigners, mainly Egyptians, after the authorities discovered that they were registered with bogus companies. "These expatriates have no legal status and their stay here is illegal since their companies do not exist," informed sources said. "The ministries of labor and interior are now coordinating their efforts to tackle the issue and deport the expatriates." Employees from both ministries who helped with the processing of the forged documents will be disciplined and legal action will be taken against the owners of the bogus companies, the unnamed sources said.

Economy Front

Kuwait begins import of natural gas in vessels

Kuwait began importing natural gas by vessel at the beginning of April and will continue to do so for seven months, the CEO of national conglomerate Kuwait Petroleum Corp said yesterday.

"We are getting LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas). It already started from the beginning of April and will continue until the end of October," Saad Al Shuwayeb told reporters after attending the opening of a new gathering centre. Shuwayeb said all the imported gas will be used for power plants.

Price of Kuwaiti oil up by USD 0.73, settles at USD 80.89 pd – KPC

The price for Kuwaiti oil increased by USD 0.73 during Tuesday's trading and settled at USD 80.89 per barrel, said a statement by Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Wednesday.

This increase is attributed to the resumption of flights in Europe after the volcanic ash cloud which came from Iceland seemed to wane. The current global price was slightly over what OPEC was aiming for with the organization looking for USD 70 to 80 pd as a high margin. Yesterday, Minister of Information and Minister of Oil Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah said that the price of oil would be up to around USD 90pd, saying

that such was due to growth in world economy. The current price is a far cry from when the price of a barrel was at USD 32 back in December 2008. The oil price had reach its highest margin of USD 136 pd back in July of the same year.

Kuwait, France discuss economic relations

A delegation of Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) met here Friday with representatives of the Paris Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCIP) on bilateral cooperation. Anas Al-Saleh, head of the KCCI delegation accompanying His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah's visit to Paris, told KUNA they have discussed economic relations between Kuwait and France, with the trade exchange between the two countries. France is the 10th largest exporter to Kuwait. The Kuwaiti economy is one of the promising economies in the region, said Al-Saleh, particularly after the government and parliament passed a multi-billion-dollar development plan. He said the government of Kuwait planned to establish mega projects like infrastructure ventures, the developments of hospitals and ports.

OMAN

International Front

Oman, Yemen sign two cooperation agreements

Yemen and Sultanate of Oman signed here on Thursday two cooperation agreements in the areas of social security and environment protection.

This came during the meetings of the 10 session of the Yemeni-Omani Joint Ministerial Committee held in Sana'a for two days under the chairmanship of the Transport Minister Khalid al-Wazir and the Omani Minister of Transport and Communications Khamis bin Mubarak al-Alawi.

Concluding the 10th session, the two sides signed the minutes of the meetings, which included the agreement to enhance the joint cooperation areas between the two countries in the areas of trade, industry, agriculture, tourism, customs, transport, public works, environment and investment.

Omani-Iranian relations "deeply-rooted": bin Alawi says

Omani-Iranian relations are "deeply-rooted," visiting Omani Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yousif bin Alawi said Monday. "Nothing can spoil the warmth" of Oman's relation with Iran, the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) quoted Alawi as saying on the sidelines of meeting Advisor and Head of the Iranian Presidential office Esfandiar Rahim Mashai. There is a mutual desire to "boost bilateral relations between the two countries in economic, political, and cultural domains," he said.

Ben Alawi, Larijani discuss bilateral relations

Iran's Shura Council Chairman Dr. Ali Larijani met Sunday with Omani Minister in Charge of Foreign Affairs Yousuf Ben Alawi bin Abdullah, who is currently visiting Tehran.

Discussions during the meeting dealt with bilateral relations as well as regional and international issues of common interest.

Social Front

Oman plans new mechanisms to prevent poll malpractices

Next year's elections to the seventh term of the Majlis Ash'shura will incorporate several new measures to prevent malpractices, the authorities have announced, also urging voters to register their names as early as possible.

"The preparation committee for the elections has studied a number of steps to prove voters' presence at the polls, which will be revealed shortly," Interior Minister Sayyid Saud bin Ibrahim Al Busaidi said, adding: "Such measures when enforced will fully prevent double voting."

