

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

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

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SUMMARY

The six-member Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) on Sunday supported the efforts of Turkey and Brazil to find a peaceful solution to Iran's nuclear standoff with the West. It also emphasized the right of countries in the region to use nuclear power for peaceful purposes within the framework of international agreements. In a final communiqué issued by GCC foreign ministers following their meeting in Jeddah, the group emphasized the need to keep the Middle East - including Israel - free of nuclear and mass destructive weapons. "The ministers praised the efforts of Turkey and Brazil to help reach a peaceful solution to the Iranian nuclear program within the framework of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and related UN Security Council resolutions," the communiqué said. German Chancellor Angela Merkel arrived here Tuesday for talks with Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah and other top Saudi officials on expanding economic, commercial and political ties. She was received by the king at his palace late Tuesday and her discussions with the king and Crown Prince Sultan, deputy premier and minister of defense and aviation, focused on ways of reviving the Middle East peace process, boosting regional security and the nuclear standoff with Iran. Her talks in Saudi Arabia, which is a G20 member, were also to cover planned reform of the financial markets and the upcoming G20 summit in Canada. Merkel's foreign policy adviser Christoph Heusgen said GCC countries have a central role to play in resolving the standoff with Iran. Speaking to reporters in Abu Dhabi before leaving for Jeddah, the chancellor pledged to boost trade across the Gulf region. German cars and consumer goods have a major presence in the Gulf, but efforts to further expand economic ties were underscored by the high-level business delegation accompanying Merkel. Saudi Arabia has exchanged messages with Bahrain and Qatar over the appointment of the new Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretary General. King Hamad Bin Eisa Al-Khalifa of Bahrain and Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the Emir of Qatar, responded Thursday to the initiative of King Abdullah, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, concerning the appointment. The King had earlier Thursday sent messages to the King of Bahrain and Emir of Qatar about the matter. The messages were delivered by Prince Mit'eb Bin Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz, Deputy Commander of the National Guard for Executive Affairs. King Abdullah, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, is scheduled to discuss with German Chancellor Angela Merkel Monday a range of issues topped by the Middle East following the beginning of indirect Palestinian-Israeli talks. The discussions are also expected to address means of strengthening Saudi-European relations and Riyadh-Berlin political, economic and trade ties. Speaking ahead of the chancellor's visit, German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle said the Kingdom had a "pioneering" role in achieving peace in the Middle East. "Riyadh has been and still is keen to ensure security in the region," Westerwelle told Okaz. "There is no alternative to the option of the two states of Palestine and Israel." South Korea and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Tuesday signed a nuclear regulatory pact to set safety guidelines for the building of commercial reactors in the Middle East, Seoul's Yonhap News Agency reported. The deal was signed in Seoul between Vice Science Minister Kim Jung-hyun and Hamad Al Kaabi, the UAE's nuclear ambassador. The Ministry for Education, Science and Technology said the nuclear safety arrangement is a follow-up to the USD 18.6 billion

agreement reached late last year to build four 1,400 megawatt reactors by 2020, according to the report. "The pact calls for South Korea and the UAE to share and check safety requirements, technologies and regulations related to the construction of the reactors in the coming years," an official was quoted as saying. Under the arrangement, Seoul will also help Abu Dhabi set up a nuclear safety control infrastructure, it said, adding that such an arrangement is in line with requirements set by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Kuwaiti Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah said Sunday GCC countries were keen on finding a peaceful resolution of the Iranian nuclear file. Sheikh Mohammad, at a joint news conference with GCC Secretary General Abdulrahman Al-Attiyah after the GCC Foreign Ministers' meeting, recalled that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states have repeatedly called on Iran to comply with UN resolutions and honored obligations related to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Brazil and Turkey have recently brokered a deal with Iran to send 1,200 kgs of low-enriched uranium to Turkey to be exchanged with nuclear fuel for Tehran research reactor. Sheikh Mohammad, rotating chairman of the GCC Council, said the GCC foreign ministers looked forward that efforts by Brazil and Turkey pave way for the resolution of the Iranian nuclear file.

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos will pay private visits today to the State of Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the Arab Republic of Egypt during which he will discuss with the leaders, strong fraternal relations binding the Sultanate with its sisterly countries and means of enhancing the existing co-operation with them to serve the joint interests of the Omani people and peoples of these countries, in addition to, consulting and exchanging viewpoints on various issues, the latest regional and international developments. Oman and Pakistan yesterday underlined the necessity of familiarising Pakistani manpower with the laws and systems before their arrival in the Sultanate. An official session of talks held at the Oman Tourism College yesterday between the Sultanate and Pakistan praised the Sultanate for providing the Pakistani manpower the opportunity to amend their situation without fines and encouraging them to benefit from the permit period. The talks chaired by Shaikh Abdullah bin Nasser al Bakri, Manpower Minister, and Syed Khursheed Ahmed Shah, Pakistan's Labour, Manpower and Overseas Minister, also stressed on the importance of signing a memorandum of understanding on labour and training. The number of Pakistani manpower working in the private sector in the Sultanate as at the end of April 2010 stood at 147,636. The Pakistani minister appreciated Oman's role in protecting the rights of foreign manpower and defending their interests. Qatar's emir has pardoned a group of Saudis for their involvement in an attempted coup to overthrow him in 1996, the country's foreign ministry said on Tuesday. "In response to the desire of the custodian of the two holy shrines, Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, Qatar's emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, issued an emiri decision to pardon a number of convicts charged for a failed coup d'etat," the ministry said. The statement did not specify the number of convicts, nor say what their sentences were.

Saudi Arabia has made minor progress on its dismal human rights record but the powerful state security apparatus and the conservative religious regime continue to block real change, Amnesty International said Wednesday. Despite recently formed human rights bodies and reforms to the justice system, prisoners still face secret and summary

justice, women are frequently abused, and faiths other than Sunni Muslim are still unable to worship freely in the country, Amnesty said in its annual report for 2010. “The authorities used a wide range of repressive measures to suppress freedom of expression and other legitimate activities” last year, Amnesty said. It cited the ongoing practice of detention without charge or trial of people suspected of links to what the Saudis brand as “terrorist” activities. His Highness Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, has issued a resolution on endowment resources, categories and regulations of spending from endowment revenues. The resolution sets resources of endowment in accordance with the laws observed in the UAE, as well as categories such as knowledge, Islamic affairs, orphans and poor people, Al Bir Wal Taqwa (righteousness and piety), health, social affairs and parents endowment. The resolution grants the board of the General Authority for Islamic Affairs and Awqaf (GAIAA) the power to create new categories. The resolution also provides for a set of regulations for payment from endowment revenues. Child rights will soon be made a part of school and college syllabuses in Oman under a collaborative project among Unicef, the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and the Ministry of Education. Officials said the move was part of the country’s commitment towards promoting rights and welfare of children. A curriculum has already been developed for students pursuing a degree in education at SQU with the focus on human rights conventions, with a particular emphasis on the rights of children. “The child rights course will also assist current teachers teaching at Ministry of Education in enhancing their skills in integration of Child Right Convention (CRC) principles in the various education curricula,” a spokesperson for the Unicef office in Muscat said. Protect and don’t hurt me is the theme of an anti-domestic violence campaign which will be observed throughout this summer in Bahrain. Organised by the Public Committee Against Domestic Violence at the Bahrain Women’s Union, the campaign will target all family members, with greater focus on children. Youngsters who are prone to abuse and accidents in outdoor activities will be targeted with a series of workshops to teach them how to protect themselves. Bahrain Women’s Union spokesperson Fatima Rabai said on Monday the campaign initially started on Saturday with a workshop for parents and children to discuss domestic violence. She said actual activities of the campaign will start from June. “We will be holding monthly workshops, each of which will target a particular district to cover maximum number of children,” she said while highlighting that associating parents and their children would help correct wrong practices in family relations that could affect psychological health of youngsters. HH Sheikha Mozah Nasser al-Misnad, the chairperson of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF), addressed yesterday morning the graduating students of Virginia Commonwealth University in the US. “We as human beings, carry a potential within us which is greater than any technology and that our minds are more powerful than any computer,” she said. HH Sheikha Mozah stressed that “what unites us as humans are our shared virtues, our compassion, and a desire to carve a mark on this world. It is those virtues which transcend any technological wonders”.

