

**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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SAUDI ARABIA

International Front

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- **Obama, Saudi King Abdullah to meet at White House June 29**
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Social Front

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Economy Front

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UAE

International Front

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- **Abu Dhabi to host session on fighting nuclear terror**
- **UAE keen on EU help to fight human trafficking**
- **UAE shuts 40 firms for illegal trade with Iran**
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- **Hamdan Bin Zayed reiterates UAE's commitment to help refugees worldwide**
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Social Front

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- **Mohammed bin Rashid endorses by-laws for federal human resources**
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Economy Front

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- **Dubai Economic Forum to open in Seoul**
- **Abu Dhabi inflation climbs 3 per cent**

KUWAIT

International Front

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- **ILO praises Kuwait for new decisions on labor**
- **'Kuwaiti-Syrian media forum to boost historic relations'**
- **Kuwait plans more health cooperation with Germany**
- **UN praises Kuwait's support for refugees**
- **Kuwait eyes greater educational cooperation with Singapore**
- **Kuwait asks Lebanon not to extradite citizen to Iraq**
- **Kuwait, Japan to deepen cooperative relations**
- **Pakistan, Kuwait discuss strengthening relations**

Social Front

- **Al-Kharafi receives three requests for special parliamentary sessions**
- **Afasi defends Kuwait human rights record**
- **Kuwait parliament speaker urges national unity**
- **Kuwaiti prince shot dead**

Economy Front

- **Kuwait's crude oil exports to China down 42.3 percent**
- **Kuwait pledges \$ 100m to support Mauritania**
- **Kuwait, Tunisia sign three trade, customs-related deals**
- **Kuwait to host agricultural meeting**
- **Kuwaiti parliament to discuss power issue**
- **Kuwait backs creative youth: Minister of Commerce and Industry**
- **Kuwait calls for finding new energy strategies**

OMAN

International Front

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- **Oman emerges most successful Arab country**
- **King Hamad, Qaboos discuss bilateral ties**
- **Oman-UK relations reviewed**
- **UK defence studies team arrives in Oman**
- **Sultan Qaboos, Shaikh Sabah to discuss bilateral ties**
- **Oman, Russia co-operation in higher education explored**
- **Human rights panel assured of co-operation: Oman**
- **Oman to host GCC disaster control panel meeting**

Economy Front

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- **Institutional investors keen on Oman's capital market**
- **Oman-Brunei discuss co-operation in key areas**
- **Oman-Tunisia boat factory deal inked**
- **Five MoUs, programmes to enhance Oman-Tunisia ties**

BAHRAIN

International Front

- **Bahrain beats UN deadline**
- **Bahrain 'keen on stability'**
- **Bahrain vow to boost Iran ties**
- **Bahrain reforms push hailed**
- **King Hamad, Qaboos discuss bilateral ties**
- **Detained Bahrain fishermen will be released: Qatari Shura Council**
- **BD2.3m Bahrain lifeline for Gaza**
- **Bahrain backs bid to boost Gulf stability**
- **Qatar-Bahrain relations reviewed**
- **Bahrain plan space satellite with Russia**

Social Front

- **Safeguarding human rights in Bahrain**
- **204 candidates for Bahrain local, general polls**

Economy Front

- **Financial crisis clips wings of Bahrain investment houses**
- **Bahrain' expo industry surges despite global crisis**
- **Bahrain International Air show preparations reviewed**
- **Bahrain signs accords to boost trade with US**
- **Bahrain' privatisation plan rapped**

QATAR

International Front

- **Qatar signs IRENA pact**
- **\$ 10mn emergency aid for Darfur areas by Qatari govt**
- **Qatar 'committed to strengthening' rights panel**
- **Qatar Cooperates with Bosnia-Herzegovina in the Spheres of Security**
- **Qatar, Iran discuss bilateral ties**
- **Qatar hails action plan to end child soldier recruitment**
- **US hails Qatar Emir's mediation efforts**
- **Qatar reviews ties with Jordan and Iran**
- **Qatar, Syria seek stronger security cooperation**
- **Qatar region's most peaceful nation: Study**
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Economy Front

- **Work starts on Doha Metro's first station**
- **Qatar: Lusail Expressway project tender soon**
- **Call for more investment in Qatar' transport sector**
- **Qatar 'to become largest overseas property investor'**
- **Qatari market important, says top US trade official**

SUMMARY

The European Union (EU) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) last week celebrated 22 years of their relationship by launching a three-year Joint Action Programme (JAP) to move forward to stronger cooperation with confidence and optimism. Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, expressed the common buoyant mood of the occasion. "This is a momentous event. Relations between the EU and GCC could not have been better," he told a press conference at the end of the 20th EU-GCC Joint Ministerial Council in Luxembourg last Monday. Sheikh Dr. Mohammad chaired the meeting as Kuwait holds the current GCC Presidency. It was in this tiny European country that the GCC-EU Cooperation Agreement was signed in 1988. The agreement came into force in 1990. Analysts consider the endorsement of the JAP as a sign of very significant shift in ties between the 27-member European bloc and the six Arab states of the Gulf. A joint communique released after the council meeting noted that the JAP "reflects a shared ambition to reinforce cooperation in a number of key strategic areas of mutual interest, including economic, financial and monetary cooperation; investment, trade, energy and the environment, transport, industry, telecommunications and information technology, education and scientific research, and culture and mutual understanding." Some observers have been critical of the EU policy towards the GCC saying that Brussels has not given the priority or the importance that the Gulf region deserves. As one British analyst commented, "the Gulf has long been something of a backwater of EU foreign policy. It has long appeared important but never really urgent in the eyes of European diplomats". But the EU has now realized that in this era of globalization and an increasingly integrated world economy, regional groupings like the GCC are playing a significant and growing political and economic role which cannot be ignored. The 19th meeting

of the heads of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations' customs and coastguards bodies ended yesterday, with the delegates unanimously agreeing to strengthen communication among the GCC countries' land and sea border stations and to utilize the latest information and communications technology (ICT). The delegates were urged to use the trans-regional optical fiber cable network which is expected to be put in place shortly as soon as their respective interior ministries begin using it, according to a statement issued by Kuwait's Ministry of Interior (MoI) following the conclusion of the meeting. The delegates also agreed to increase the number of maritime patrol operations to combat the increase in seaborne criminal activities, such as robbery, piracy and attempts to illegally enter GCC member states, and to strengthen their joint capacity-building programs. Among the other business conducted at the meeting was a review of the decisions taken at the recent meetings of GCC interior ministers and of experts from the GCC ministries of interior, defense and communications. President Barack Obama will welcome King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia at the White House on June 29, White House spokesman Robert Gibbs announced on Sunday. Obama "looks forward to discussing with King Abdullah the strengthening of bilateral ties between the United States and Saudi Arabia as well as a range of common concerns related to Gulf Security, peace in the Middle East, and other regional and global matters," Gibbs said in a brief statement. US Ambassador to Saudi Arabia James Smith said Wednesday that the Kingdom and his country would make combined efforts to counter challenges such as terrorism that face the two countries. He described Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah's upcoming visit to the US as "very important." Speaking to reporters after visiting Naif Arab University of Security Sciences in Riyadh, the ambassador commended Saudi Arabia's efforts in combating terrorism. "The Kingdom and the US will face these dangers together," he said, adding that the king's visit would contribute to confronting these challenges. King Abdullah is scheduled to visit the US soon after attending the G20 summit in Toronto on June 26-27. His talks with US President Barack Obama will focus on the prospects of reviving the Middle East peace process and strengthening bilateral relations. The Arab peace initiative, which has been welcomed by all countries except Israel, is the brainchild of King Abdullah. Obama will host Saudi King Abdullah in Washington on June 29, the White House said. The Ministry of Interior (MoI) is keen to boost cooperation and coordination with the European Union (EU) in various security fields with particular emphasis on fighting human trafficking, a senior UAE official said. "The UAE is among the first countries in the region which issued a federal law on combating human trafficking," Lt. General Saif Al Shafaar, Interior Ministry Undersecretary, said on Monday during a meeting with consuls of the EU accredited to the UAE, led by Consul of Spain in the UAE, Vicente Cacho . He told the European Union diplomats that the Ministry has set up several specialised units for human rights and trafficking in persons and social support shelters for victims of these crimes. "By doing so, the UAE has become a key reference to other countries seeking to draw lessons from its experiment in this respect, he added. Authorities in the United Arab Emirates have closed down 40 companies for selling products to Iran in violation of UN sanctions on Iran. Analysts said the move would have little impact on the estimated \$ 8 billion in trade between the UAE and Iran. The 40 companies that were shut down reportedly had been found to be trading strategic dual purpose goods, good which could be used in both civilian or military production, and other dangerous material. The UN has barred these goods as part of sanctions against Iran over its alleged nuclear program. On June 9, the United Nations Security Council slapped on Iran a fourth round of sanctions which now bar dealings with firms linked to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. Christian Koch, director of international studies at the Gulf Research Center in

Dubai, told The Media Line that the crackdown was part of a national strategy. "This is certainly one step, although the commitment to enforce United Nations sanctions has been there from the very beginning," Koch said. "There is awareness within the United Arab Emirates that there are Iranian front companies set up in the free zones. This is a concerted move to try to undermine those companies involved in possible illegal transactions," Koch added. "It is also to see what companies are actually doing what, and closing those down that are not doing anything." An estimated 400,000 Iranians live in the United Arab Emirates and the trade flow between the two countries is worth some \$ 8 billion annually. "In the latest official figures from the UAE authority for 2009, we can see that imports from Iran was negligible but total exports represented almost \$ 8 billion," Philippe Dauba-Pantanacce, senior economist with Standard Chartered Bank, told The Media Line. "With 92 percent of this being re-exports. This represents 13.2 percent of the total exports from the UAE." he said. "I would certainly argue that the pressure on the UAE to put a lid on its commerce with Iran could put a strain on these exchanges but might also translate into a diminishing part of the actual trade translated into the official figures," Dauba-Pantanacce said. Kuwait signed here Wednesday a Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC) with the US Government on nuclear safeguards and other nonproliferation topics. The MOC was signed by Secretary General of the Kuwait National Nuclear Energy Committee (KNNEC) Dr. Ahmad Bishara and the Administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) Thomas D'Agostino during a ceremony held at the Department of Energy. The MOC proposes cooperation in nuclear legislation and regulations; human resource planning and modeling; nuclear safeguards and security; radiation protection; environmental, safety and health issues; low- and intermediate-level radioactive waste management; reactor operations, safety and best practices. During the ceremony, D'Agostino said "it is clear that both of our countries recognize the importance of preventing nuclear proliferation, and keeping dangerous nuclear materials out of the hands of terrorists and proliferators. "This agreement is an important milestone further underscoring the commitment of the United States and Kuwait to address the global challenges of nuclear nonproliferation, safeguards and security," he added. Lt Gen Malik bin Sulaiman al Maamari, Inspector General of Police and Customs, received here yesterday the delegation of the Royal College of Defence Studies in the United Kingdom headed by Sir Jeffrey James. The two sides reviewed relations and various aspects of co-operation. The meeting was attended by Maj Gen Salim bin Mussalam Qatan, Assistant Inspector General of Police and Customs, and senior officers of the Royal Oman Police. Delegation visits SAF Museum: The delegation also visited the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) Museum yesterday. The guests were briefed on the SAF's progress under the prosperous reign of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. The guest admired the beauty of the building and Oman's rich heritage. Meanwhile, Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Under-Secretary of for Commerce and Industry, received the delegation here yesterday. They discussed issues of common concern. The Sultanate will host a meeting on Monday and Tuesday on the establishment of a GCC Oman to host GCC disaster control panel meeting. The meeting, to be organised by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs, will study the Sultanate's experience in the handling natural and environmental disasters. The technical committee entrusted with the project will meet with Lt Gen Malik bin Sulaiman al Maamari, Inspector General of Police and Customs and Chairman of the National Committee for Civil Defence, and Mohammed bin Khamis al Araiimi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs. The centre, due to be set up in Kuwait, is expected to enhance the GCC states preparedness and rapid response. Bahrain yesterday stressed its firm commitment to promote bilateral relations with Iran. "The kingdom stands firmly against all that