Sayyid Saud, who was giving an interview to state-owned Arabic daily Oman, said the ministry would introduce several 'new mechanisms' to simplify registration formalities of citizens in the electoral register and "enable the voter to cast his voice with ease and transparency." He added preparations for the elections, due in October 2011, was under way. "Amendments have been introduced in election regulations to cope with the current and future modernisation trends and ensure complete security of the exercise," the minister said.

Economy Front

Macki calls for Japanese investments in Sultanate

Ahmed bin Abdulnabi Macki, minister of national economy and deputy chairman of the Financial Affairs and Energy Resources Council, met here yesterday a number of CEOs of major Japanese oil and gas, construction, heavy and light industries companies.

During the meetings, Macki highlighted the importance of diversifying the Japanese companies investments in the Sultanate, benefiting from the economic and development projects implemented by the Sultanate's government in the ports, civil aviation, new technologies, small and medium industries, power plants, oil and gas-based industries, roads, construction engineering and construction fields. He pointed out that access of Japanese companies to the Omani markets will contribute to exploring and creating investment opportunities associated with the ongoing projects.

As per the Japanese statistics, the Sultanate is also the third largest importer of Japanese products in the Middle East and North Africa region sixth in terms of the volume of reciprocal trade.

Oman Gas Company turns up the gas at OGWA

Oman Gas Company (OGC) set out a bold new strategy at the Oil and Gas West Asia show over the last few days. Taking one of the largest stands at the show, OGC set out their intent to be recognised as one of the Sultanate's most important economic pillars, and to continue their remarkable growth and integration over the coming years.

peaking in a welcome foreword to visitors at the show, the Company's CEO Yousuf al Ojaili said: "As a leading company in this sector, we are very conscious of our role in supporting broader economic development in the Sultanate. It is important for us to support this kind of event as a showcase for Oman's rapid progress in the oil and gas sector, and to take the opportunity to stand alongside our partners, stakeholders and customers."

External Coordination Manager Abdullah al Harthy added: "We have had a really great response at the show, both in terms of networking relationships inside the industry, and in public interest and awareness."

Oman reports 84% drop in 2009 fiscal deficit

Oman reduced its forecast fiscal deficit by nearly 84 per cent in 2009 as the Gulf country spent less than the 2008 record expenditure and revenues were much higher than had been expected, official data showed.

Oman, which is not an Opec member, had forecast 2009 spending at a record RO6.4 million (Dh61.6 billion) compared with a budgeted expenditure of RO5.8bn in 2008. Revenues were also estimated higher at RO5.614m in 2009 against RO5.4bn in 2008. The increase in spending nearly doubled the forecast gap to RO810m in 2009 from RO410m in 2008. But figures released yesterday by the Ministry of National Economy showed the actual deficit last year stood at only around RO128.3m.

Oman's first external trade office in Singapore

The Sultanate opened its first overseas trade office in Singapore. The office, that of Oman Trading International (OTI), the flagship international trading outfit of the Sultanate, was officially inaugurated here yesterday by Dr Mohammed bin Hamad al Rumhy, Minister of Oil and Gas and Deputy Chairman of Oman Oil Company.

Speaking on the occasion, Al Rumhy said, "The opening of the Singapore office reflects Oman's commitment to expanding further into the fast-growing Asian markets and constitutes a step towards strengthening economic ties with Singapore. The opening marks yet another milestone in OTI's growth."

BAHRAIN

International Front

Bahraini PM hails relations with Kuwait

Bahraini Prime Minister Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa on Tuesday received Kuwaiti Ambassador to Bahrain, Sheikh Azam Mubarak Al Sabah and hailed the relations between his country and Kuwait. During the meeting, Kuwaiti Ambassador handed a written message from HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah to the Bahraini PM. The Bahraini PM hailed the relations between his country and Kuwait, which are being developed under the patronage of King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa and HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Saudi Arabia, Bahrain slam Israeli settlements

The joint communiqué issued Monday at the conclusion of the visit of King Abdullah, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, to Bahrain, described Israel's settlement policy as a "major obstacle to the Middle East peace process" and urged the European Union and the US to move to "prevent Israel from continuing its oppressive policies". The communiqué, which followed King Abdullah's meeting with King Hamad Bin Isa Aal-Khalifa of Bahrain and went on to address Iraq, Iran's nuclear ambitions, and the situation in Darfur, said the two countries hoped for advances in Middle East peace in line with the Arab Peace Initiative.