The GCC is quite close to concluding the much-awaited Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the European Union (EU), the visiting German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, said here yesterday. “We are centimetres away from inking the coveted deal,” Merkel said in reply to a question from media persons about the proposed GCC-EU FTA. She was

addressing a joint news conference with the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, H E Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabor Al Thani, at the Emiri Diwan. German Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Wednesday her country was committed to strong relations with Saudi Arabia and the mission she had undertaken was aimed at further boosting trade and investment between the two countries. Germany wants to invest in more than just oil in Saudi Arabia by partnering in renewable energy, rail transport and other projects, Merkel said Wednesday. She was addressing entrepreneurs at the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI), offering assurances that Germany's economy will remain strong despite the European debt crisis. "I know you look to Europe with a concerned eye after the challenges the euro has faced," she said. "We will make every effort to ensure the stability of the currency by promoting bilateral trade." The International Monetary Fund, or IMF, may revise up its growth forecast for the UAE in the middle of the year following Dubai World's \$ 23.5 billion debt restructuring settlement with its creditors, IMF Director Masood Ahmed said. The IMF previously predicted that the UAE economy will grow 1.3 per cent this year, after a 0.7 per cent contraction in 2009. "We have done a relatively conservative forecast and depending on what happened on oil production and depending on how quickly the effect of the agreement on Dubai World feed through into credit, then that could lead to a revision of forecast," Ahmed told Khaleej Times in an interview. Commerce and Industry Minister Dr. Ahmad Al-Haroun stressed on Tuesday that the inflation rate in Kuwait was mainly because of external factors. The minister's speech came during a session at the National Assembly (NA) to discuss the increase of food and construction materials' prices and a report of the parliamentary financial and economic affairs committee on that issue. Al-Haroun said that the inflation rate was not controllable because of the openness of the Kuwaiti market and economy, in addition to several internal factors like the consumers' eating habits and the population's increase. He pointed out that the Commerce and Industry Ministry issued a number of decisions to include new kinds of food, milk, and children's food on the list of subsidized good to reduce the negative effects of the increase of prices. Qatar may end up exporting just 6mn metric tonnes a year (mty) of LNG to the US after diverting as much as 20mn mty to other countries, Qatar's Deputy Prime Minister HE Abdullah bin Hamad al-Attiyah said in an interview published yesterday. Al-Attiyah said that Qatar "may divert 12-20mn mty" away from the US market. "This means our gas exports to the US would remain in the range of 6mn mty", he said in the interview published in the Middle East Economic Survey. To date, Qatari LNG exports to the US have been well below those levels, reaching just 60,000mt in 2008 and 260,000mt in 2009. "We have agreed with China to export 5mn mt/year and with Poland for 1mn mty," al-Attiyah said. We are also negotiating to export an additional 7mn mty to China, and to India an additional 4mn mty. There are negotiations with other Asian markets for an additional 3-4mn mty."

GCC

Rights watchdog for GCC planned

A NEW watchdog is on the way to monitor and combat human rights violations across the GCC and in Yemen, it emerged yesterday. It is being formed by a coalition of activists from across the Gulf and will be the first regional body of its kind in the Middle East. The new Regional Coalition Against Torture could be created in Bahrain on Saturday at the end of a three-day workshop that got underway at Elite Suites, Sanabis, yesterday. "The goal of this workshop is to create a regional coalition in the GCC countries and Yemen against torture," Bahrain Human Rights Society secretary general Dr Abdulla Alderazi told the GDN yesterday on the sidelines of the event. The objective is to spread awareness of the crime of torture, which is practised in our countries, and to educate the new generation on this issue.

Merkel vows to boost trade with GCC countries

German Chancellor Angela Merkel arrived here Tuesday for talks with Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah and other top Saudi officials on expanding economic, commercial and political ties. She was received by the king at his palace late Tuesday and her discussions with the king and Crown Prince Sultan, deputy premier and minister of defense and aviation, focused on ways of reviving the Middle East peace process, boosting regional security and the nuclear standoff with Iran.

Her talks in Saudi Arabia, which is a G20 member, were also to cover planned reform of the financial markets and the upcoming G20 summit in Canada. Merkel's foreign policy adviser Christoph Heusgen said GCC countries have a central role to play in resolving the standoff with Iran. Speaking to reporters in Abu Dhabi before leaving for Jeddah, the chancellor pledged to boost trade across the Gulf region. German cars and consumer goods have a major presence in the Gulf, but efforts to further expand economic ties were underscored by the high-level business delegation accompanying Merkel.

GCC Chief asserts importance on GCC's all time cohesiveness

Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Abdulrahman Al-Attiyah asserted Tuesday on GCC's history and all time cohesiveness throughout the years since its establishment to achieve integration and unity.

Al-Attiyah made the statement in a ceremony marking the GCC's 29th Anniversary which was sponsored by Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz and attended by Saudi high ranking officials, GCC diplomatic missions, Arab and friendly nations. Al-Attiyah added that GCC has surpassed a coordination period and heading toward integration during its third decade. The GCC Chief noted that the GCC has become a vital bloc with high transparency and strategic power both regionally and internationally.

GCC backs efforts to solve Iran N-issue

The six-member Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) on Sunday supported the efforts of Turkey and Brazil to find a peaceful solution to Iran's nuclear standoff with the West. It also emphasized the right of countries in the region to use nuclear power for peaceful purposes within the framework of international agreements.

In a final communiqué issued by GCC foreign ministers following their meeting in Jeddah, the group emphasized the need to keep the Middle East - including Israel - free of nuclear and mass destructive weapons. "The ministers praised the efforts of Turkey and Brazil to help reach a peaceful solution to the Iranian nuclear program within the framework of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and related UN Security Council resolutions," the communiqué said.

GCC-Indian relations ever-growing

Kuwaiti Ambassador to New Delhi Sami Al-Suleiman affirmed here yesterday that GCC-Indian relations were ever-growing, especially at the commercial and economic level.

Al-Suleiman said, "GCC-Indian economic and commercial relations are on an upward trend to the point that the GCC region became India's number one commercial partner in 2009.

The GCC states are looking forward to sign a free-trade zone deal with Indian based on the 2004 document which was signed by Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah with the presence of GCC Secretary General Abdulrahman Al-Attiyah, he said.

GCC urged to adopt sustainable agriculture to head off food crisis

The scramble by Gulf states to secure strategic food supplies by buying up vast tracts of farmland in Africa and Asia won't be enough to stave off a surge of food imports over the next decade, a Saudi bank report said. "The era of cheap food is over," NCB Capital, the investment arm of Saudi Arabia's National Commercial Bank, said in the report issued several weeks ago.

The wholesale investment in arable land in Sudan, Tanzania, Kenya, Ethiopia and other African states won't prevent the level of food imports of the six Gulf Cooperation Council states from rising sharply over the next decade. The NCBC report urged the GCC states to boost domestic food production through sustainable agriculture to head off an eventual crisis caused by a dramatic surge in the global demand for food that will push prices ever upward.

GCC, EU close to free trade agreement

The GCC is quite close to concluding the much-awaited Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the European Union (EU), the visiting German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, said here yesterday.

“We are centimetres away from inking the coveted deal,” Merkel said in reply to a question from media persons about the proposed GCC-EU FTA. She was addressing a joint news conference with the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, H E Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabor Al Thani, at the Emiri Diwan.

Euro crisis makes GCC wary of single currency

The economic crisis in the eurozone has convinced six Gulf states to “pause” for reflection in their push toward a monetary union, a top Gulf official said yesterday. Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al Sabah said it would be “irresponsible” for the Gulf Cooperation Council six to push ahead without studying the implications of the problems in Europe. “The new development is the crisis in the eurozone,” he said at the end of a GCC foreign ministers meeting in Saudi Arabia’s Red Sea city of Jeddah. “There are a lot of lessons, (so) that we should pause,” he said. The GCC members — Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and United Arab Emirates — agreed last year to begin a move toward monetary union, with a Gulf central bank

YEMEN

President's amnesty on outlaw elements to be carried out soon: Yemen

Judicial bodies have started to legal measures to carry out the amnesty of president Ali Abdullah Saleh on outlaw elements in some southern and detainees because of rebellion in north. Minister of Justice Ghazi al-Aghbari told Saba that the prosecutions and courts started their measures to implement the amnesty in coming days.