compromises these solid relations," Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa said. He was speaking as he received Iranian Ambassador Hussain Amir Abdullahyan. He also slammed anti-Iranian media reports, dismissing them as "totally unacceptable". "These stances do not reflect His Majesty King Hamad's directives," Shaikh Khalid asserted. HE Qatar's Assistant Foreign Minister for Follow-Up Affairs Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Rumaihi, who is currently visiting Tehran, has met with Adviser to the Deputy President of the Islamic Republic of Iran's economic affairs Agha Mohammad Discussions during the meeting dealt with means of strengthening bilateral relations in all domains. HE Assistant Foreign Minister for Follow up Affairs chairs the Qatari side to the meetings of the joint technical committee on the maritime border between the two countries, which began yesterday in Tehran and lasts for two days. The Iranian side is chaired by the Director General of the Legal and International Affairs at the Iranian Foreign Ministry Benahi Azer.

Council, has questioned the contribution of the domed chamber's backbenchers and asked for ways to be found to involve them more in the Council's debates. Aal Al-Sheikh heard during the Shoura's session on Monday Council member Yousuf Al-Maimani express his dismay at his distant seating position in the chamber which he said did not give him and his colleagues in the vicinity the chance to take part in debates. Aal Al-Sheikh responded by likening the situation to a school. "In the last year and a half since the beginning of the Shoura's fifth term we have not felt a large presence in debates from those seated at the back," he said. "It's just like a school classroom!" Aal Al-Sheikh asked that the issue be addressed after the Shoura's summer holidays. The Shoura (Consultative) Council Sunday approved the establishment of the National Commission for the Protection of Integrity and Combating Corruption that was first approved by the Council of Ministers in February 2007. The approval came after the Council listened to the views of the Foreign Affairs Committee on the UN Agreement for Combating Corruption. This agreement has been reconsidered in the light of the content of the National Strategy for Protecting Integrity and Combating Corruption. The committee recommended approving the UN Agreement for Combating Corruption. The Shoura Council also approved the recommendations of the Education Affairs and Scientific Research Committee on the annual report of the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST) for the year 2007-08. The recommendations include supporting efforts of KACST to develop its capabilities to serve the strategic goals of the Kingdom; to draw up a mechanism that guarantees the availability of information on science and technology indices; to study the stagnation in scientific activity in the Kingdom; and to lay down practical plans to boost this activity. His Highness Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, has endorsed by-laws of the federal human resources laws. The move comes within the government's efforts to establish clear standards and effective managerial governmental measures to develop human resources, clarify duties and rights of employees in the federal government and provide an appropriate work environment for all employees, who number about 80,000. The provisions of the new bylaws will be applicable to all staff in the federal agencies covered by the decision. The human resources departments in these federal agencies will implement the law as published in the Official Gazette. The Federal Authority for Human Resources authority could be referred to in case anything hampers the implementation of the new executive regulation. The new by-law includes all regulations, details on the rights and functions of employees, employment operations, evaluation, motivation rules, leaves, penal codes and others pertinent to human resources at the federal agencies. Kuwait's National Assembly

Speaker Jassem Al-Kharafi on Tuesday urged the need to apply "wisdom and dialogue" in solving any potential differences that could cause unrest in the country. Al-Kharafi responding to reporters on reactions to the issue of the Islamic Studies school exam, stressed the importance of not escalating sectarian issues because "Kuwait would be better off not having to handle such matters." He indicated to a meeting of local newspapers Editor-in-Chiefs not to allow the distribution of statements that could cause conflict in the country. "We hope for compliance on this stance in commitment to national unity," Al-Kharafi said. Law enforcement officials are discussing ways to strengthen Bahrain's safeguards against alleged cases of torture. Interior Ministry, Public Prosecution and Justice and Islamic Affairs Ministry officials are examining the country's measures against international standards during a workshop, which concludes at the Golden Tulip Hotel today. It is the second workshop on safeguards against torture organised by the Foreign Affairs Ministry and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The two-day event is being conducted by human rights experts from the Swiss-based Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT). Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr Nazar Al Baharna said the workshop was part of Bahrain's efforts to protect and promote human rights in the country.

After two decades, the gap between the GCC and the EU on a free-trade agreement has been narrowed down to "two to three paragraphs" of a 2,000-page document, trade negotiators say. The main sticking point is over export duties, according to EU and GCC officials. Negotiators say one Gulf country wants to impose duties on some of its exports. EU and GCC diplomats say that country is Saudi Arabia which, they say, wants to impose tariffs on its petrochemical exports. Marcus Noland, the deputy director and senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington, explained that tariffs could be used as a way to influence global prices for petrochemical products. Saudi Arabia provides cheap raw materials for its petrochemical industry, allowing its plastic and other products to be sold at lower prices than those made elsewhere. However, exporting them would in effect transfer those subsidies abroad. Tariffs would be a way for the Saudi government to claw back the subsidies. Saudi Arabia "needs a policy to restrain its domestic producers so that they don't overproduce, and drive down prices sub-optimally", Mr Noland said. Saudi Arabia will store 3.8 million barrels of crude oil in Japan, helping the Pacific nation stock up its reserves while giving the top oil exporter better access to Asian markets. The well-flagged deal between Japan's trade ministry and state oil firm Saudi Aramco would see the crude start arriving later this year at the Okinawa Oil Base (OCC), according to a trade ministry statement. Industry sources have said the size of its facilities and the fact OCC allows supertankers to dock directly at port to transfer crude oil makes it a good destination for the Saudi crude. Saudi Arabia and Japan have been discussing an agreement in which the kingdom would store crude oil in Okinawa since April 2007, when then-Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe offered up the storage. A high-powered Dubai economic mission led by Ahmad Dhaen Al Qamzi, Director General of the Department of Finance - Government of Dubai, arrives in Seoul on Sunday to participate in the Dubai Economic Forum scheduled for June 21, 2010 at InterContinental Hotel in downtown Seoul. Members of the delegation include Fahad Al Gergawi (CEO, the Foreign Investment Office), Abdul Baset Al Janahi (CEO, Mohammed bin Rashid Establishment for SME Development), Mohammed Shael Al Saadi (CEO, Business Registration Division), Saed Mohamed Al Awadi (CEO, Dubai Export Development Corporation) and Laila Suhail (CEO, Dubai Events and Promotions Establishment, Moon-ryeon Choi, a spokesman for Index Holding Korea said. More than 70 Korean businessmen from 48 local business associations and companies reflecting a

wide spectrum of Korean industries will join the forum to get the latest information about investment climate in Dubai as well as Dubai's new policy guidelines for Korean companies. Kuwait will host next Wednesday the 21st ministerial meeting of the GCC agricultural cooperation committee, said the Public Authority for Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAFR) on Monday. PAAFR said in a statement that the GCC ministers of agriculture will discuss during the meeting a number of items chiefly the standardization of rates in the lists of pesticides and soil enhancers, in addition to the unified GCC phytosanitary certificate and the abolition of fees for agricultural quarantine. It added that the ministers would also look into a technical cooperative project for the establishment of a trust fund to meet the needs of GCC countries in the field of pest control provided by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). It noted that the conferees will also discuss a model health certificate associated with the movement of sport horses between the GCC states as well as the importance of the collective purchase of medicines and materials used in veterinary field. The Sultanate and Tunisia yesterday signed five memoranda of understanding (MoU) and three executive programmes aimed at enhancing co-operation in various key sectors. The MoUs were signed in the fields of education, vocational training, tourism, environment protection and climatic affairs and archives and restoration of historical documents. The MoUs were signed at the conclusion of the 13th session of the Oman-Tunisia Joint Committee here yesterday. The two sides were represented at the session by Yahya bin Saud al Sulaimi, Minister of Education, and his Tunisian counterpart Hatim Ben Salim. The Ministries of Education in both countries signed an MoU that seeks to encourage the exchange of expertise in the use of technological equipment. Emphasis was laid on the training of the disabled in this area. The Ministry of Manpower and the Tunisian Ministry of Vocational Training and Labour signed an MoU to exchange programmes and expertise in technical education and training. The MoU aims to develop employment and upgrade programmes to facilitate young people joining the labour market. The third MoU was signed by the Ministries of Tourism to encourage the citizens of both countries to visit each other's countries. The MoU seeks to foster tourism promotion and regulate participation in international tourism exhibitions. The fourth MoU was signed between the governments of the Sultanate and Tunisia in environment protection, climate affairs and nature conservation. The fifth MoU was signed by Dr Hamad bin Mohammed al Dhowyani, Chairman of the National Authority for Archives and Documents, and Dr Salwa al Ayashi, Director -General of National Archives in Tunisia. The MoU provides for the use of technology and exchange of expertise in the restoration of documents. It also seeks to organise scientific meetings and exhibitions. The Sultanate and Tunisia also signed executive programmes for co-operation specifications and measurements, restoration of historical buildings and archaeological areas, cultural co-operation and higher education. Bahrain has signed two memoranda of understanding to boost economic co-operation with the US. Economic Development Board chief executive Shaikh Mohammed bin Essa Al Khalifa sealed the first deal with Greater Houston Partnership (GHP) chairman Patrick Oxford. The GHP is the primary advocate of Houston's business community and is dedicated to building regional economic prosperity. It is considered the biggest coalition of businessmen and decision-makers in Houston, Texas. It includes thousands of companies operating in key fields, particularly industrial sectors. Shaikh Mohammed also signed a second memorandum of understanding with the US-Arab Chamber of Commerce (BUSACC) representative David Philip. Under the tripartite deal, the EDB, the GHP and the BUSACC commit to draw up a framework to promote joint ventures, exchange data and promote technical co-operation. Bahrain has already signed other deals with the Atlanta Development Agency, the Oklahoma