The call for "respect for Iraq's unity and sovereignty" was high on the communiqué's agenda, reiterating the need for the "preservation of its Arab and Islamic identity and non-interference in its internal affairs" while welcoming improvements in security and offering assistance to its authorities to combat terrorism.

Saudi Arabia, Bahrain willing to work with Iraq against terror

Bahrain and Saudi Arabia voiced here Monday willingness to cooperate with Iraqi authorities in the fight against terrorism, reiterating Gulf support for anti-terror efforts. This came in a joint statement at the end of the visit by Saudi King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz to Bahrain, saying that "both sides showed full satisfaction with the level of Saudi-Bahraini relations".

hey also welcomed relative improvement in the security situation in Iraq, it said. During his visit to Bahrain, the Saudi King met Bahraini Monarch Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa at Al-Sakhir Palace to discuss deep-rooted bilateral ties as well as Arab and international issues of common interest, according to the statement. "The two sides expressed much concern over and resentment at the continuing unjust blockade of Israel on the Palestinian people, especially in the Gaza Strip," it said.

King Abdullah to Bahrainis: We are one nation

Bahrain honored Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah by giving him the historic Ajrab sword of Imam Turki bin Abdullah, which the country has been keeping for 140 years, and conferred on him the Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa Medal during a colorful ceremony at Al-Sakhir Palace here Sunday.

King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa, who presided over the function, welcomed King Abdullah and his delegation to Bahrain and thanked him for the landmark visit. “On this occasion, I have the pleasure to give you the sword of your grandfather Imam Turki bin Abdullah, on behalf of the entire Al-Khalifa family,” he said.

In his short crisp speech, King Abdullah emphasized the historic relations between the two GCC neighbors. “Our visit today is not to add anything new, but to tell others that we are one nation and one people in good times as well as in bad times,” said King Abdullah drawing applause from the gathering.

Bahrain, Iran discuss ways of boosting bilateral relations

Bahraini Deputy Premier Sheikh Mohammed bin Mubarak Al Khalifa met here Friday with Iranian Assistant First Vice President Ali Agha Mohammadi who is currently visiting Manama. Ways of boosting relation between Bahrain and Iran in various fields were discussed during the meeting. Earlier, King of Bahrain Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa met with the Iranian official to discuss bilateral relations and other issues of common concern.

Social Front

Al Khalifa stresses Bahrain's keenness to protect human rights and freedoms

Interior Minister Shaikh Rashid bin Abdulla Al Khalifa yesterday received UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay and her delegation, in the presence of Public Security chief Major-General Dr Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani and Under-Secretary Brigadier Tariq Bin Daina.

He stressed Bahrain's keenness to protect human rights and freedoms under His Majesty King Hamad's reform project. He outlined Bahrain's democratic achievements and political and legislative reforms, including the abolition of State Security Law and State Security Courts, Public Prosecution autonomy, turning prisons into rehabilitation centres, authorising rights organisations to visit them and improving freedom of expression.

He also highlighted the ministry's resolve to fight crime which is the biggest threat to human rights. The ministry is keen to bolster relations with the UN and its agencies, notably those concerned with rights, he said, stressing its commitment to the Constitution and human rights laws

Council rejects women's quota in polls: Bahrain

The state-run Supreme Council for Women (SCW) has again rejected the quota system for women in the upcoming parliamentary election. Activists have been calling for temporary quota for women in the lower house, until the public accept the idea of having women parliamentarians. Currently the elected house has only one woman among 40 members.

The General Secretary of the SCW, Lulwa Al Awadhi, told a seminar on women empowerment that was held last week that the quota system violates the equality principle enshrined in the constitution. She stressed that the quota is like forcing women on the public and that is against their rights of selecting their representatives. "Political empowerment of women could take place by teaching them their rights and duties," she explained

Reforms key to peace and stability: Bahrain

Reforms launched by His Majesty King Hamad have created an unprecedented condition of political stability, peaceful co-existence and religious, cultural and intellectual diversity.