Al-Aghbari said that decision of the amnesty is right for president Saleh in accordance with the country's law. On his speech to the nation on 20th anniversary of unification day, president Saleh announced the amnesty on all detainees in outlaw acts in south and north of the country in addition to amnesty on journalists who have cases in the courts.

Yemen opposition lauds amnesty but sceptical

A Yemeni umbrella opposition group welcomed a government amnesty for nearly 300 imprisoned rebels and separatists, one of its key demands, but members said on Monday they doubted the government was serious about change.

In a speech on Friday to mark 20 years of unity between north and south Yemen, President Ali Abdullah Saleh announced an amnesty for 298 imprisoned northern Shi’ite rebels, southern secessionists and journalists. He also said he wanted to open up Yemen’s political process to all participants. A national dialogue, which also would result in

agreement on terms of the first parliamentary election since 2003, has been delayed since last year when Sanaa declined to include northern rebels and southern secessionists in the talks.

Yemen says war against terrorism won't stop

A Yemeni official affirmed here on Saturday that Yemen's war against terrorism would not stop, whether through direct confrontation or through intelligence work that was able to stop several operations before they occur. Director of the Presidential office, and Yemen's national security chief Ali Al-Ansi considered the "failed" terrorism operation that targeted the British Ambassador in Sanaa as a failure to Al-Qaeda in Yemen, describing them as "useless". He added that Yemeni forces have captured many Al-Qaeda militants, and their testimonies would be made public after completion of investigations.

Al-Ansi said in an interview published in "Al-Methaq" newspaper issued by the General People's Congress "The security services will continue to prosecute Anwar Awlaqi to surrender voluntarily or be arrested to stand trial." "Yemen will not be a haven for terrorists, bandits, and advocates of ignorance, and will remain an active part of the world alliance against terrorism wherever it exists," Al-Ansi said.

Subsidies biggest danger to the Yemeni economy

Fuel subsidies and tax evasion are the biggest strains on Yemen's finances and need to be dealt with swiftly to allow the impoverished country to turn its economy around, the Yemeni finance minister said. Falling oil production will see economic growth decline to 5 percent in 2011 from a projected 7 percent this year, Nouman Al-Suhaibi said, and the country's fledgling gas industry will not support the economy in 2010 as much as previously expected.

The energy subsidies are a real disaster for Yemen's public finances, not least because they do not actually benefit the poorest in society," Suhaibi said in an interview, adding that Yemen's poorest have no use for energy subsidies, since they do not own cars or have access to electricity. The government will continue with its policy of cutting subsidies gradually to reduce the impact on ordinary people, Suhaibi said. Around 40 percent of Yemenis live on less than \$ 2 a day, and more than half of young men are unemployed.

SAUDI ARABIA

International Front

Saudi committee urged Muslim leaders to back Palestinians

A Saudi committee comprising influential scholars that is responsible for issuing fatwas has called on Muslim leaders to support Palestinians in their fight to stop the atrocities of Israel in their lands, the Saudi Press Agency has reported.

“Muslim rulers should stand by their Palestinian brothers and help them in their efforts to prevent the Jews from carrying out their hostile acts and transgression against the Al-Aqsa Mosque and to end the occupation,” said the statement from the Permanent Committee for Scholarly Studies and Ifta. Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Aziz Al-Asheikh chairs the permanent committee.

Saudi Arabia consults with Bahrain, Qatar over GCC S.G.

Saudi Arabia has exchanged messages with Bahrain and Qatar over the appointment of the new Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretary General. King Hamad Bin Eisa Al-Khalifa of Bahrain and Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the Emir of Qatar, responded Thursday to the initiative of King Abdullah, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, concerning the appointment. The King had earlier Thursday sent messages to the King of Bahrain and Emir of Qatar about the matter. The messages were delivered by Prince Mit'eb Bin Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz, Deputy Commander of the National Guard for Executive Affairs.

King Hamad hails Saudi role in Arab unity

His Majesty King Hamad yesterday received a letter from Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud on strong relations bonding Bahrain and Saudi Arabia and bolstering joint GCC action regionally and internationally. The King received at Gudaibiya Palace Saudi National Guard deputy chief for executive affairs Prince Mita'ab bin Abdullah Al Saud who delivered the letter. He hailed King Abdullah's efforts to unify GCC and Arab ranks and stances. Prince Mita'ab highlighted Saudi's keenness to bolster relations in all fields.

African diplomats underscore expanding ties with Saudi Arabia

The ambassadors of African states recently stressed the excellent and historic relations binding African countries and Saudi Arabia at a function held to celebrate Africa Day 2010. “Such historic and excellent ties have grown through the continuous and direct meetings between Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah and African leaders,” they said in a joint statement issued on the occasion.

They said that on a regional level relations between Africa and Saudi Arabia as well as other Arab countries have been exceptional and that they all have the same stance on the Middle East issue. “Out of respect for the principles of international law, Africa has always been supporting the legitimate Palestinian rights and aspirations for freedom, independence, respect and security,” they said.

Saudi Shoura approves social insurance ties with Yemen

The Shoura Council has in principle approved cooperation on social insurance between Saudi Arabia and Yemen on Monday. A draft memorandum of understanding (MOU)

was passed at a council session presided over by Chairman Abdullah Al-Asheikh. The council's Secretary-General Abdullah Al-Ghamdi said members had approved the draft MOU between the Kingdom's General Organization for Social Insurance (GOSI) and the Yemeni General Corporation for Social Security. Al-Ghamdi added that the two countries enjoy historical ties and the Kingdom was interested in exchanging expertise with Yemen in several areas of mutual interest.

Turkey signs military agreement with Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia and Turkey signed a military agreement here on Monday that aimed at fostering scientific and technical cooperation. The signature ceremony took place at Turkish General Staff headquarters in Ankara, attended by Saudi Deputy Defense Minister Prince Khalid bin Sultan, Turkish Chief of Staff Gen. Ilker Basbug and other officials representing both countries. After the signature, Prince Khalid told the press the deep rooted ties between Turkey and Saudi Arabia were the driving force behind the cooperation agreement.

Saudi King, Merkel to discuss Mideast, bilateral ties

King Abdullah, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, is scheduled to discuss with German Chancellor Angela Merkel Monday a range of issues topped by the Middle East following the beginning of indirect Palestinian-Israeli talks. The discussions are also expected to address means of strengthening Saudi-European relations and Riyadh-Berlin political, economic and trade ties. Speaking ahead of the chancellor's visit, German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle said the Kingdom had a "pioneering" role in achieving peace in the Middle East. "Riyadh has been and still is keen to ensure security in the region," Westerwelle told Okaz. "There is no alternative to the option of the two states of Palestine and Israel."

Social Front

Saudi society blamed for rising unemployment among women

Saudi women who have recently graduated face long-term unemployment due to limited choice of careers available on the job market. In fact, the rate of unemployed Saudi women is increasing. According to the Central Department Of Statistics and Information, the unemployment rate among Saudi women was 28.4 percent in 2009, compared to 26.9 percent in 2008. Culture and tradition sometimes play an important part in rising unemployment among Saudi women, especially when they reject certain jobs such as waitress, hairdresser or cashier.

The Ministry of Labor, Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Human Resources Fund should not be blamed for this problem, says Dr. Aisha Netto, CEO of the Eye-to-Eye optical company and member of the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI). "In Saudi Arabia, most job opportunities are available only for men. This increases the unemployment rate among Saudi women. Officials in governmental bodies

are trying their best to create job opportunities for Saudi women. Unfortunately Saudi society still insists on objecting to these opportunities,” said Netto.

Security, religion block Saudi rights progress

Saudi Arabia has made minor progress on its dismal human rights record but the powerful state security apparatus and the conservative religious regime continue to block real change, Amnesty International said Wednesday.

Despite recently formed human rights bodies and reforms to the justice system, prisoners still face secret and summary justice, women are frequently abused, and faiths other than Sunni Muslim are still unable to worship freely in the country, Amnesty said in its annual report for 2010. “The authorities used a wide range of repressive measures to suppress freedom of expression and other legitimate activities” last year, Amnesty said.

It cited the ongoing practice of detention without charge or trial of people suspected of links to what the Saudis brand as “terrorist” activities.