City Chamber of Commerce and the US State of Georgia Ministry of Economic Development. The agreements aim to boost the already strong commercial and economic ties between the kingdom and US. Fuelled by the rapid growth in its oil and gas sectors, Qatar is likely to emerge as the new "powerhouse" in global real estate capital flows this year, leading real estate consultancy Jones Lang LaSalle has said in a report. "Qatar is the epitome of energy-rich GCC nations, with a large appetite for real estate investment, fuelled by the rapid growth in oil and gas revenues over recent years," Jones Lang LaSalle regional director Fadi Mousalli said. "With a relatively small domestic real estate market, much of this interest is being directed towards real estate markets overseas, making Qatar an increasingly important player in terms of global real estate capital flows," Mousalli added. After an adjustment period in 2009, Qatar-based institutions are back in the spotlight and the state is projected to rank as the number one global overseas real estate investor in 2010, he said. The return of the Qataris on the global real estate scene has been marked by an "aggressive and bold" investment strategy. As relatively young entities, Qatar-based institutions have shown a hunger for high-profile acquisitions and an eagerness to leave their footprint on the global map. "Cash-rich and with a strong appetite for splashy overseas assets, Qatari vehicles have lately outshined their counterparts from the region and are projected to carry on with their rapid expansion across the real estate world," Mousalli said.

GCC

French ambassadors to GCC, Yemen, Iraq, Iran hold meeting

French ambassadors and consuls general at GCC countries plus Yemen, Iraq and Iran held a coordinative meeting here on Thursday to discuss regional and international state of affairs, in addition to French official stances towards issues vis-a-vis current events in the Middle East.

"We held the meeting here (Kuwait) due to the political and geographical significance of the country; one of the most important non-NATO allies," Patrice Paoli, Director of North Africa and the Middle East Department at the French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, said in a press conference held at residence of French Ambassador to Kuwait Jean Rene Gehan earlier today.

"This meeting comes in light of the visit of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Paris in 2006, as well as the recent visit by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in April this year," Paoli noted. In response to a question by KUNA, Paoli said "the Yemeni affair was discussed during the meeting, as France envisages it as a crucial element in the region's security equation.

'GCC FMs meeting on Bahrain's vision very constructive'

The Arab Gulf Foreign Ministers' Tuesday meeting to discuss Bahrain's vision to further develop the GCC was "very constructive," Kuwait's Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Sabah said. At a joint news conference with GCC Secretary General Abdulrahman Al-Attiyah, Sheikh Mohammad said the ministerial meeting "has placed the foundations for the development and activation of cooperation among the GCC countries."

Sheikh Mohammad, whose country holds the rotating Presidency of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), said the top diplomats adopted "important decisions and some of them will be referred directly to the GCC leaders while some other decisions needed to be finalized." The ministers, he added, agreed to hold another meeting to put final touches on Bahrain's vision before submitting it to the GCC leaders in their upcoming summit in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

The ministers, said the Kuwaiti official, discussed the Arab political dimension, security and military cooperation between the six GCC countries, economic and technical cooperation, activation of GCC mechanisms of action, human rights, the implementation of GCC summits' resolutions, and economic cooperation with international organizations namely the ASEAN. The foreign ministers approved the cooperation with ASEAN as well as the agenda item concerning security and military cooperation, he said. "There are other issues yet to be finalized including economic integration between the Gulf countries specially that there are many ideas to develop this matter," he said and asserted there were no differences over this issue.

GCC asserts importance of coordination with Yemen

Foreign Minister of six Arab Gulf countries asserted Tuesday importance of coordination and consultation with Yemen in order to further strengthen bilateral partnership. The foreign ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Yemen, in a meeting here to discuss development projects and economic progress in Yemen, expressed relief for level of cooperation between the two sides, according to a statement issued after the meeting.

The GCC top diplomats praised economic reforms in Yemen, the Yemeni government's improvement of investment environment, honoring economic and social development goals to contribute to being in harmony with the GCC economies, noted the statement. They also commended the Yemeni government's allocation of resources to execute GCC-funded projects.

Yemen uses US to submit GCC membership request

The USA has reportedly conveyed a request from Yemen to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), asking the current six member states to consider it for full council membership rather than postponing consideration of the issue every year. A well-informed source said that Yemen had chosen to seek US mediation ahead of the next GCC summit, which is scheduled to take place at the end of this year in Abu Dhabi, so that its application might be prioritized on the summit agenda and in order to enable the member nations to discuss and consider the matter beforehand.

Washington supports the plea," the source asserted, adding however that the issue is unlikely to be discussed at the December summit and pointing out that some member states have flatly rejected to consider according Yemen GCC membership since the council's establishment. The issue had already been discussed at previous summits, the insider pointed out, with Yemen always being turned down for full membership.

The GCC states only agreed to Yemen's membership of the GCC's social, educational, sports and cultural committees, as well as economically supporting it," said the source, adding that the US had been informed of the member states' rejection of full membership for Yemen and had demonstrated understanding and put no pressure on the countries, only asking that they provide Yemen with more economic support.

GCC social insurance and pension panel meets

Deliberations of the Permanent Technical Committee of the 20 GCC Civil Pension and Social Insurance Departments meeting, hosted by the Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI), began in the Sultanate yesterday in pursuance of earlier meetings.

The meeting, held at Muscat InterContinental Hotel, reviewed the latest developments in applying a GCC unified system to extend insurance cover to citizens of member states. The meeting was aimed to forge a unified model for pension and social insurance registration in GCC states and help implement the common insurance system which seeks to cater to the needs of Gulf manpower regarded as a pillar for development.

Bahrain's GCC vision comes in response to current developments - FM

Bahraini Foreign Minister Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmad Al-Khalifa said on Monday that his country's vision toward development of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was in response to current developments and to deal positively with strategic changes in regional and international arenas. The minister said in a statement that such vision was discussed by Bahraini King Hamad bin Issa in the last GCC summit in Kuwait, adding that such vision reflected a strong conviction to bolstering GCC achievements since establishment which must be felt by GCC peoples.

Sheikh Khalid added that such vision comes to complete GCC leaders' vision regarding the activation of GCC role, boosting joint work, and to transform the GCC into the new era. The Bahraini minister made the statement a day before GCC foreign ministers' meeting here. The top diplomats will discuss Bahrain's vision and proposals which, if approved, will be submitted to GCC 31st higher council meeting next December in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

GCC ministerial council to meet in Manama Tuesday

Ministerial Council of the Gulf Cooperation Council (foreign ministers) will convene in Manama on Tuesday to discuss the vision of Bahrain for the development of the Cooperation Council. GCC Secretary-General Abdulrahman al-Attiyah told reporters here today that the foreign ministers will review the progress of the GCC joint cooperation and the latest development on Bahrain's vision for the development of the GCC based on aspects of activating the GCC march in the political, economic, security, military and legal spheres. The ministers will refer their recommendations to the 31st GCC summit which will be hosted by Abu Dhabi later this year.

EU-GCC relations enter new phase

The European Union (EU) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) last week celebrated 22 years of their relationship by launching a three-year Joint Action Programme (JAP) to move forward to stronger cooperation with confidence and optimism. Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, expressed the common buoyant mood of the occasion. "This is a momentous event. Relations between the EU and GCC could not have been better," he told a press conference at the end of the 20th EU-GCC Joint Ministerial Council in Luxembourg last Monday.

Sheikh Dr. Mohammad chaired the meeting as Kuwait holds the current GCC Presidency. It was in this tiny European country that the GCC-EU Cooperation Agreement was signed in 1988. The agreement came into force in 1990. Analysts consider the endorsement of the JAP as a sign of very significant shift in ties between the 27-member European bloc and the six Arab states of the Gulf. A joint communique released after the council meeting noted that the JAP "reflects a shared ambition to reinforce cooperation in a number of key strategic areas of mutual interest, including economic, financial and monetary cooperation; investment, trade, energy and the environment, transport, industry, telecommunications and information technology, education and scientific research, and culture and mutual understanding." Some observers have been critical of the EU policy towards the GCC saying that Brussels has not given the priority or the importance that the Gulf region deserves. As one British analyst commented , "the Gulf has long been something of a backwater of EU foreign policy. It has long appeared important but never really urgent in the eyes of European diplomats". But the EU has now realized that in this era of globalization and an increasingly integrated world economy, regional groupings like the GCC are playing a significant and growing political and economic role which cannot be ignored.

Arab Maghreb Union, GCC sign MoU

The Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) here Wednesday to initiate cooperation and coordination over a host of issues of mutual interest. The MoU, signed by AMU and GCC Secretary Generals Al-Habib bin Yahya and Abdulrahman Al-Attiyah respectively, aimed at further boosting relations between both blocs. Bin Yahya said the MoU would contribute to serving bilateral interest. He said the AMU and GCC were preparing a meeting of businessmen from both sides to be held early next year. Al-Attiyah said the GCC was ready to backing and activating cooperation tracks with AMU. He called for cementing cooperation in domains of energy, security, youth, sport and tourism.

GCC strengthens land, sea border stations

The 19th meeting of the heads of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations' customs and coastguards bodies ended yesterday, with the delegates unanimously agreeing to strengthen communication among the GCC countries' land and sea border stations and to utilize the latest information and communications technology (ICT).

The delegates were urged to use the trans-regional optical fiber cable network which is expected to be put in place shortly as soon as their respective interior ministries begin using it, according to a statement issued by Kuwait's Ministry of Interior (MoI) following the conclusion of the meeting.

The delegates also agreed to increase the number of maritime patrol operations to combat the increase in seaborne criminal activities, such as robbery, piracy and attempts to illegally enter GCC member states, and to strengthen their joint capacity-building programs. Among the other business conducted at the meeting was a review of the decisions taken at the recent meetings of GCC interior ministers and of experts from the GCC ministries of interior, defense and communications.

GCC's free trade deal with EU sticks over Saudi export tariff

After two decades, the gap between the GCC and the EU on a free-trade agreement has been narrowed down to “two to three paragraphs” of a 2,000-page document, trade negotiators say. The main sticking point is over export duties, according to EU and GCC officials. Negotiators say one Gulf country wants to impose duties on some of its exports. EU and GCC diplomats say that country is Saudi Arabia which, they say, wants to impose tariffs on its petrochemical exports.