"The reforms have created a condition that could be easily emulated by several countries in the region and elsewhere," said MP Dr Saleh Ali Abdulrahman, who is second vice-chairman of Bahrain's parliament and chairman of the Al Menbar parliamentary bloc.

No "prisoners of opinion" in Bahrain - King Hamad

Bahrain - and the Arab world - are proud of their commitment to Islam whose main principles are respect of the human being and protection of his rights, it was declared last night. "Since the wake of Islam, this great religion was the first to abolish slavery in line with its respect for human freedom," His Majesty King Hamad said.

He also affirmed that Bahrainis are keen to adhere to their deep-rooted authentic Arab values of fraternity and respect for all religions and peoples, indicating that the existence of many places of worship in Bahrain testifies to its citizens' adherence to co-existence values and respect for other peoples' right to live in a coherent and tolerant society.

His Majesty was speaking as he received at Al Safriya Palace the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay who is currently visiting the kingdom. "The freedom of speech is safeguarded in the kingdom, and every citizen has the right to express his opinion," he said, adding that "all legal channels are open for the citizens to express their views freely for the benefit of their nation".

Economy Front

Bahrain Air spreads wings

Bahrain Air, Bahrain's first privately owned low priced airline and second flag carrier, will start operating four flights a week to Dammam from June, Majeed Maarij, regional manager of the airline for the GCC, Yemen and Iran, said at a road show in Jeddah on Monday night. The carrier operates services to Jeddah daily and six times a week to Riyadh.

"We are not a low cost carrier, but an affordable one," Maarij said, adding that it was able to keep its cost low by keeping its profit margin down from 10 percent to seven percent. "What's more, our fair structure is 40 percent less compared to other airlines," he said.

Bahrain's SMEs 'need financial support'

Bahrain's small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are facing challenges to growth because they lack access to finance and specialised advice, says a top expert. Leading businessman and economist Dr Yousef Mashal said Bahrain did not have financial services to support SMEs.

Without access to finance SMEs were held from expanding, updating their technology and management and advancing their marketing campaigns, he said. "We have the Bahrain Development Bank but it has to distribute its services across all sectors, not just the industrial sector," Dr Mashal told the GDN.

Saudi - Bahraini trade ties to flourish, say businessmen

The majority of Bahraini businessmen believe that relations between Bahrain and Saudi Arabia will further flourish thanks to the visit by King Abdullah. The visit of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdul-aziz Al Saud to Bahrain will further cement historic ties and boost trade, National Assembly members and businessmen said yesterday.

"Our warm welcome is in support of the Saudi leader's efforts in proposing an initiative for peace and resolution of conflict between Hamas and Fatah, which need to be appreciated," said MP Abduljalil Hassan. "In this initiative, he has focused on Islam as a religion of forgiveness and tried to reconcile the conflicting parties with that in mind."

Mr Hassan said that relations between Bahrain and Saudi Arabia continued to grow stronger because of the ongoing support for each other. "The Abu Sa'afa oil field shared by the two countries represents 80 per cent of Bahrain's economy and more co-operation is welcome," he said.

QATAR

International Front

Qatar Emir, Comoros president hold talks

A session of official talks was held yesterday at Al-Salam Presidential Palace here chaired by HH the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani and President of the Union of the Comoros Ahmed Abdallah Sambi.

Talks during the meeting dealt with relations between the two countries and means of developing them, in addition to a number of regional and international matters of mutual concern. After the talks the Emir and President Sambi attended the signing of a framework agreement on the implementation of mechanism of investment and development concluded between the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and the Union of the Comoros. The agreement was signed by IDB President Dr Ahmed Mohamed Ali and the Vice-President of the Union of the Comoros in Charge of Finance.

Qatar, Lebanon discuss parliamentary relations

H.E. Speaker of the Advisory Council Mohammad bin Mubarak Al Khulaifi met Thursday morning with a delegation of the Lebanese Parliament, currently visiting Qatar. During the meeting, they discussed parliamentary relations between the two countries and ways of enhancing them. The meeting was attended by H.E. Deputy Speaker of the Advisory Council Eissa bin Rabea Al Kuwari and a number of officials of the Council. H.E. Speaker of the Advisory Council hosted a luncheon banquet in honor of the Lebanese parliamentary delegation.