Saudi Shoura supports Supreme Health Services Council

The Shoura Council recommended the establishment of a Supreme Health Services Council headed by Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah on Sunday at its 26th session chaired by its vice chairman, Bandar Al-Hajjar.

The Shoura's secretary-general, Abdullah Al-Ghamdi, said that the recommendation, which would lead to enhancing health facilities and services across the Kingdom, was passed with a majority of votes. He added that the council would also have representatives from the Ministry of Education for coordination between the two bodies. He recalled that the Council of Ministers had earlier taken a decision to set up a supreme body to supervise health activities throughout the Kingdom.

Lawyers fundamental to effective judiciary: Saudi Justice Minister

Lawyers are fundamental to the justice system in the Kingdom and their importance has been recognized by the country's leadership, according to Dr. Muhammad Bin Abdul Kareem Al-Issa, the Minister of Justice. Al-Issa made the comments while addressing the final session, in Riyadh Sunday, of the Forum of Lawyers and Legal Advisers organized by the Saudi Council of Chambers of Commerce and the Legal Training Center.

He said lawyers play a fundamental role in the Saudi justice system, which is reflected in the tasks they carry out in courts and other judiciary bodies. He also praised the work of the forum in developing the profession. “The forum is unique and important, because it reflects the great efforts made by the lawyers themselves to upgrade the standard of the profession in the Kingdom,” the minister said.

Economic Front

New infrastructure investments to advance Jeddah development plan

Several projects are either currently underway or in advanced stages of planning to achieve an optimal balance among the infrastructure components of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia's "Gateway City". Local government is implementing a comprehensive 20-year re-development program involving initiatives such as the enhancement of the Khozama and Ruwais areas and the rehabilitation of the city's central and historic districts.

Many of the new developments are mega projects such as the SR99.75 billion King Abdullah Economic City and the SR42 billion Jeddah Hills. "Mega projects in Jeddah will see the city and its infrastructure transformed across the board during the next two decades - creating an enormous range of partnership opportunities," said Tareq Telmesani, CEO of Jeddah Development and Urban Regeneration Company (JDURC), a private company set up by Jeddah Municipality to spearhead the city's regeneration projects.

Germany eyes partnership with Saudi Arabia 'beyond oil'

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Wednesday her country was committed to strong relations with Saudi Arabia and the mission she had undertaken was aimed at further boosting trade and investment between the two countries.

Germany wants to invest in more than just oil in Saudi Arabia by partnering in renewable energy, rail transport and other projects, Merkel said Wednesday. She was addressing entrepreneurs at the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI), offering assurances that Germany's economy will remain strong despite the European debt crisis. "I know you look to Europe with a concerned eye after the challenges the euro has faced," she said. "We will make every effort to ensure the stability of the currency by promoting bilateral trade."

Saudi economy forecast to grow 4% in 2010

Saudi Arabia is projected to record a four-percent growth this year on the back of government spending and higher oil production, says the Business Optimism Index (BOI) released here on Saturday by the National Commercial Bank (NCB), in association with Dun and Bradstreet South Asia Middle East Ltd. (D&B).

Releasing the BOI for the second quarter of 2010, Said Al-Shaikh, senior vice president and chief economist of NCB, said that the latest findings revealed that even though business sentiments were not as high as the previous quarter due to the uneven pace of global economic recovery, they were almost as strong, indicating continued recovery in Saudi Arabia. "The results of the survey for the BOI confirm our forecasts that the Saudi economy will expand by 3.5 percent in 2010 from the low 0.15 percent in 2009, with the nonoil sector GDP projected to register a faster growth of 3.8 percent" Al-Shaikh said.

"The Saudi business community surveyed expected improved borrowing conditions, which are consistent with the gradual pickup in banks' lending so far since the beginning of the year," he added.

UAE

International Front

UAE Crown Prince begins three-day visit to Korea

Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, arrives in Seoul today for talks with the South Korean president on topics expected to include nuclear co-operation. During the three-day visit, Sheikh Mohammed is expected to meet President Lee Myung-bak, to discuss a wide range of issues such as the development of the two countries' already strong ties, officials said yesterday. The leaders are likely to discuss nuclear co-operation, according to Korean media reports.

South Korea, UAE sign nuclear safety pact

South Korea and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Tuesday signed a nuclear regulatory pact to set safety guidelines for the building of commercial reactors in the Middle East, Seoul's Yonhap News Agency reported. The deal was signed in Seoul between Vice Science Minister Kim Jung-hyun and Hamad Al Kaabi, the UAE's nuclear ambassador.

The Ministry for Education, Science and Technology said the nuclear safety arrangement is a follow-up to the USD 18.6 billion agreement reached late last year to build four 1,400 megawatt reactors by 2020, according to the report. "The pact calls for South Korea and the UAE to share and check safety requirements, technologies and regulations related to the construction of the reactors in the coming years," an official was quoted as saying. Under the arrangement, Seoul will also help Abu Dhabi set up a nuclear safety control infrastructure, it said, adding that such an arrangement is in line with requirements set by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

UAE buys rifles from South Korea

The UAE has agreed to buy from South Korean companies as much as US\$ 560,000 (Dh2m) worth of specialised assault rifles, in the first defence deal to follow Abu Dhabi's landmark \$ 20.4 billion nuclear accord with the Asian nation. The order is for 40 K11 airburst rifles and makes the UAE the first foreign customer for the weapon. The K11 rifle consists of a semi-automatic 20mm grenade launcher, an underslung assault carbine firing 5.56mm NATO-standard rounds, and a top-mounted, computer-assisted sighting system with integrated laser rangefinder and thermal infrared night-vision capabilities, according to the developers.

India, UAE to expand scope of MoU on labour migration

Indian Overseas Affairs Minister Vayalar Ravi met UAE Labour Minister Saqr Ghobash Saeed Ghobash here on Wednesday as part of the initiatives to renew the memorandum of understanding to streamline the labour mobility between the two countries. The existing MoU was signed in 2006 and is valid till December 2010.

The two sides have agreed to expand the scope of the existing MoU and to usher in more control over the recruitment agencies to avoid cheating of the Indian workers migrating here, Vayalar Ravi told journalists on the sidelines of the interactive session organised by the Community Welfare Department of the Indian Embassy at the India Social Centre.

Merkel in UAE at start of Gulf tour

German Chancellor Angela Merkel arrived yesterday in Abu Dhabi for the first leg of a four-nation Gulf tour and promptly signed a series of accords, including on hydrocarbon sector co-operation. Merkel, who will also visit Bahrain, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, met Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan, the crown prince of Abu Dhabi.

Sheikh Mohamed, the brother of President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahyan whom Merkel is due to meet today, stressed the UAE's readiness to develop its "strategic partnership" with Germany, the official Wam news agency reported. Among the main topics of their meeting was the Middle East peace process as well as regional and global issues, said Wam.

UAE-Germany relations growing, says Khalifa

The President, Shaikh Khalifa and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who is visiting the country on a regional tour, reviewed the bilateral relationship between the two countries at Mushrif Palace.

The President, His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan warmly welcomed the German Chancellor and her entourage, and referred to the cooperation and friendship which have been growing steadily between the two countries. He stressed that the UAE is keen to further consolidate relations with the Federal Republic of Germany to benefit from its developmental experiences, especially in the areas of technology, energy, economy and industry. He reiterated that Germany is an important partner of the emirates, especially in the next period in which the UAE will witness huge transformation regarding the developmental projects in the fields of alternative energy to achieve sustainable development.

UAE, Kazakhstan discuss ways to boost cooperation and bilateral ties

General H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, crown prince of Abu Dhabi and deputy supreme commander of the UAE Armed Forces received here yesterday Prime Minister of Kazakhstan Karim Masimov who is currently visiting the country.

Sheikh Mohammed welcomed the visit of Masimov and his accompanying delegation. He said that the two countries enjoy deep-rooted ties and called for exploring opportunities for furthering cooperation. During the meeting, Sheikh Mohammed and Masimov discussed ways to boost cooperation between private sectors in the two countries and the potential investment opportunities.

Abdullah bin Zayed calls for peaceful resolution of conflicts

UAE Foreign Minister Shaikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan has underlined that the UAE is keen to follow up conditions of peoples across the Arab World in terms of provision of humanitarian and developmental support.