Marcus Noland, the deputy director and senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington, explained that tariffs could be used as a way to influence global prices for petrochemical products. Saudi Arabia provides cheap raw materials for its petrochemical industry, allowing its plastic and other products to be sold at lower prices than those made elsewhere. However, exporting them would in effect transfer those subsidies abroad. Tariffs would be a way for the Saudi government to claw back the subsidies. Saudi Arabia “needs a policy to restrain its domestic producers so that they don’t overproduce, and drive down prices sub-optimally”, Mr Noland said.

GCC power meet to weigh demand spurt

The upcoming GCC Power 2010 Summit in Doha will focus on the region’s projected 9.5 percent annual growth demand for electricity and the business opportunities driven by the demand. “GCC Power 2010,” the eighth regional conference for national committees of CIGRE (the International Council on Large Electric Systems) in the Arab Countries and the 15th Exhibition for Electrical Equipment, will be held from October 18 to 20 at the Ritz Carlton here.

The conference will discuss technologies and techniques in the systems operation and control, system planning, development and technical studies, power transformers and reactors, transmission lines and cables, and emerging technologies. An exhibition planned on the sidelines of the conference will welcome trade visitors from the GCC, Europe and the United States. “GCC Power 2010 is the only event capable of providing a comprehensive view of the latest developments in electricity and energy affecting the Gulf region,” said George Ayache, general manager, IFP Qatar, organiser of GCC Power 2010.

GCC urged to keep dollar peg

Analysts and officials taking part in the AMF-World Bank economic conference yesterday called on Gulf countries to maintain the dollar peg. They said the US dollar is still the currency dominating world finance and that the rate of the US currency in the world reserves is 62.1 per cent against 27.4 per cent for the euro, 4.3 per cent for the pound sterling, three per cent for the Japanese yen, and 3.2 per cent for other currencies.

The conference, which concluded yesterday, said Gulf countries have some of the criteria needed for the establishment of a unified currency. It highlighted the need to boost economic and financial integration among Arab countries to increase inter-Arab flows. Vice-Governor of the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency Dr Abdul Rahman Al Hamidy said oil exports from the Arab region make the peg more important for the world economy.

Rising oil prices to send GCC foreign assets to new highs

A recovery in oil prices because of better global economic prospects will likely boost the foreign assets of Gulf nations to a new peak, and this will provide them with a strong cushion against any fresh fiscal crisis, THE Washington-based Institute of International Finance (IIF) said in its latest report on foreign assets of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member countries.

After the first decline in 2008 in nearly six years due to the global financial turbulence, the foreign assets of the GCC could surge above their gross domestic product (GDP) at the end of next year. The IIF figures showed growth in the GCC's foreign assets would be a result of a surge in their oil export earnings, and consequently current account surpluses. It said the increase in oil revenues would be triggered by a rise in the members' crude output and higher prices, which could average nearly \$ 80 in 2011. As a result, their combined current account surplus will sharply rebound from about \$ 47.4 billion in 2009 to about \$ 124.2 billion in 2010 and nearly \$ 157.2 billion in 2011, according to the IIF. But it will remain way below the record high surplus of about \$ 258 billion registered in 2008.

High oil prices fetched the GCC nearly \$ 1.84 trillion during 2004-2009, more than triple the income they netted during the previous six years. Nearly a quarter of the 2004-2009 revenues were earned in 2008 alone. IIF said the six GCC members currently have sufficient financial assets to deal with the fresh crisis.

GCC foreign assets set to scale new peak

A recovery in oil prices because of better global economic prospects will likely boost the foreign assets of Gulf nations to a new peak, and this will provide them with a strong cushion against any fresh fiscal crisis. After the first decline in 2008 in nearly six years due to the global financial turbulence, the foreign assets of the six-nation Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) could surge above their gross domestic product (GDP) at the end of next year. But according to a key Western financial organisation, the GCC countries need to push ahead with economic reforms to support their asset cushion and ensure sustainable growth away from unpredictable crude sales.

The Washington-based Institute of International Finance (IIF) and regional institutions believe the six GCC members, sitting atop nearly 45 per cent of the world's recoverable oil deposits and more than a quarter of the global gas wealth, currently have sufficient financial assets to deal with the fresh crisis. It was the massive overseas wealth they had amassed during the latest oil boom of 2002-2008 that allowed them to partly mitigate the repercussions of the 2008 crisis and guard their economies against a painful depression.

Besides the expected surge in their foreign assets, the combined current account of the six members is also projected to sharply rebound in the next two years after plunging in 2009. The IIF's figures showed the balance would widen due to a projected rise in oil and gas export earnings from about \$ 323 billion (Dh1.186 trillion) in 2009 to \$ 419bn in 2010 and \$ 457bn in 2011.

YEMEN

Yemen quizzes German, Iraqi over attack on British envoy

Yemen has detained a German, an Iraqi and two others it accuses of involvement in a failed suicide attack on the British ambassador's convoy in Sanaa in April, a defence ministry website said on Thursday.

Prosecutors were questioning the four over the attack that killed the bomber and wounded three people, the website said. Al Qaeda's Yemen-based regional wing claimed responsibility for the bombing, accusing the envoy of leading a war on Muslims in the Arabian Peninsula on Britain's behalf. Yemen, neighbour to top oil exporter Saudi Arabia, has been a key western security concern since the Yemen-based Al Qaeda arm claimed responsibility for a failed December attempt to bomb a US-bound passenger plane. Western countries and Riyadh want Yemen, also facing rebels in the north and southern separatism, to deal with domestic conflicts and shift its focus to fighting Al Qaeda.

Yemen uses US to submit GCC membership request

The USA has reportedly conveyed a request from Yemen to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), asking the current six member states to consider it for full council membership rather than postponing consideration of the issue every year. A well-informed source said that Yemen had chosen to seek US mediation ahead of the next GCC summit, which is scheduled to take place at the end of this year in Abu Dhabi, so that its application might be prioritized on the summit agenda and in order to enable the member nations to discuss and consider the matter beforehand.

Washington supports the plea," the source asserted, adding however that the issue is unlikely to be discussed at the December summit and pointing out that some member states have flatly rejected to consider according Yemen GCC membership since the council's establishment. The issue had already been discussed at previous summits, the insider pointed out, with Yemen always being turned down for full membership.

The GCC states only agreed to Yemen's membership of the GCC's social, educational, sports and cultural committees, as well as economically supporting it," said the source, adding that the US had been informed of the member states' rejection of full membership for Yemen and had demonstrated understanding and put no pressure on the countries, only asking that they provide Yemen with more economic support.

Yemen takes part in GCC FMs' meeting in Bahrain

Yemeni foreign minister Abu Bakr Al-Qurabi will participate in a meeting of the GCC foreign ministers in Bahrain on Tuesday. Speaking to reporters before leaving for Manama Monday evening, Al-Qurabi the foreign ministers would discuss progress made by the Yemeni government in carrying out economic and political reforms. The foreign ministers, he added, would also discuss the upcoming ministerial meeting of the Friends of Yemen which would determine size of support to Yemen's development, economy, investment, reforms and security authorities.

Yemeni minister praises bilateral relations with Kuwait

Yemeni Interior Minister Mutahar Al-Masri praised here on Thursday the level of bilateral relations between his country and Kuwait in political, cultural, economic, and military spheres. Al-Masri credited the strong relations to the wisdom of both leaders. The Yemeni official met with the Kuwaiti ambassador to Yemen Salem Al-Zamanan at the end of his diplomatic mission, and discussed with him the role played, and efforts exerted to strengthen the relations between both countries. On his part, Al-Zamanan expressed gratitude for the cooperation shown by the Yemeni leadership, as well as the Ministry of Interior during his mission in Yemen.

Yemenia embarks on major expansion drive

Yemenia has embarked on a major growth drive that will see the national carrier of Yemen strengthening its presence in various markets, adding new sectors and modernising fleet. Muneer Mohamed Jahwash, Deputy Managing director for Commercial Affairs at Yemenia, said the expansion drive was aimed at positioning the airline as one of the leading carriers in the Middle East region.

Following its recent foray into China with an inaugural flight to Guanzhou on June 7, the airline now plans new routes in Africa, he said. Currently, the carrier flies to 32 destinations in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, the Gulf countries, the Indian Sub Continent, the Far East and now China. As huge demand is foreseen between points in Africa and China, Yemenia plans to launch new routes from its Sana'a hub, said Jahwash. Also on the cards is increasing frequencies on existing routes.

Saudi, Yemen businessmen discuss trade, investment

The Saudi-Yemeni business council held a meeting at the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI) on Wednesday, discussing issues such as trade exchange and investment

activities. Council head Abdullah ibn Mahfouz said the meeting discussed the benefits of providing advanced machines on the Saudi-Yemeni border to prevent counterfeit goods from being smuggled between the two countries.

The meeting also stressed the importance of private sector participation in the decision making of the two countries. Mahfouz stressed the need to evaluate the value of trade exchange between the two countries and develop ways to increase it, as well as smooth the transfer of goods between the two countries. The meeting also suggested opening a Saudi standards office at the Kingdom's borders

SAUDI ARABIA

International Front

Saudi Arabia, US to make joint efforts to confront terror

US Ambassador to Saudi Arabia James Smith said Wednesday that the Kingdom and his country would make combined efforts to counter challenges such as terrorism that face the two countries. He described Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah's upcoming visit to the US as "very important." Speaking to reporters after visiting Naif Arab University of Security Sciences in Riyadh, the ambassador commended Saudi Arabia's efforts in combating terrorism. "The Kingdom and the US will face these dangers together," he said, adding that the king's visit would contribute to confronting these challenges.

King Abdullah is scheduled to visit the US soon after attending the G20 summit in Toronto on June 26-27. His talks with US President Barack Obama will focus on the prospects of reviving the Middle East peace process and strengthening bilateral relations. The Arab peace initiative, which has been welcomed by all countries except Israel, is the brainchild of King Abdullah. Obama will host Saudi King Abdullah in Washington on June 29, the White House said.

Saudi Arabia Provides More than \$ 10 million as a Grant to UNHCR

The Saudi Fund for Development (SFD) and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) signed here today a Memorandum of Understanding by which the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia provides \$ 10,841,096 as a grant to assist the displaced in Pakistan. The Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the SFD Vice Chairman and Managing Director Eng. Yousef bin Ibrahim Al-Bassam and UNHCR Regional Representative to the GCC Yaqoub Al Hillo.