Qatari PM, Mitchell discuss latest developments regarding the stalled peace process

H.E. the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor Al-Thani received Wednesday a telephone call from US Envoy to the Middle East George Mitchell. During the call, Mitchell briefed H.E. the Premier and Foreign Minister on talks between the Palestinians and the Israelis, due to open on Friday, as well as latest developments regarding the stalled peace process. For his part, H.E. the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister stressed necessity of not resuming the Palestinian-Israeli talks, unless Israel shows commitment to stop building settlements in Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Qatar Emir, Cypriot President Hold Talks

A round of official talks was held Wednesday between H.H. the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani and President Demetris Christofias of the Republic of Cyprus at the presidential palace at Nicosia. The talks were attended by members of the official delegation accompanying H.H. the Emir. and number of Cypriot ministers, officials and Cyprus's Ambassador to Doha.

The two leaders discussed means of developing and enhancing bilateral ties besides several regional and global issues of common concern. Following the talks, H.H. the Emir and President Christofias witnessed the signing of two agreements and several

memoranda of understanding, including: An agreement on the air transportation between the governments of Qatar and the republic of Cyprus.

Qatar Premier, Blair discuss peace efforts

HE the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor al-Thani yesterday met the Quartet's envoy to the Middle East, Tony Blair, during his visit to Qatar. They discussed the Quartet's efforts to bring peace to the Middle East.

Qatar spells out stand on NPT

Qatar has expressed its keenness to reinforce the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Treaty and revitalise its basic pillars namely non-proliferation, disarmament and the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Qatar has also confirmed the inviolability of the inalienable rights of the member-states' access to nuclear technology for peaceful purposes and called in this context to solve the dispute over Iran's nuclear file via diplomatic channels and peaceful means in accordance with the UN Charter and the principles of international law.

This came in a speech by HE the Foreign Minister's Assistant for Follow-Up Affairs Mohamad bin Abdullah al-Rumaihi delivered at the opening ceremony of the two-day International Conference on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation which kicked off in Tehran on Saturday with the participation of over 60 countries.

Sudanese poll: Counting of ballots begins in Qatar

The counting of the ballots of the Sudanese community in Qatar started yesterday and the results would be reported to the election committee by Tuesday.

Around 70 percent of eligible Sudanese voters in Qatar had cast their ballots for the country's multi-party election in over two decades following a five-day ballot. The period of voting was extended from three days to five days by the election committee to allow all the people to participate in the significant democratic event. The election back home was marked by delays, logistical problems and an opposition boycott.

According to the Secretary-General of the Sudanese Community in Qatar, Mohamed Al Mirghani, the election was held smoothly with no violations reported to the observers of the election by the representatives of the political parties. The five-day vote was a key requirement of a 2005 north-south peace deal and paves the way for a referendum next year on independence of South Sudan.

Social Front

First Gulf Human Rights Forum kicks off in Doha today

Under the patronage of H.E. the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor al-Thani, the First Gulf Forum of National Human Rights institutions will open here today, at the Ritz Carlton Hotel. The Forum is organized by the Qatar National Human Rights Commission (QNHRC) in collaboration with the High Commission for Human Rights and the UN Centre for Studies and Documentation of human rights for South West Asia and the Arab region, with representatives of several agencies and organizations on human rights and other relevant authorities taking part. The two-day Forum, to be held under the slogan (Promotion and Protection of Human Rights ... Challenges, Achievements and Aspirations), aims to establish a Gulf network for human rights institution, support human rights institutions in the region and encourage the setting up of national institutions for human rights in countries that do not have these organizations. Among the senior participants in the forum is the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navanethem Pillay.

Qatar sees robust growth in job creation

Qatar witnessed a 2.2 percent increase in its expatriate employees in the fourth quarter last year, placing second in the GCC ranking, according to latest data released by GulfTalent.com yesterday.