The UAE Minister was speaking at the meetings of 37th session of OIC Foreign Ministers in the Tajik Capital, Dushanbe. He reiterated that the UAE government has been continuing to settle its conflict with Iran, which has been occupying three UAE Islands since 1971, through dialogue and peaceful approaches based on the principles of international law and charter of OIC. "The UAE is still hoping Iran will respond to its repetitive calls to commence dialogue or both resort to International Court of Justice."

He added that upon the directives of The President His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the UAE continues to provide humanitarian assistance and developmental aid to a number of Muslim countries.

Social Front

UAE to adopt three-semester school year in 2010-2011 academic year

As of next academic year 2010-2011, schools will have three instead of two terms, Minister of Education Humaid Al Qattami announced today after the Council for Ministerial Services passed the new plan. The minister told the media today that the start of the duty of the teaching and administrative staff will be deferred to 12th from 5th September 2010.

"Students will come back to classes for the new year on 15th September instead of 12th September," Al Qattami said, adding that the philosophy of reviewing the school time schedule, which will cover government and private schools following the Ministry of Education curricula, was introduced following a thorough study and scientific research conducted by specialised teams which examining the most advanced three-semester learning systems.

Mohammed bin Rashid issues resolution on endowments

His Highness Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, has issued a resolution on endowment resources, categories and regulations of spending from endowment revenues.

The resolution sets resources of endowment in accordance with the laws observed in the UAE, as well as categories such as knowledge, Islamic affairs, orphans and poor people, Al Bir Wal Taqwa (righteousness and piety), health, social affairs and parents endowment. The resolution grants the board of the General Authority for Islamic Affairs and Awqaf (GAIAA) the power to create new categories. The resolution also provides for a set of regulations for payment from endowment revenues.

Economy Front

IMF may revise UAE growth up

The International Monetary Fund, or IMF, may revise up its growth forecast for the UAE in the middle of the year following Dubai World's \$ 23.5 billion debt restructuring settlement with its creditors, IMF Director Masood Ahmed said. The IMF previously predicted that the UAE economy will grow 1.3 per cent this year, after a 0.7 per cent contraction in 2009. "We have done a relatively conservative forecast and depending on what happened on oil production and depending on how quickly the effect of the agreement on Dubai World feed through into credit, then that could lead to a revision of forecast," Ahmed told Khaleej Times in an interview.

UAE-US trade crosses \$ 12 billion in 10 years

The US trade with the UAE has surpassed \$ 12 billion, 600 per cent growth in 10 years, it was revealed by US Ambassador Richard Olsen on Monday. The US is doubling its exports, salvaging the banking sector and easing visa regulations for the UAE, he added.

Attending a Dialogue Session between the US Consulate General in Dubai and the representatives of the local business community regarding US credit facilities, Olsen and his team of experts said that "in 2009 the UAE was the largest Middle East export market for the US with a value of \$ 12 billion. This is even more remarkable when you consider that our total exports in 2000 were just \$ 2.2 billion. So, we've seen nearly 600 percent increases in a decade."

Gas imports from Iran to UAE in pipeline

Crescent Petroleum, the Sharjah-based firm that had resorted to an international arbitration for import of gas from Iran, expects to reach an understanding on the issue and begin imports soon, Chairman of the Board of Crescent Petroleum Hamid D Jafar told Emirates Business, on the sidelines of the Menasa Forum. "By early next year", Jafar said, asked about the timeframe for reaching an understanding and beginning import from Salman gas field.

If the deal goes through, the UAE will be importing 540 million cubic feet of gas per day from this gas field, more than a quarter of its import from the Dolphin pipeline that sources gas from Qatar. The deal is expected to quench the rising thirst for gas in a country that is fast industrialising. "The gas will certainly be a shot in the arm for

emirates like Sharjah," a Dubai-based energy analyst said. The supply was expected to begin from February 11 this year.

Russia dominance under threat as UAE makes plan for Caspian gas

The UAE is tapping its \$ 328bn sovereign wealth fund to invest in gas-rich Turkmenistan, seeking fuel for its own use while potentially challenging Russia's dominance as a supplier to Europe. "We want to invest and we've been conducting negotiations for a long time," UAE Oil Minister Mohamed al-Hamli said in an interview this month in the Turkmen capital, Ashgabat. "We have a special relationship with Turkmenistan. There is a genuine interest and a genuine determination with both countries to exploit this possibility."

Access to Turkmen gas reserves, the world's fourth-largest, would help the UAE curb imports of the fuel as growing demand from power stations outstrips supply. At the same time, the Arab country has a stake in a planned pipeline to Europe, which gets a quarter of its gas from Russia and suffered shortages last year as exporter Gazprom and transit nation Ukraine bickered over prices.

KUWAIT

International Front

GCC keen on peaceful solution of Iran's nuclear file - Kuwait FM

Kuwaiti Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah said Sunday GCC countries were keen on finding a peaceful resolution of the Iranian nuclear file. Sheikh Mohammad, at a joint news conference with GCC Secretary General Abdulrahman Al-Attiyah after the GCC Foreign Ministers' meeting, recalled that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states have repeatedly called on Iran to comply with UN resolutions and honored obligations related to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Brazil and Turkey have recently brokered a deal with Iran to send 1,200 kgs of low-enriched uranium to Turkey to be exchanged with nuclear fuel for Tehran research reactor. Sheikh Mohammad, rotating chairman of the GCC Council, said the GCC foreign ministers looked forward that efforts by Brazil and Turkey pave way for the resolution of the Iranian nuclear file.

Kuwaiti FM to head GCC ministerial meeting in Jeddah

Kuwait's Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah will arrive in Jeddah today to head the 115th meeting of the GCC Ministerial Council. The agenda includes a review of outcomes of meetings held by the specialized ministerial meetings, including the meeting of interior ministers, the 84th meeting of finance and economy ministers, and the first meeting of finance market heads.

They will also discuss military and security reports referred to the Ministerial Council, as

part of joint action. Moreover, the foreign ministers will discuss Bahrain's vision for developing the council, as well as environmental and water issues, dealing with natural disasters, peaceful use of nuclear energy, and developments in strategic economic dialogue with Pakistan, Japan and Azerbaijan.

ISCI chief commends deep Iraq - Kuwait ties

Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) Chairman Ammar Al-Hakim lauded here Monday deep relations between Iraq and Kuwait at both governmental and popular levels.

During a meeting with a Kuwaiti media delegation visiting the Iraqi cities of Najaf and Karbala, he said, "We always remember good relations between both brotherly peoples, and we seek to develop and strengthen them." He hailed the ongoing visit of the Kuwaiti delegation, led by Adnan Al-Rashid and MP Adnan Al-Mutawa, and accompanied by Kuwaiti Ambassador in Baghdad Ali Al-Momen.

He said the visit comes at critical circumstances Iraq is facing, chiefly complications bearing on new government formation efforts, hoping that it would lead to "pushing matters forward." He urged the Kuwaiti ambassador in Baghdad and Iraqi Ambassador in Kuwait Mohammad Hussain Bahr Al-Uloom, who were present in the meeting, to act for finessing outstanding issues between Iraq and Kuwait and for consolidating bilateral political, social, economic and popular bonds.

Kuwaiti Amir, Sierra Leone president hold talks

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received, on Monday at Bayan Palace, President of Sierra Leone Ernest Bai Koroma. The meeting took place in the presence of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The two leaders held summit talks. The Kuwaiti side was represented by His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and top state officials. Sierra Leone was represented by its President and top officials of his government. Acting Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah, in a statement following the talks, said that the two leaders discussed means to boost cooperation between their two countries in all areas, as well as issues of mutual concern.

Kuwait, Qatar discuss bilateral relations

The Heir Apparent H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani with the Emir of Kuwait H H Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmed Al Jaber Al Sabah at Al Bayan Palace in Kuwait yesterday. Talks dealt with bilateral relations and ways of boosting them. Following the meeting, Sheikh Tamim attended a luncheon banquet hosted by the Kuwaiti Emir.

Social Front

Voluntary work innate characteristic of Kuwaitis: PM

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah stressed that voluntary work was an innate characteristic of the Kuwaiti people.

The statement via video came at the final ceremony of a forum held here Wednesday evening on voluntary work in Kuwait and France under His Highness's sponsorship. Voluntary work spreads the sentiments of love of Mankind and mercy and unites societies, he stressed. Kuwait itself was developed by the efforts of volunteers, he said. His Highness emphasized that his country supported civil society organizations because it believed in their ability and major role in contributing to development.