Under the supervision of the SFD, the UNHCR will allocate the grant to provide foodstuff and non-foodstuff for thousands of displaced Pakistanis affected by violence and instability in the north-western part of the country. 'The items include 2500 tents, 379200 blankets, 126400 plastic cover and 20000 food baskets to be distributed in Ramadan,' UNHCR said in a press statement.

Obama, Saudi King Abdullah to meet at White House June 29

President Barack Obama will welcome King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia at the White House on June 29, White House spokesman Robert Gibbs announced on Sunday. Obama "looks forward to discussing with King Abdullah the strengthening of bilateral ties between the United States and Saudi Arabia as well as a range of common concerns related to Gulf Security, peace in the Middle East, and other regional and global matters," Gibbs said in a brief statement.

300 Pakistanis jailed for petty crimes in Saudi to be released soon

Prince Naif, second deputy premier and minister of interior, has said he will facilitate the release of around 300 Pakistanis who are in prisons across the Kingdom, Pakistan's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Umar Khan Alisherzai told Arab News on Wednesday. "These prisoners, detained on charges of petty crimes, have already served the jail terms handed down by Saudi courts," the ambassador said.

Referring to his two-hour meeting with Prince Naif in Jeddah on Tuesday night, Alisherzai said the talks covered a range of important subjects, including cooperation in the fields of security, counterterrorism and organized crime. A proposal to set up "a consultative panel representing officials of the ministries of interior of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan" was also discussed, he added.

Asked about the release of Pakistani prisoners, he said that Prince Naif has pledged to provide all support in this regard. "I was also assured that the Ministry of Interior will look into the case of a Pakistani investor, Aliuddin Hussain, who has been in jail for the last three to four years," Alisherzai added.

Saudi Arabia may enrich uranium for nuclear plants

Saudi Arabia may mine and enrich uranium to fuel power plants if it embarks on a civilian nuclear energy program, a consultant preparing a draft nuclear strategy for the Kingdom said on Wednesday.

Saudi Arabia would want to play a role in as many of the stages of generating nuclear power as possible eventually, said David Cox, president for energy at the UK branch of Finnish management consultancy Poyry. "Enrichment could happen there and the same with mining uranium..." Cox said in a telephone interview with Reuters. "But outsourcing will happen initially."

Earlier this month, King Abdullah City for Atomic and Renewable Energy appointed Poyry to help prepare a draft of the national vision and high-level strategy in the area of nuclear and renewable energy. The Kingdom instructed Poyry to evaluate the economic and technical feasibility of its involvement in all stages of the nuclear power generation cycle, Cox said.

Saudi Al-Qaeda involved in Yemen pipeline attack

Official sources have said that two Saudi nationals named on the Ministry of Interior's list of 85 wanted terrorists were involved in last Saturday's oil pipeline attack in the Yemeni region of Marib.

A Yemeni government source said that Saeed Al-Shehri - Al-Qaeda's "second man" in the Arabian Peninsula - and the organization's field commander Othman Al-Ghamdi were both involved, making it their first operation since joining up with the group in Yemen.

The source added that three Yemenis - Qasim Al-Raimi, Saeed Ali Bin Jameel and Nasser Bin Douha - also took part in the bombing. Al-Raimi is the organization's military commander while Bin Jameel is believed to be Al-Qaeda's head in the region of Marib. Sources in the Yemeni government added that a number of wanted Saudis from the list of 85 had departed Marib for the region of Shabwa following the pipeline attack.

Saudi Arabia urges int'l community to work for Mideast peace

The Saudi government called on the international community Monday to live up to its responsibility in order to achieve just and comprehensive peace that guarantee the rights of the Palestinian people. A government statement said Saudi Arabia condemned the Israeli policy of violence and suppression including the siege of Al-Aqsa Mosque, confiscating of Palestinian lands and judaization of occupied Jerusalem. It said a just and lasting peace in the Middle East would secure the return of the rights of the Palestinian people including their right to establish their independent state with Jerusalem as its capital.

Social Front

Saudis lament weakening family bonds

Many Saudis are lamenting the way family ties in the Kingdom have become weak, something that seems to have become one of the hallmarks of modern life and is in stark contrast to how people in the region used to live not so long ago. "Families are no longer what they used to be. The entire family system has disintegrated. You can nowadays find fathers and sons at loggerheads and cousins hostile to each other," said one Saudi old man in Makkah who asked for his name not to be published.

Saudi woman Latifa Ali said she has not been on speaking terms with her sister for over 10 years and has tried to make up on numerous occasions. "My sister is adamant in boycotting me. She wanted her son to marry my daughter but I refused for several reasons. My daughter is a university graduate while her son has only studied until secondary school. He was also unemployed at the time. My daughter refused to marry him and there was no way I could force her," she said. Latifa Ali misses her sister whom she loved and was very close to. "I felt safe with her. I still long to be with her but she doesn't want to be with me. She considers my daughter's rejection of her son an insult," she added.

Saudi Shoura to tackle 'backbenchers'

Council, has questioned the contribution of the domed chamber's backbenchers and asked for ways to be found to involve them more in the Council's debates. Aal Al-Sheikh heard during the Shoura's session on Monday Council member Yousuf Al-Maimani express his dismay at his distant seating position in the chamber which he said did not give him and his colleagues in the vicinity the chance to take part in debates. Aal Al-Sheikh responded by likening the situation to a school.

"In the last year and a half since the beginning of the Shoura's fifth term we have not felt a large presence in debates from those seated at the back," he said. "It's just like a school classroom!" Aal Al-Sheikh asked that the issue be addressed after the Shoura's summer holidays.

Smoking banned at Saudi airports

The Council of Ministers urged the General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA) to ban smoking at all airports and their facilities in the Kingdom on Monday. It also advised GACA to impose a fine of SR200 on people who violate the new regulations. The Cabinet meeting, chaired by Crown Prince Sultan, deputy premier and minister of defense and aviation, approved the recommendations of the 150-member Shoura Council.

Although the Kingdom passed anti-smoking regulations in August 2003, the habit is growing among its population. There are six million smokers in the country who puff away SR8 billion every year. According to one report, smoking-related diseases kill at least 33 people in the Kingdom each month. Saudi Arabia ranks fourth in the world in terms of cigarette consumption and 41st in terms of population. As many as 13 billion cigarettes are imported into the Kingdom every year.

Saudi Shoura OK's anti-corruption commission

The Shoura (Consultative) Council Sunday approved the establishment of the National Commission for the Protection of Integrity and Combating Corruption that was first approved by the Council of Ministers in February 2007. The approval came after the Council listened to the views of the Foreign Affairs Committee on the UN Agreement for Combating Corruption. This agreement has been reconsidered in the light of the content of the National Strategy for Protecting Integrity and Combating Corruption.

The committee recommended approving the UN Agreement for Combating Corruption. The Shoura Council also approved the recommendations of the Education Affairs and Scientific Research Committee on the annual report of the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST) for the year 2007-08. The recommendations include supporting efforts of KACST to develop its capabilities to serve the strategic goals of the Kingdom; to draw up a mechanism that guarantees the availability of information on science and technology indices; to study the stagnation in scientific activity in the Kingdom; and to lay down practical plans to boost this activity.

Over 2.7m school students take exams in Saudi

More than 2.7 million students of intermediate and secondary schools from across the Kingdom began taking their annual exams on Saturday. The Ministry of Education said schools were adequately prepared to receive the students and that spacious halls had been assigned for the exams.

Over 11,000 invigilators are supervising the exams at government and private schools. In Jeddah, about 270,000 male and female students are taking their exams in more than 700 schools across the city. Col. Muhammad Al Qahtani, Director of the Jeddah Traffic Police, said some 260 traffic patrols had been deployed near schools and along the roads leading to the schools to help prevent any traffic bottlenecks or violations. Preparations have also been made to monitor the areas around the schools. Authorities have warned that anyone found harassing students would be punished severely. The invigilators will report violations to the regional offices of the Department of Education.

Rights group calls on Saudi to free activist

Human Rights Watch has called on Saudi Arabia to free a rights activist it says was arrested for criticising attacks by Sunni clerics on Shia Muslims. Police told activist Mikhlif bin Dahham Al Shammari, a Sunni, that he was being detained because his online articles “criticised statements of clerics attacking Shiite Muslims,” HRW said in a statement yesterday.

“Arresting Mikhlif Al Shammari simply for opinions he expressed peacefully shows the limited reach of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah’s commitment so far, five years into his reign, to protect human rights,” HRW’s Middle East director Sarah Leah Whitson was quoted as saying. “King Abdullah... should instruct officers of the Criminal Investigation Department in Khobar to immediately release (Shammari)... who apparently was detained arbitrarily,” the rights watchdog said.

Former Saudi minister says he received death threats

Former Education Minister Dr. Mohammad Al-Rasheed revealed to a local newspaper that he received death threats from extremists for changing the Saudi educational curriculum and limiting the time allotted for religious studies. “I received a telephone call from an unknown person who told me that brothers were plotting to kill me if I went ahead with my plan to change the curriculum,” Al-Rasheed told a local daily. “I suffered a lot at that time,” he added.

“After girls’ education merged with the Ministry of Education, some people started a campaign to remove me from my post,” said Al-Rasheed. “Extremist websites were full of insulting articles and improper words against me in a way that contradicts every principle of Islam,” he added. Friday sermons were also used in the campaign to remove him from his office. “I tried every effort to reassure people that girls’ education would not be changed and would remain according to our Islamic and traditional values, but all my efforts were in vain,” he said.

Al-Rasheed still remembers a conference on education that was held in Beirut and organized by Arab Thought Forum. "Saudi women delegates participated in that conference representing themselves and not the Ministry of Education," he said, adding that he was depicted as a corrupt man for taking these Saudi women in a private plane abroad. "I had nothing to do with that trip. They were invited by the forum and I was a guest speaker at that conference," he said, adding that some of these women were university teachers, accompanied by their husbands and representing various institutions.

Saudi Arabia creating more job opportunities for Saudis and expatriates

Abdul Wahid Al-Hameed, the Saudi Deputy Minister of Labor, told G20 ministers of labor Monday night that the Kingdom held a "significant economic position in the world" and that its handling of the global financial crisis was "creating jobs for its own citizens and those of other countries". "The Kingdom recruited 1,500,000 workers from abroad last year," Al-Hameed told the ministers' meeting at the International Labor Conference currently in progress in Geneva. "Their money transfers have contributed in strengthening the economies of their home countries."