Growth in Qatar has been fuelled by the country's continued exploitation of its huge gas reserves, the third largest in the world while massive spending by the Saudi government on infrastructure projects has helped maintain economic activity during the global economic downturn. Qatar, however, had the highest rate of redundant employees returning home at 54 percent, in part due to strict laws prohibiting employees from switching employers.

Economy Front

Qtel scrips rise; Qatar Exchange up

Qatar Telecom (Qtel) surged to a six-month high yesterday after its first-quarter profit more than doubled, beating forecasts as growth in its overseas operations boosted earnings. Rival regional Zain rose 3.1 percent following a local newspaper report saying a Turkish firm was eyeing a stake in the Kuwait operator, helping the country's index ease away from Wednesday's 10-week low, while Dubai and Qatar also advanced.

'Qatar is looking very attractive and is getting interest from both regional and international investors,' said Rami Sidani, Schroders Middle East head of investment. 'Bank results were good and stocks are at attractive levels, so the index should continue to outperform. The Qatar economy is likely to be the fastest growing in the world in 2010 and the stock market should reflect that.'

Saudi Arabia, Qatar to lead Sukuk market recovery in 2011

Analysts predict that now is a pivotal time for the global Islamic finance industry as Sukuks are expected to grow in importance on the radar of global investors. Industry players predict that the current year will remain static but recovery is expected in 2011-12. Qatari and Saudi Sukuks will lead the markets. "The market is changing wherein the cost of capital is becoming important. In the medium to long term, markets need a lot more funds, more listings and finally, more players to develop this market," said Nida Raza, senior vice president - Capital Markets, Unicorn Investment Bank B.S.C. at a "peakfast piefing".

According to industry players, growth of Sukuk markets will arise from solid core issues that attract solid core investors. Subsequently, a common consensus is the fact that the Sukuk market has to become competitive

Qatar to pour millions in Cyprus property

Qatar and Cyprus signed an agreement yesterday to build a multimillion dollar luxury hotel, office and residential complex in the commercial center of the island's capital. Qatar's Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani and Cyprus President Dimitris Christofias signed the deal to establish a joint venture in which the two countries will hold an equal stake in the 55,000 square-meter (592,020 square foot) complex that will also include retail shopping and residential quarters.

We believe in the economy of Cyprus," he said. Cyprus Finance Minister Charilaos Stavrakis said the government will contribute the land on which the complex will be built. The land's value will be calculated by an international real estate appraiser. The two countries also signed an agreement on forging closer air transport links. -

First LNG cargo from Qatargas train-6 in Nov

The first cargo from Qatargas train six should be loaded by November, with the first shipment from train seven possible by year end, a Qatargas shipping executive said yesterday. "We are in the process of starting up train six at Qatargas 3 and at later stage we will start up train seven of Qatargas 4," said Ahmed al-Khulaifi, commercial and shipping chief operating officer at the state-run LNG giant told Reuters. "Hopefully, train six will be producing this year, maybe the first cargo is in October or November, maybe two-three months after we will see the first cargo from train seven", he said on the sidelines of an LNG conference in Algeria.

Train six is a joint venture between Qatar Petroleum, US-based ConocoPhillips and Japan's Mitsui, while train seven is being developed with Royal Dutch Shell. "We are sold out. Most of the trains (output) are going to east of Suez and partially to west of Suez," he said, adding that growing appetite for Qatar's biggest export in emerging markets in Asia and beyond should mop up any available fuel. "What we see for this year and the future is that there will be a new market of totally new countries that will come to LNG," he said, pointing to rising demand for gas to fire power plants around the world.

Qatar, Russia agree on Yamal gas joint project

Russia and Qatar have agreed to work together to develop the gas reserves of Russia's Arctic Yamal peninsula, the two sides said in a joint statement yesterday.

“The parties have reached an agreement to further develop their cooperation through joint implementation of oil and gas projects in Qatar and Russia, including the integrated project of development of natural gas reserves of the Yamal peninsula, in third countries, as well as through scientific research”, said the statement, issued at a meeting of major gas producers. The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Energy and Industry, H E Abdullah bin Hamad Al Attiyah, and Russian Energy Minister Sergey Shmatko signed the statement.