Kuwait government and popular voluntary societies provided aid to poor people around the world regardless of their religion, color, and political or intellectual views, he pointed out. A Kuwait believes that no people could live away from others, regardless of their abilities and resources.

Kuwaiti MPs show support for 'integrity authority'

A Kuwaiti non-governmental organization (NGO) urged Members of Parliament to support and pass legislation to formulate the 'Public Authority for Integrity,' an anti-corruption authority. The NGO spokesman announced that the legislation is crucial for the advancement of the country after the adoption of the huge development plan budget.

Any delay in the adoption of this law will reinforce the fears of Kuwaiti citizens that forces of corruption will control the huge budget," said Salah Al-Ghazali, head of the Kuwaiti Transparency Society. His comments were part of a speech to launch the 'Isn't it time to adopt Anti-corruption laws?' campaign. Al-Ghazali said that the legislation is based on a number of suggestions presented by MPs in the past and covers many anti-corruption policies. "The society has put together four legislations; Anti-Corruption, Financial Liability, Conflict of Interests, and the Informer Protection law. All of these legislations were presented by different MPs in the National Assembly at various times," he added.

Kuwait writer accused of harming national interests

Kuwait charged a prominent author and government critic yesterday with damaging national interests and undermining the status of the emir. Mohamed Abdulqader al-Jassem, also a journalist and lawyer, categorically denied the charges, insisting his trial is purely political. "It is untrue," Jassem said emphatically when criminal court judge Adel al-Huwaidi read out charges pressed by the public prosecution at the start of the trial. "This is an entirely political case from start to finish," said Jassem, speaking from a metal cage in a courtroom overcrowded with family members, human rights activists and more than 20 defence lawyers.

Kuwaiti cabinet agrees establishment of new educational authority

The Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education Dr Moudhi Abdulaziz Al-Humoud announced yesterday that the cabinet approved a draft decree of establishing a "national authority for academic accreditation and quality of education."

She said, commenting on the weekly cabinet meeting held Sunday night, that the new decree named a board of directors for the new authority, headed by the minister of higher education, with the membership of representatives of Kuwait University, the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training, the Private universities Council, and a number of academics of educational institutions, along with three representatives from the private sector.

No urgent need to amend Constitution of Kuwait

The Democratic Forum recently organized a seminar at Al-Menayyes Diwan entitled 'Reform Character before Amending Constitution!' Participants denied the need to amend the Constitution.

Speaking during the seminar, former MP Dr Khaled Al-Wasmi said that the 1981 Parliament indicated the presence of anti-democratic elements in Kuwait. "Thank God, we got rid of that Parliament. Now they are trying to amend the Constitution, which is very risky," he stressed. MP Adel Al-Saraawi stressed that Kuwait's Constitution was well-balanced and was based on popular participation. He added that when first formulated, the Kuwaiti Constitution benefited from other countries' experiences and that it did contain many articles on which Kuwait can build its future.

There is no urgent need to amend the Constitution," he underlined. He pointed out that Kuwait only suffered from harmful democratic practices rather than faulty constitutional articles. "Our Constitution rules Kuwait. It defines the liabilities of each power so that they could all work together toward serving Kuwait," he stressed. He pointed out that most of the suggested amendments were procedure-related.

Economy Front

Sheikh Ahmad, Turkish finance minister discuss common economic affairs

Deputy Premier for Economic Affairs, State Minister for Development Affairs and State Minister for Housing Affairs Sheikh Ahmad Fahad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah met Thursday with Turkish Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek to discuss common economic issues and opening markets in their respective countries.

A statement issued by the deputy premier's office said that the two officials discussed several matters, and that Sheikh Ahmad briefed the Turkish minister on the State development plan and Kuwait's preparations for welcoming international companies to

take part in its implementation. Sheikh Ahmad affirmed Kuwait's keenness for involving as many Turkish companies in the Kuwaiti market as possible, especially with the launch of developmental projects, as part of the State plan. During the meeting, the Kuwaiti deputy premier requested a report in the problems faced by Turkish companies here, so that they may be resolved.

Kuwait passes law to privatise new power plants

Kuwait's parliament yesterday passed a law to set up shareholding companies to build new power and water desalination plants in the first privatisation of the sector in the Gulf state. Thirty-seven MPs, including cabinet ministers, voted for the law while only three lawmakers opposed it in the second and final round of voting. It becomes effective after the emir signs it.

The legislation stipulates that 50 per cent of the company shares will be sold to Kuwaitis in an initial public offering (IPO) and up to 24 per cent will be held by the government and state institutions. The remaining 26 per cent will be auctioned to Kuwaiti firms listed on the bourse or foreign companies approved by the government. The new companies will sell their production to the government based on contracts valid for 40 years. At least 70 per cent of the company staff must be Kuwaiti, according to the legislation.

Inflation in Kuwait result on external factors mainly - minister

Commerce and Industry Minister Dr. Ahmad Al-Haroun stressed on Tuesday that the inflation rate in Kuwait was mainly because of external factors. The minister's speech came during a session at the National Assembly (NA) to discuss the increase of food and construction materials' prices and a report of the parliamentary financial and economic affairs committee on that issue. Al-Haroun said that the inflation rate was not controllable because of the openness of the Kuwaiti market and economy, in addition to several internal factors like the consumers' eating habits and the population's increase. He pointed out that the Commerce and Industry Ministry issued a number of decisions to include new kinds of food, milk, and children's food on the list of subsidized good to reduce the negative effects of the increase of prices.

OMAN

International Front

Qaboos visits Qatar, Saudi, Egypt today

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos will pay private visits today to the State of Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the Arab Republic of Egypt during which he will discuss with the leaders, strong fraternal relations binding the Sultanate with its sisterly countries and means of enhancing the existing co-operation with them to serve the joint interests of the Omani people and peoples of these countries, in addition to, consulting

and exchanging viewpoints on various issues, the latest regional and international developments.

Oman, Pakistan discuss ties

His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, received here yesterday Syed Khursheed Ahmed Shah, Pakistan Minister of Labour, Manpower and Overseas. HH Sayyid Fahd and Shah reviewed means of promoting co-operation between the Sultanate and Pakistan in the field of manpower, exchanging expertise in technical and technological disciplines and activating bilateral agreements and memoranda of understanding. The meeting also touched on current regional and international developments. Shah expressed his delight at the visit and the level of consultations. He affirmed his country's appreciation for the achievements that the Sultanate has made, thanks to the enlightened leadership of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. He expressed his satisfaction with the good outcome of the talks he had with senior Omani officials.

Oman, Pakistan plan MoU on labour training

Oman and Pakistan yesterday underlined the necessity of familiarising Pakistani manpower with the laws and systems before their arrival in the Sultanate. An official session of talks held at the Oman Tourism College yesterday between the Sultanate and Pakistan praised the Sultanate for providing the Pakistani manpower the opportunity to amend their situation without fines and encouraging them to benefit from the permit period.

The talks chaired by Shaikh Abdullah bin Nasser al Bakri, Manpower Minister, and Syed Khursheed Ahmed Shah, Pakistan's Labour, Manpower and Overseas Minister, also stressed on the importance of signing a memorandum of understanding on labour and training. The number of Pakistani manpower working in the private sector in the Sultanate as at the end of April 2010 stood at 147,636. The Pakistani minister appreciated Oman's role in protecting the rights of foreign manpower and defending their interests.

Social Front

Yes to scientific research in Oman

Issuing the Law of Research Council by the Royal Decree No. 30/2010 was a right move to give scientific research an important position in the government plans. The question is: Is there enough budget earmarked to support the important projects and programmes for scientific research? Will there be efforts to train young efficient Omanis inside and outside the Sultanate at research centres in the developed countries?

The Research Council plans include developing an integrated strategy for scientific research in the Sultanate, support individual inventions and projects according to the priorities of the strategy, support publishing of valuable scientific works, creating a national database for scientific research and approving policy and programmes for

qualifying national cadres in the areas of scientific research along with other competencies, set in article 5 of the law.

Child rights to be included in Oman school curriculum

Child rights will soon be made a part of school and college syllabuses in Oman under a collaborative project among Unicef, the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and the Ministry of Education. Officials said the move was part of the country's commitment towards promoting rights and welfare of children.