Remittances from Saudi Arabia's estimated nine million mostly Asian foreign workers are soaring as the Kingdom recruits more of them for its massive development plan. At \$ 18.4 billion in 2008 and 15.0 billion in the first eight months of 2009, earnings sent abroad equalled four percent of Saudi gross domestic product, according to government data. Saudi Arabia was the world's third largest source of foreign worker remittances in 2008 after the United States and Russia – far larger economies – according to the World Bank. Al-Hameed told ministers that the G20's focus needed to extend beyond their own individual nations and concentrate on Third World countries suffering from the effects of the economic crisis.

Saudi schools could teach human rights

Riyadh Saudi Arabia may introduce the subject of human rights in its educational syllabus for male and female students at all educational levels, a senior human rights official told Gulf News. "The project is in its final stages at the ministry of higher education after it has been approved by the supreme authority [the king]," he said. In a statement to Gulf News, Dr Zaid Al Hussain, deputy chairman of the Saudi Human Rights Commission (HRC), said the commission was trying to make human rights a subject in the educational syllabi at all general education levels in the Kingdom. "This is among the priorities of the commission," he added. According to Al Hussain, the commission would be supervising the process.

Economy Front

Saudi Arabia, Yemen boost ties

The 4th meeting of the Yemeni-Saudi Businessmen Council (YSBC) was held here on Wednesday co-chaired by head of the Yemeni side Ahmed Ba-Zara'a and his Saudi counterpart Abdullah Bin Mahfoudh. It reviewed installations of X-rays goods check systems in the Saudi land outlets and what the two sides have agreed on concerning participation of the private sector

in the joint governmental committees as well as assessment of volume of the commercial exchange, in addition to proposing some reliable means to increase it. The Council also addressed investment aspects in the boarder areas and holding annual exhibitions in both of Yemen and the Saudi Kingdom. It recommended to facilitate customs procedures in border outlets and to open an office for Saudi Standards Organization in Al-Wadiyah outlet.

Saudi GDP to grow to 13-year high in 2010

The fragility of the global economic recovery evidenced in Europe's debt crisis in many ways served as a reality check for Saudi business executives, Banque Saudi Fransi's latest report on "Business Index Saudi Arabia" said on Tuesday. Dr. John Sfakianakis, the bank's chief economist and his team said in the report that in the Q3 2010 BSF Business Confidence Index, company managers were more restrained and "more guarded now than they had been prior to the euro-zone sovereign debt crisis about the resilience and pace of the country's economic recovery."

Greater global economic uncertainty in light of the euro-zone debt crisis and volatility in oil prices over the last two months has taken a toll on sentiment among Saudi business executives, who have adopted greater caution in their outlooks for financial performance, bank lending, investment strategies and hiring plans, the report said. Oil prices fell Tuesday. Benchmark crude for July delivery lost 61 cents to settle at \$ 77.21 on the New York Mercantile Exchange. Brent crude lost 78 cents to settle at \$ 78.04 on the ICE futures exchange. "Although most respondents remain by and large confident about the growth potential for the domestic economy," it added.

Saudi gold reserves more than double: WGC

The World Gold Council (WGC) has more than doubled the estimated gold holdings of the central bank of Saudi Arabia – the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (Sama) – with retrospective effect from the first quarter of 2008, according to a report released yesterday.

The WGC data showed the kingdom's Central Bank holding 322.9 tonnes of gold, up from 144.3 tonnes reported by the WGC in March this year. As per the latest estimates, about 2.8 per cent of the kingdom's reserves are in gold, as opposed to 1.2 per cent stated in the last WGC report.

The WGC had to update its current and historical data because of a new report from Sama. "Sama reported in the last quarter that old data have been modified from the first quarter of 2008 as a result of the adjustment of Sama's gold accounts, meaning Sama's gold reserves are now reported to be 322.9 tonnes or 2.8 per cent of reserves, from 143 tonnes or 1.2 per cent previously," the WGC said. "Gold data have been modified from the first quarter of 2008 as a result of adjustment of Sama's gold accounts," the WGC explained.

King Abdullah launches the first Saudi-made vehicle

King Abdullah, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, has launched the first Saudi-made vehicle named Ghazal 1 during a reception at his palace in Jeddah, Monday. Also present at the event were Dr. Khaled Bin Muhammad Al-Anqari, Minister of Higher Education; Dr. Abdullah Bin

Abdul Rahman Al-Othman, President of King Saud University; the university's deputies; and the team involved in the Ghazal 1 project. King Abdullah viewed photos showing the manufacture of the car in different stages. He was briefed by the constructing team on the manufacturing process. He then pressed a button to launch the vehicle. The King thanked the team members and congratulated them on their achievement. Al-Anqari said that the team worked on the project for more than two years with the support of King Saud University.

Japan, Saudi Arabia reach oil storage agreement

Saudi Arabia will store 3.8 million barrels of crude oil in Japan, helping the Pacific nation stock up its reserves while giving the top oil exporter better access to Asian markets. The well-flagged deal between Japan's trade ministry and state oil firm Saudi Aramco would see the crude start arriving later this year at the Okinawa Oil Base (OCC), according to a trade ministry statement.

Industry sources have said the size of its facilities and the fact OCC allows supertankers to dock directly at port to transfer crude oil makes it a good destination for the Saudi crude. Saudi Arabia and Japan have been discussing an agreement in which the kingdom would store crude oil in Okinawa since April 2007, when then-Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe offered up the storage.

UAE

International Front

Arab foreign ministers meet in Abu Dhabi

Arab foreign ministers held a meeting this evening at the Emirates Palace Hotel in Abu Dhabi which was presided over by UAE Foreign Minister H.H. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, in presence of Arab League's Secretary General Amr Musa.

The meeting, which was also attended by Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr Anwar Mohammed Gargash, Minister of State Reem Al Hashemy, and a number of Arab foreign ministers, discussed prospects of cooperation between the Arab countries and the UAE as the latter is preparing to host tomorrow the first ever Pacific Island-Arab League Summit entitled "Prospects for Cooperation between the Arab world and the Pacific Islands". Sheikh Abdullah met with the representatives of the Pacific countries taking part in the summit. He stressed the importance of developing commercial, economic and investment relations between the two sides. The talks also focused on boosting trade exchange and setting strategies for mutual benefits.

Abu Dhabi to host session on fighting nuclear terror

Abu Dhabi will host a plenary session of the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism (GICNT) on June 29, a media release said. Launched with a view to strengthen the global efforts to enhance nuclear security and non-proliferation, GICNT is an international partnership of 82 nations and four official observers. It was formed with a mission to strengthen global capacity to

prevent, detect, and respond to nuclear terrorism by conducting multilateral activities. The US and Russian Federation are co-chair the movement.

The meeting here is being hosted by the UAE Government and senior-level officials from partner nations and official observers in the GICNT are expected to attend it, according to an official announcement. The plenary session will conclude a year-long process, which begun at the 2009 Hague plenary meeting, to pursue “enhanced implementation” of the Initiative, apart from serving to strengthen the commitment and resolve of the GICNT partnership. “UAE policies support the establishment of a strong international framework for the cooperation in the nuclear security field” the release said quoting Shaikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Foreign Minister, “The government hosting of this important event is a clear demonstration of the UAE’s commitment to counter nuclear terrorism and promote nuclear security”, he added.

UAE keen on EU help to fight human trafficking

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) is keen to boost cooperation and coordination with the European Union (EU) in various security fields with particular emphasis on fighting human trafficking, a senior UAE official said.

“The UAE is among the first countries in the region which issued a federal law on combating human trafficking,” Lt. General Saif Al Shafaar, Interior Ministry Undersecretary, said on Monday during a meeting with consuls of the EU accredited to the UAE, led by Consul of Spain in the UAE, Vicente Cacho . He told the European Union diplomats that the Ministry has set up several specialised units for human rights and trafficking in persons and social support shelters for victims of these crimes. “By doing so, the UAE has become a key reference to other countries seeking to draw lessons from its experiment in this respect, he added.

UAE shuts 40 firms for illegal trade with Iran

Authorities in the United Arab Emirates have closed down 40 companies for selling products to Iran in violation of UN sanctions on Iran. Analysts said the move would have little impact on the estimated \$ 8 billion in trade between the UAE and Iran. The 40 companies that were shut down reportedly had been found to be trading strategic dual purpose goods, good which could be used in both civilian or military production, and other dangerous material. The UN has barred these goods as part of sanctions against Iran over its alleged nuclear program.

On June 9, the United Nations Security Council slapped on Iran a fourth round of sanctions which now bar dealings with firms linked to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. Christian Koch, director of international studies at the Gulf Research Center in Dubai, told The Media Line that the crackdown was part of a national strategy. "This is certainly one step, although the commitment to enforce United Nations sanctions has been there from the very beginning," Koch said. "There is awareness within the United Arab Emirates that there are Iranian front companies set up in the free zones. This is a concerted move to try to undermine those companies involved in possible illegal transactions," Koch added. "It is also to see what companies are actually doing what, and closing those down that are not doing anything."

An estimated 400,000 Iranians live in the United Arab Emirates and the trade flow between the two countries is worth some \$ 8 billion annually. "In the latest official figures from the UAE authority for 2009, we can see that imports from Iran was negligible but total exports represented almost \$ 8 billion," Philippe Dauba-Pantanacce, senior economist with Standard Chartered Bank, told The Media Line. "With 92 percent of this being re-exports. This represents 13.2 percent of the total exports from the UAE." he said. "I would certainly argue that the pressure on the UAE to put a lid on its commerce with Iran could put a strain on these exchanges but might also translate into a diminishing part of the actual trade translated into the official figures," Dauba-Pantanacce said.

But some, like Morteza Masoumzadeh, the executive deputy president of the Iranian Business Council in United Arab Emirates which represents many Iranian businessmen living in the UAE, are unconcerned about the crackdown. "These forty or so companies represent we heard about in the media are not members of the Iranian Business Council in United Arab Emirates, therefore such crackdowns do not bother us at all," Masoumzadeh told The Media Line. "We came to the United Arab Emirates 30 years ago when the Iranian Revolutionary Guard did not even exist then," he said pointing out the long-standing economic ties between the two countries. "Until two years ago, Iran used to be the first trading partner for the UAE. It has since declined and it is now number three," Masoumzadeh said "Saudi Arabia is now number one."

UAE, Chechnya discuss relations and latest regional developments

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 President Ramzan Kadyrov of Chechnya who is currently visiting the country.

Sheikh Mohammed welcomed Kadyrov and discussed with him ways to strengthen bilateral ties between the two friendly countries. They also reviewed topics of mutual interest, as well as latest regional developments. Kadyrov said he was impressed with the progress achieved by the UAE in all fields and expressed his country's desire to further strengthen cooperation with the UAE. The meeting was attended by Mohammed Mubarak Al Mazrouei, Under Secretary of the Abu Dhabi Crown Prince's Court, and Omer Saif Ghobash, UAE Ambassador to Russia.

UAE RCA aid for Kyrgyzstan riot refugees

A delegation from the UAE Red Crescent Authority (UAE RCA) has left for Uzbekistan to distribute humanitarian aid for refugees who were displaced by the Kyrgyz-Uzbek violence in Kyrgyzstan over the past week. The RCA aid for the refugees was ordered by Shaikh Hamdan bin Zayed, the Ruler's Representative in the Western Region and President of the UAE RCA.

A quick assessment of the humanitarian conditions on ground will be made by the UAE RCA team to develop a plan to distribute emergency aid which includes blankets, tents, food and medicine, according to Dr Saleh Al Taii, Secretary General of UAE RCA and head of the delegation to Uzbekistan. Taii says UAE's aid materials to be procured by UAE RCA from Uzbekistan's local markets will be hauled on trucks to the borders with Kyrgyzstan.

Hamdan Bin Zayed reiterates UAE's commitment to help refugees worldwide

The UAE, under the leadership of President His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, plays an active role in strengthening international efforts to put an end to the suffering of refugees and the dangerous consequences of displacement and uprooting on millions of people worldwide, H.H Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed, the Ruler's Representative in the Western Region "&" Chairman of the Red Crescent Authority (RCA) stressed yesterday.

In a statement on the World Refugee Day, Sheikh Hamdan reiterated the UAE's commitment and support to efforts to stabilize, and promote security in, hotspots around the world in line with directives from Vice President and Prime Minister of UAE and Ruler of Dubai His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum and the follow up by H.H General Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces. "The UAE will always be a strong supporter for refugees and efforts to put an end to their suffering and hardships and protect their human dignity," Sheikh Hamdan said.

UAE Representative addresses Human Rights Council

UAE Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) Obaid Salem Al-Za'abi has welcomed the report submitted by the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, Githu Muigai, on his mission to the United Arab Emirates (4-8 October 2009).

Al-Za'abi said the UAE then had expressed appreciation of the constructive dialogue between the Special Rapporteur and the UAE governmental officials (both at the federal and emirates' level), representatives of civil society, including community members, academics and other organizations and individuals. The UAE Representative made his remarks in a speech before The Human Rights Council held its fourteenth session, held at the United Nations Office at Geneva from May 31st to June 18th.

The UAE, he added, attaches high importance to a set of challenges and issues in its efforts to make more progress on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination. He cited efforts being made by the UAE in areas such as justice, judiciary, religious freedom, women, healthcare, social care, education, labour and trafficking in persons.

Manmohan likely to visit UAE

Prime Minister of India Manmohan Singh is likely to visit the UAE later this year or early next year, the Indian Ambassador to the UAE, MK Lokesh said. "The dates of the proposed visit are being worked out through diplomatic channels. I hope the visit can take place later this year or early next year," Lokesh told a meeting at the Indian Social Centre here on Tuesday.

It is almost three decades that an Indian Prime Minister has visited the UAE. The last visit was by the late premier, Indira Gandhi, from May 11 to 13, 1981, Lokesh recalled. The envoy said

the proposed visit will further boost the strong economic, cultural and social ties that exist between the UAE and India since ages.

UAE Cabinet approves major projects

His Highness Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of UAE and Ruler of Dubai chaired on Sunday a cabinet meeting at the Presidential Palace in Abu Dhabi in the presence of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, Shaikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Presidential Affairs, Shaikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan. The cabinet reviewed a number of topics and memoranda on its agenda and took appropriate decisions.

The Cabinet also approved the establishment of UAE embassies in Kenya and Uganda. It also gave approval for the restructuring of the boards of directors of the General Authority for Youth Welfare and Sports, the General Authority for Islamic Affairs and Awqaf and the Emirates Securities and Commodities Authority. The Cabinet also ratified a number of technical regulations on food products setting the Emirati mandatory standards within the framework of maintaining safety and public health.

The Cabinet also endorsed the agreement signed between the governments of the UAE and Turkmenistan on the Joint Committee for Cooperation, as well as the agreement between the governments of the UAE and Kazakhstan on mutual exemption of visa for the holders of diplomatic passports in both countries.

UAE Ambassador and French President Advisor discuss bilateral ties

Mohammed Meer Abdullah Al Raesi, UAE Ambassador to France, last night met Jean-David Levitte, President Nicolas Sarkozy's Chief Diplomatic Advisor. The meeting which took place at the Elysee Palace, both sides discussed bilateral ties and ways to strengthen them in various fields, in addition to exchanging ideas on various issues of mutual interest. Jean-David Levitte hailed the role played by UAE to support security and stability in the Middle East Region and the world. On his part, Al Raesi stressed on his keenness to develop and strengthen relations between UAE and France.

Social Front

New law will ban discrimination against HIV/Aids sufferers in UAE

A proposal to allow anonymous HIV/Aids tests and ban discrimination against UAE nationals with the condition is another step closer to becoming law. The legislation, drafted by the National Aids Committee, aims to eliminate discrimination and reduce the stigma surrounding the disease. It has been approved by the Council of Ministers, and now awaits final approval from Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed, the President of the UAE and Ruler of Abu Dhabi.

Dr Nada al Marzouqi, head of the National Aids Programme, said it was a huge step towards “integrating HIV patients into society”. As well as improving rights to education, employment,

care and treatment, the law will also legalise and regulate voluntary testing and counselling clinics, which enable people to be tested anonymously. “Previously there were no laws stopping employers discriminating against people with HIV,” Dr al Mazrouqi said. “This will now change so they will not be allowed to do it. We really want to reduce stigma and discrimination but we need laws, as well as education, to do this. Now we have a firm reference point, everyone is aware of their rights.”

Mohammed bin Rashid endorses by-laws for federal human resources

His Highness Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, has endorsed by-laws of the federal human resources laws.

The move comes within the government’s efforts to establish clear standards and effective managerial governmental measures to develop human resources, clarify duties and rights of employees in the federal government and provide an appropriate work environment for all employees, who number about 80,000. The provisions of the new bylaws will be applicable to all staff in the federal agencies covered by the decision. The human resources departments in these federal agencies will implement the law as published in the Official Gazette. The Federal Authority for Human Resources authority could be referred to in case anything hampers the implementation of the new executive regulation.

The new by-law includes all regulations, details on the rights and functions of employees, employment operations, evaluation, motivation rules, leaves, penal codes and others pertinent to human resources at the federal agencies.

UAE professionals thinking green, but not doing

Professionals in the UAE are keen to go green and companies in the country may be doing their bit for the environment, but there appears to be a disconnect between intention and action. A recent survey by recruitment site Bayt.com of Middle East employers and staff finds the environment is not yet right to match thought and deed. It says a whopping 88 per cent in the Middle East want greener offices without walking that extra mile to get there.

In the UAE, 52 per cent of the respondents say their employers “do actually make an effort to varying degrees to foster environment-friendly practices”, according to the online job portal. The country is a step ahead in environmental awareness, considering the regional average is 35 per cent, with 30 per cent employers completely ignoring the issue. Some 13 per cent offices in the UAE allow telecommuting, or working from home. Nothing significant to change the carbon footprint situation overnight, but the figure indicates a small start has been made.

Environmental awareness among workers may be high, so is waste produced by them, with only six per cent of offices in the country recycling paper, according to the online study of 916 respondents from the UAE. This is marginally higher than the Middle East average which stands at four per cent. Offices in the country are glossing over their green good looks a cosmetic shift. Artificial plants are still a major attraction in workplaces, with only eight per cent of companies opting for real plants, says Lama Ataya, director of Marketing and Corporate Communication,

Bayt.com, in replies to questions from this newspaper. The green concept may seem alluring to many firms; implementation issues, however, are a long way from being addressed. "This poll has given a remarkable insight into professionals' attitudes in the Middle East with regard to environmental friendliness. The fact that the vast majority consider having a greener office vital illustrates the significance of this study," says Rabea Ataya, chief executive officer of the website.

Midday break from today in UAE

With the summer mid-day break rule being applicable from today, the Ministry of Labour (MoL) has launched an awareness campaign on the necessity of the break and the effects of heat stress to protect the workers from heat related ailments. As per the MoL's rules, workers should not be allowed to work under the sun in the afternoon between 12.30pm to 3pm from June 15 to September 15, 2010. The employer shall provide workers of such activities with a shaded place for rest during non-working hours. The MoL has extended this year's summer mid-day break from two to three months. Last year, the mid-day break had lasted from July 1 to August 31.

The awareness campaign was launched at a ceremony at Abu Dhabi Police Officer's Club in the capital on Monday. Officials from the Health Authority-Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi Municipality and a large number other public and private sector companies, stakeholders, contractors' associations and various establishments took part in the launch ceremony. MoL along with coordinating firms from private and public sectors, will distribute leaflets and brochures at labour housing units and worksites to educate workers on how to beat the heat at their worksite and the precautions they must take in case of heatstrokes.

Economy Front

UAE to stay out of planned Gulf monetary union

Dubai's ruler is not worried about debt restructuring and the United Arab Emirates will stay out of a planned Gulf monetary union, favouring a dollar peg, an interview transcript showed yesterday.

The economy of the world's third largest oil exporter is expected to see the slowest growth in the Gulf region this year, with banks heavily exposed to a \$ 23.5bn restructuring of debt-laden state conglomerate Dubai World. When asked whether Dubai needed additional external support to proceed with current restructuring, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, in a transcript of an interview with CNN to be aired today, said: "I'm not worried about the company, the company have got the wealth. So they have something, and they will come back very very quickly."

Sheikh Mohammed, who is also vice president and prime minister of the UAE federation, did not say which company he was referring to. Dubai World reached a deal in May with key banks after a multi-billion dollar bailout from the Abu Dhabi emirate but the remaining creditors still await the final terms. Creditors of Dubai World are still awaiting details of a meeting to present the final terms of its massive debt restructuring plan, sources said, causing unease among some

bankers hoping for a timely resolution. A meeting with other bank creditors was supposed to follow by the end of June.

Economy will overcome challenges: Mohammed

His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, has stressed that the country's economy is strong despite the effects of the global financial crisis, during an interview with CNN, to be aired in full on Friday, July 25. Underscoring the local economy's ability to overcome challenges arising from the global recession, Sheikh Mohammed revealed Emirates airline's decision to purchase new aircraft next month. He said: "The recession is a global phenomenon and I do not think that we in Dubai fear it, but instead we consider it a challenge." Sheikh Mohammed said the UAE faces daily challenges such as water shortages, growth and development, but added the country is not suffering from a recession in the real sense of the word, but is facing challenges. "Without challenges," he reasoned, "life would be boring. Dubai and Abu Dhabi and the rest of the UAE are fine."