A curriculum has already been developed for students pursuing a degree in education at SQU with the focus on human rights conventions, with a particular emphasis on the rights of children. "The child rights course will also assist current teachers teaching at Ministry of Education in enhancing their skills in integration of Child Right Convention (CRC) principles in the various education curricula," a spokesperson for the Unicef office in Muscat said.

Economy Front

Plans to make Oman top tourism destination by 2020

Dr Rajha bint Abdulameer bin Ali, Minister of Tourism, in her ministry's statement before the Majlis Ash'shura here yesterday, reviewed five main topics of relevance to the sector during the current stage. She spoke about: (a) the implications of the global financial crisis to the tourism sector in the Sultanate, (b) the policies undertaken to encourage the setting up of projects in regions beyond Muscat and main cities, (c) the salient features of programmes expected to be included in the 2011-2015 8th Five Year Plan, (d) the sector's contribution to the GDP and employment of citizens and (e) the policies to be pursued for promoting the Sultanate as a tourist destination. 8th Five Year Plan projects:

Speaking about the salient features of the 8th Five Year Plan, Dr Rajha said, as per the Economic Vision 2020, they envisage a long-term strategy themes, which are 1) reinforcing opportunities for sustainable tourism development with emphasis on cultural and environmental conservation and achieving maximum economic benefits for local communities where the tourism projects come up; 2) expanding the role of inbound tourism (for visitors within the Sultanate); 3) upgrading tourism promotion; 4) quality management of tourism services; 5) giving priority in employment in tourism projects to local citizens; 6) reassessment of incentives offered to investors; 7) developing non-classical tourism projects like caves, environmental tourism, mountain climbing, etc; 8) increasing training and education in the field of tourism; and 9) increasing the number of hotel rooms and opening more tourism projects to bring the prices down

Oman's IT market to witness robust growth, says SAP

The Sultanate is investing significantly in information technology as part of its 'Digital Oman Initiative' and SAP is committed to driving innovation in the country, said Segio Maccotta, managing director, SAP Middle East and North Africa. Speaking on the sidelines of the SAP executives' meeting held at InterContinental Hotel on Monday, Maccotta said there was massive growth in the information technology market of the Sultanate. Quoting from a report by the Business Monitor International (BMI), he said the Sultanate's information technology market size grew from \$ 327 million in 2010 from \$ 308 million in 2009. BMI expected the market to grow five per cent between 2010 and 2014, said Segio.

Maccotta said the country's economy was relatively well-positioned for a quick recovery from the global credit crunch, but companies across sectors must open themselves to the new realities shaping the markets today if they really want to stand out. "SAP possess vast industry know-how that can help Omani business take a holistic approach to solving key business challenges and establish themselves as regional and future global players," said Maccotta.

BAHRAIN

International Front

Bahrain nominates new candidate to head GCC

Bahrain nominated a new candidate to head the Gulf Cooperation Council on Friday, Bahrain's news agency said, responding to mediation efforts by Saudi Arabia to calm a Qatar-Bahrain row over a previous nominee. Bahrain said it would nominate public security chief Abdul Latif bin Rashid Al Zayani as Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a post that rotates between the six nations of the loose economic and political bloc. Analysts say tension has been high since Bahrain initially nominated Mohammad Al Mutawa, a former Bahraini information minister widely said to be disliked by Qatar for his role in a territorial dispute between the two states.

Bahraini, German leaders seek closer ties

Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa met here Thursday visiting German Chancellor Angela Merkel on ways and means of further promoting and reinforcing cooperative relations between Bahrain and Germany. During the meeting, the Bahraini king hailed bilateral relations as historical and close, pointing to both sides' willingness to develop them in various domains. He hoped that the ongoing visit by the German chancellor, which is part of her regional tour, could lead to closer political, economic, trade and investment relations between Kuwait and Germany.

US to double size of navy base in Bahrain

Construction began yesterday on doubling the size of the US Navy base in Bahrain, with digging beginning on a 70-acre site leased from the Bahraini government. The four-phase, \$ 580mn project will massively increase the military capabilities of the US 5th Fleet based there, according to US officials. “The 60-year long relationship the US Navy has had with Bahrain has benefited the US, Bahrain, and the entire region. Today’s ceremony is a demonstration of America’s commitment to a common shared future,” US ambassador to Bahrain, Adam Ereli, said during the groundbreaking ceremony at Mina Salman port.

Social Front

Bahrain announces amnesty for illegals

The Bahrain government on Tuesday announced an amnesty scheme for illegal expatriate workers so that they could leave the country without attracting any legal action or hefty fines. Announcing the amnesty at a press conference here, Shaikh Ahmed bin Isa Al Khalifa, Assistant Undersecretary for General Directorate of Nationality, Passport and Residence, said the scheme was applicable only to those illegal workers who would like to leave the country voluntarily as part of what he called ‘Easy Exit’ project. However, illegal workers would not be allowed to regularise their status and stay back in the country, he pointed out.

Bahrain to launch anti-domestic violence campaign

Protect and don’t hurt me is the theme of an anti-domestic violence campaign which will be observed throughout this summer in Bahrain. Organised by the Public Committee Against Domestic Violence at the Bahrain Women’s Union, the campaign will target all family members, with greater focus on children. Youngsters who are prone to abuse and accidents in outdoor activities will be targeted with a series of workshops to teach them how to protect themselves.

Bahrain Women’s Union spokesperson Fatima Rabai said on Monday the campaign initially started on Saturday with a workshop for parents and children to discuss domestic violence. She said actual activities of the campaign will start from June. “We will be holding monthly workshops, each of which will target a particular district to cover maximum number of children,” she said while highlighting that associating parents and their children would help correct wrong practices in family relations that could affect psychological health of youngsters.

Call to resolve Al Jazeera row

A Bahraini journalists' leader yesterday called for an agreement to be reached over the issue of Al Jazeera satellite channel's activities in Bahrain. Bahrain Journalists Association deputy chairman Faisal Abdulla Shaikh said that it was in the best interests

of all that the dispute is immediately resolved. He made the comments as a temporary ban on the channel reporting from Bahrain remained in place for the seventh day yesterday.

The ban was imposed on May 18 after Bahrain's Information Ministry reported the channel had violated professional norms. It decided to temporarily freeze the operations of its office in response to Al Jazeera's "violation of professional norms and not abiding by the laws and rules that regulate Press and publishing". Mr Shaikh, who is also a leading columnist, said that he hoped all parties would sit and resolve their dispute. "Everyone in Bahrain wants the dispute to end. I hope that will happen soon."

Bahraini women to step up nationality campaign

Bahraini women married to foreigners have vowed to step in during parliamentary elections to be held this year to pressure the government to amend in the nationality law. During a meeting between the Bahraini women married to foreigners and representatives of the Nationality Campaign, a panel of eight women was formed to use power of their vote to get the law amended.

They warned of staging a boycott of the election if their demands were not met. The women decided to coordinate their efforts through the panel of eight of them to visit election campaigning sites, mainly tents erected in neighbourhoods to push for Bahraini nationality for their children similar to the children of male citizens married to foreigner women.

Economy Front

Panel call to back Bahraini farmers

The National Initiative for Agricultural Development yesterday convened its first meeting. Her Royal Highness Princess Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa, wife of His Majesty King Hamad and Supreme Council for Women chairwoman presided. His Majesty's personal representative and Public Commission for the Protection of Marine Resources, Environment and Wildlife president Shaikh Abdulla bin Hamad Al Khalifa attended.

The panel also includes Municipalities and Agriculture Minister Dr Juma Al Ka'abi and chief executives of leading national companies, banks, Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry and agronomists. The session asserted the importance of mobilising efforts to promote Bahraini farmers.

Bahrain's transshipment container moves increase

Bahrain's General Organisation of Sea Ports (GOP) yesterday announced "an unprecedented rise in the transshipment container moves" during the past 12 months. The total number of TEU's handled at Khalifa bin Salman Port (KBSP) during the first 12 months increased by 13.2 per cent. This is the first annual performance statistics for

KBSP, which successfully completed one year of operations in April this year. In a statement, the company said: "The statistics reveal a remarkable upward curve in the port's commercial and operational activities with an unprecedented rise in the transshipment container moves since the transition to KBSP from Mina Salman, the kingdom's main port for more than 50 years." According to the statistics, KBSP has greatly improved transshipment through Bahrain, which has increased significantly.

\$ 350m Bahrain-Saudi pipeline plan on track

The design and route of a massive new pipeline to bring crude oil from Saudi Arabia to Bahrain will be completed later this year, Oil and Gas Affairs Minister and National Oil and Gas Authority (Noga) chairman Dr Abdulhussain Mirza said yesterday. The \$ 350 million project, which is expected to be completed within a year, will ensure that the Bahrain Petroleum Company (Bapco) refinery in Sitra receives around 350,000 barrels of oil a day, said Dr Mirza. Speaking after opening the Middle East Petrotech 2010 at the Bahrain International Exhibition and Convention Centre (BIEC), he said the project is being undertaken to expand and replace the existing capacity and an old pipeline. "The 114-km pipeline will use a safer route that avoids going through inhabited areas and will also use state-of-the-art technology."

QATAR

International Front

Qatar emir pardons Saudis involved in 1996 coup

Qatar's emir has pardoned a group of Saudis for their involvement in an attempted coup to overthrow him in 1996, the country's foreign ministry said on Tuesday. "In response to the desire of the custodian of the two holy shrines, Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, Qatar's emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, issued an emiri decision to pardon a number of convicts charged for a failed coup d'etat," the ministry said. The statement did not specify the number of convicts, nor say what their sentences were.

Qatar's deputy premier meets UK counterpart

Abdullah bin Hamad Al-Attiyah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Energy and Industry of the State of Qatar, a UK official said. The two officials discussed the deep cultural and economic partnership between the UK and Qatar, including strategic relationship in the energy sector. "This meeting signifies the importance the Government places on building close ties with Gulf partners," according to a brief statement issued after the meeting.

Qatari FM holds joint press conference with Chancellor Merkel

Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabr Al-Thani said he had discussed during his meeting on Wednesday with visiting German Chancellor

Angela Merkel issues of interest to the region as well as the global economic situation, especially in Europe. In a joint press conference with Chancellor Merkel, Qatari PM added that Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani will meet on Thursday with the visiting German Chancellor to discuss the political and economic issues of regional interest.

Al-Thani described his talks with Merkel as "good" and it reflects the spirit of understanding and friendship between the two countries, stressing the importance of Merkel's visit to Qatar. "We consider Germany to be most important partner to Qatar in investment whether locally or in Germany." He said. He then welcomed the German Chancellor's assurances about the single European currency.

Qatar Cabinet praises GCC achievements

The Cabinet, which met under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister H E Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabor Al Thani yesterday praised significant achievements of the GCC on its 29th anniversary. The Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs H E Sheikh Nasser bin Mohamed bin Abdul Aziz Al Thani addressed the media following the meeting.

At the outset of the meeting the Cabinet, on the occasion of the 29th anniversary of the GCC foundation, praised the steps and achievements accomplished by the GCC, which pushed its drive toward broader scopes and contributed effectively to enhance relations between the region's states and peoples.

Qatar Emir, former Iraqi PM hold talks

HH the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani receiving former Iraqi prime minister and head of the Iraqiya coalition, Iyad Allawi, at the Al Wajbah Palace yesterday. They reviewed a number of issues of common concern. Later yesterday, Allawi left Doha ending a two-day Qatar visit.

Qatar, Kuwait discuss bilateral ties

HH the Heir Apparent Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani met the Crown Prince of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah at his residence in Kuwait City yesterday. They discussed bilateral relations and ways of enhancing them. They also reviewed a number of issues of common concern. The meeting was attended by members of the official delegation accompanying the Heir Apparent. Later at Qatar's embassy headquarters the Heir Apparent received Qatari students, who are studying in a military college in Kuwait.

Former Iraqi PM in Doha for talks

Former Iraqi prime minister Iyad Allawi, whose Iraqiya List won the most seats in the March parliamentary elections, arrived in Doha yesterday to discuss with Qatari officials

Iraqi and regional developments. Allawi told Qatar News Agency that Iraq is passing through a “crucial phase of its history, so such tours come to put the Arab leaders in the picture,” in turn enabling these leaders to participate “in maintaining the safety of Iraq and the region.” “We are in the last mile on the way to becoming a stable country,” Allawi added. Tension is rising in Iraq as no signs of a new government to be formed soon more than two months after the elections.

Hamad bin Khalifa, Sambi review bilateral ties

HH the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani received Sunday a telephone call from President Ahmed Abdullah Sambi of Comoros. Bilateral ties and issues of mutual interest were reviewed during the call.

Qatar Emir reviews ties with Jordan and Djibouti

HH the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani yesterday received a telephone call from King Abdullah II of Jordan. They reviewed relations between the two countries and regional developments. Separately, the Emir phoned Djibouti’s President Ismail Omar Guelleh yesterday. They reviewed bilateral relations.

Social Front

Sheikha Mozah stresses humility, patience

HH Sheikha Mozah Nasser al-Misnad, the chairperson of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF), addressed yesterday morning the graduating students of Virginia Commonwealth University in the US. “We as human beings, carry a potential within us which is greater than any technology and that our minds are more powerful than any computer,” she said.

HH Sheikha Mozah stressed that “what unites us as humans are our shared virtues, our compassion, and a desire to carve a mark on this world. It is those virtues which transcend any technological wonders”.

Economy Front

Qatar gas export to US may be cut, says al-Attiyah

Qatar may end up exporting just 6mn metric tonnes a year (mty) of LNG to the US after diverting as much as 20mn mty to other countries, Qatar’s Deputy Prime Minister HE Abdullah bin Hamad al-Attiyah said in an interview published yesterday. Al-Attiyah said that Qatar “may divert 12-20mn mty” away from the US market. “This means our gas exports to the US would remain in the range of 6mn mty”, he said in the interview published in the Middle East Economic Survey.

To date, Qatari LNG exports to the US have been well below those levels, reaching just 60,000mt in 2008 and 260,000mt in 2009. “We have agreed with China to export 5mn mt/year and with Poland for 1mn mty,” al-Attiyah said. We are also negotiating to export an additional 7mn mty to China, and to India an additional 4mn mty. There are negotiations with other Asian markets for an additional 3-4mn mty.”

Ashghal signs contracts for QR2bn projects

Qatar’s Public Works Authority (Ashghal) yesterday rolled out another set of projects aimed at upgrading the existing infrastructure across the country. It signed contracts for the execution of five projects, worth QR2.13bn, with various companies who were selected after the bidding process, officials said. The projects include the Doha and Rayyan Sewerage lines Phase I (Mesaimmer), Phase II (Ain Khalid), Doha South Sewerage Treatment Works Expansion Phase II, Al-Ruwais Port Expansion Works and renovation of Qatar Radio & Television Corporation Complex.

Qatar Airways named among top three carriers

Qatar Airways has been named among the top three airlines in the world at the latest Skytrax World Airline Awards 2010 held in Hamburg, Germany. The airline’s global ranking among more than 200 international airlines rose to number three in the world—up from fourth spot last year—further cementing its stature as a world leading airline.

Qatar Airways, which remains one of a select-few carriers with a Skytrax Five Star ranking, also claimed the World’s Best Business Class award in one of the most hotly contested categories. The airline’s Business Class catering was recognised separately as the best in the world. Qatar Airways earned the title Best Airline in the Middle East for a fifth consecutive year and became the first airline to receive the Staff Service Excellence Award for the Middle East.

Top banker highlights Qatar's energy potential

R Seetharaman, Group CEO of Doha Bank, gave an outlook on the global energy in the light of current global developments at the the Euro-Arab Dialogue on Private Sector Participation in Infrastructure held at Steigenberger Frankfurter Hof Frankfurt am Main, Frankfurt.

The event was co-hosted by the Union of Arab Banks and the Maleki Group. The two-day conference addressed Water Infrastructure and Global Energy Infrastructure which is of strategic importance to Arab world and Europe. Seetharaman said: “Following two years of sharp declines, world oil demand is expected to return to growth in 2010. Downward risk factors that may put pressure on oil demand include the pace of the economic recovery in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), especially in the US. Global gas demand is expected to increase in future. The power sector is expected to be the largest driver of gas demand in all regions.”