Dubai Economic Forum to open in Seoul

A high-powered Dubai economic mission led by Ahmad Dhaen Al Qamzi, Director General of the Department of Finance - Government of Dubai, arrives in Seoul on Sunday to participate in the Dubai Economic Forum scheduled for June 21, 2010 at InterContinental Hotel in downtown Seoul.

Members of the delegation include Fahad Al Gergawi (CEO, the Foreign Investment Office), Abdul Baset Al Janahi (CEO, Mohammed bin Rashid Establishment for SME Development), Mohammed Shael Al Saadi (CEO, Business Registration Division), Saed Mohamed Al Awadi (CEO, Dubai Export Development Corporation) and Laila Suhail (CEO, Dubai Events and Promotions Establishment, Moon-ryeon Choi, a spokesman for Index Holding Korea said.

More than 70 Korean businessmen from 48 local business associations and companies reflecting a wide spectrum of Korean industries will join the forum to get the latest information about investment climate in Dubai as well as Dubai's new policy guidelines for Korean companies.

Abu Dhabi inflation climbs 3 per cent

The consumer price index, or CPI, reached 118.22 points in May against 114.75 in the same month last year, the Centre's monthly CPI report showed. The Centre, part of the capital's Department of Economic Development, said that the month-over-month rise in May was 0.28 per cent, while it grew 2.33 per cent in the January-May period. Education led the upward trend, advancing 20.1 per cent. Food and beverages rose 6.7 per cent. Housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels were up 5.5 per cent, while transport jumped 5.1 per cent.

On the other hand, communications showed a decline of 11.3 per cent, due to a drop in the prices of telephone and telefax services. The mail services, telephone and telefax equipment subgroups shed 11.3, 9.6 and 6.4 per cent, respectively. Prices of the clothing and footwear group declined

by 6.4 per cent, as clothing dipped 5.3 per cent and footwear slid 17.4 per cent. The report points to a relative stability in the prices of most of the main expenditure groups during the month of May compared to April, despite an increase of three per cent in transport and 0.2 per cent in miscellaneous goods and services, pushing CPI up 0.28 per cent. At the end of the first five months, the Centre's report saw inflation at 2.33 per cent compared with the same period last year, reflecting the net change in consumer basket prices during the two periods compared. The rise in the prices of transport resulted from the rise of oil prices.

KUWAIT

International Front

Kuwait, US sign MOC on peaceful uses of nuclear energy

Kuwait signed here Wednesday a Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC) with the US Government on nuclear safeguards and other nonproliferation topics. The MOC was signed by Secretary General of the Kuwait National Nuclear Energy Committee (KNNEC) Dr. Ahmad Bishara and the Administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) Thomas D'Agostino during a ceremony held at the Department of Energy.

The MOC proposes cooperation in nuclear legislation and regulations; human resource planning and modeling; nuclear safeguards and security; radiation protection; environmental, safety and health issues; low- and intermediate-level radioactive waste management; reactor operations, safety and best practices. During the ceremony, D'Agostino said "it is clear that both of our countries recognize the importance of preventing nuclear proliferation, and keeping dangerous nuclear materials out of the hands of terrorists and proliferators. "This agreement is an important milestone further underscoring the commitment of the United States and Kuwait to address the global challenges of nuclear nonproliferation, safeguards and security," he added.

'Kuwaiti-Syrian media forum to boost historic relations'

The upcoming Syrian-Kuwaiti media forum will help enhance deeply-rooted relations between the two countries, Chairman of the Union of Syrian Journalists Elias Murad said Wednesday. The event scheduled to take place on July 4-5 with its activities directed towards boosting cooperation and exchanging expertise draws its importance from the fact that it will be tackling a variety of working papers covering politic, economic, journalistic and cultural domains, Murad told KUNA.

It displays the cooperation existing between the Union of Syrian Journalists and Kuwait Journalists Association (KJA), he said, while noting at the protocol signed between the two sides which dictated cooperation and ways to implement it. They both share similar views towards a number of strategic issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and Arab matters in general, he said. A number of icons in both countries will be taking part in the joint event which would help boost Arab solidarity on two levels, that of leaders along with that of the people of Syria and Kuwait, he added.

ILO praises Kuwait for new decisions on labor

Minister for Social Affairs and Labour Mohammad Al-Afasi has said it was an achievement that Kuwait was omitted from the International Labour Organization's (ILO) least conforming nations to international labour standards. Talking to KUNA following the Kuwaiti Cabinet's weekly session late Sunday, the minister said that a report Kuwait had presented to the ILO outlined recent decisions taken on labour and the disabled which received a warm welcome from attendees of the 186-nation conference.

The report illustrated laws namely through which foreign labour in the country can now change their job without having to take permission from their sponsors, and through which employers must determine minimum worker wages and their work hours under tough conditions. Minister Al-Afasi, who had headed the delegation that submitted the report in Geneva, said that Kuwait's record as a least complying nation with ILO standards was clean. He attributed the achievement to the wise directions of the Kuwaiti political leadership, and to the cooperation between the executive and legislative bodies in the country.

Kuwait plans more health cooperation with Germany

Undersecretary of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Health Dr Ibrahim Al-Abdulahdi met with the Kuwaiti doctors completing their specialization study and training in Germany, along with German doctors, and representatives of German Ministry of Higher Education and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). Albdulahdi said that the ministry is seeking to cooperate with Germany in the field of medicine, health services, and related higher education in order to improve the skills of Kuwaitis in these fields. The German officials are keen on boosting cooperation with Kuwait, and are to offer all possible facilities to Kuwaiti doctors training there, besides Kuwaiti patients who receive the best treatment, he noted. Abdulhadi promised to overcome all the obstacles facing Kuwaiti doctors in Germany at present, including issues related to allowances and working hours.

The Kuwaiti trainee doctors thanked Dr Abdulhadi and the Director of the Health Office in Germany Dr Sulaiman Al-Harbash for efforts to recognize difficulties and solving problems. Abdulhadi signed a number of agreements with six hospitals and treatment centers to offer better services to Kuwaiti patients in Germany during a visit to the state. The Kuwaiti Minister of Health Hilal Al-Sayer had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with his German counterpart in North-Rhine Westphalia last year, for further cooperation in the fields of medicine and higher education.

UN praises Kuwait's support for refugees

A UN official spoke highly here yesterday of Kuwait's contribution to backing the issues of refugees everywhere in the world, together with its humanitarian role. Speaking to KUNA to mark the World Refugee Day, which falls on June 20, the chief of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Kuwait, Wahid bin Omar said Kuwait plays a pioneering and distinguished role worldwide regarding refugees. Kuwait contributes USD one million to the UNHCR's budget every year, not to mention other financial contributions by

Kuwaiti non-governmental organizations (NGOs), he said. By providing humanitarian services and relief aid to many countries worldwide, Kuwait has alleviated the woes and plight of many disaster-stricken people, the UN official added. But, he called for stepping up coordination between the UNHCR and Kuwait and its NGOs over humanitarian aid to refugees and homeless people.

Kuwait eyes greater educational cooperation with Singapore

Two senior Kuwaiti educational officials commended here on Saturday the huge resources and great potential of Singapore's educational institutions. Undersecretary of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education Tamadher Al-Sudairawi and Assistant Undersecretary for Educational Research and Curricula Sector Mariam Al-Wutaid, now accompanying Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education Dr. Moudhi Al-Humoud on an official visit to the Southeast Asian city state, voiced hope that the visit would cement cooperation between the two sides.

Al-Sudairawi said in a statement to KUNA the visit provided an opportunity for the Kuwaiti delegation to get first-hand knowledge about the advancement of Singapore's educational sector particularly in the introduction of information and communication technology (ICT) to this domain. "The delegation discussed with the Singaporean side their leading experience in e-education and e-government services as well as the application of ICT in running the administrative systems and school affairs," she pointed out.

Kuwait asks Lebanon not to extradite citizen to Iraq

Kuwait has asked Lebanon not to hand over to Iraq a Kuwaiti citizen serving a life term in Beirut for alleged Al Qaeda links, a foreign ministry official said yesterday. The ministry has expressed "through official contacts the state of Kuwait's total rejection of the extradition of citizen Mohammed Al Dossari to any side other than Kuwait," said the official, cited by the state news agency Kuna. According to Lebanese media, a military court in January sentenced Dossari and two men from Syria and Tajikistan to life in jail on charges of belonging to Al Qaeda and plotting attacks on UN peacekeepers in Lebanon.

Dossari was arrested at Beirut airport in December while trying to enter the country on a fake Moroccan passport. In May, a Kuwaiti court tried and acquitted Dossari and seven other Kuwaitis on charges of plotting to attack a major US army base in the Gulf state. Dossari and another suspect were tried in absentia. The issue of Dossari was raised by Islamist MP Mohammed Hayef who said the Lebanese government had agreed to an Iraqi request to extradite Dossari to Iraq to face trial on terrorism-related charges. The Kuwaiti foreign ministry argued that only Kuwait has the right to seek Dossari's extradition.

Kuwait, Japan to deepen cooperative relations

Kuwaiti Ambassador to Japan Abdulrahman Al-Otaibi hosted a dinner in honor of visiting Civil Service Commission (CSC) Undersecretary Mohammed Al-Roumi and his accompanying delegation, as well as Japan International Cooperation Center (JICE) President Kazuhisa Matsuoka, the embassy said yesterday. During the dinner, the ambassador welcomed the two

sides and underscored their significant efforts to help deepen the cooperative relations between Kuwait and Japan, the embassy said in a statement.

On Monday, the CSC and the JICE sealed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) here on technical cooperation for the development of Kuwait's human resources. Kuwaiti government officials and experts, in groups of 10-12 members, will undergo training courses provided by the JICE, starting later this year. Al-Otaibi also showed satisfaction on the agreement and the results of visit to Tokyo by Kuwaiti Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah to participate in the first Japan-Kuwait Joint Committee meeting on June 2.

The five training courses, which will be conducted in Japan for the benefit of Kuwait until June next year under the MOU, is a new and important step toward strengthening and deepening cooperation in all fields between Kuwait and Japan," Al-Otaibi said.

Pakistan, Kuwait discuss strengthening relations

Senior Pakistani and Kuwaiti officials yesterday held lengthy discussions on measures to enhance bilateral ties between the two nations in various fields, including the economy, politics and defense. Kuwait's Ambassador to Pakistan Nawaf Abdulaziz Al-Enezi held a meeting with Shehbaz Sharif, the Chief Minister of Pakistan's most economically powerful province, the Punjab.

Speaking to KUNA following the talks, Ambassador Al-Enezi described the meeting, which lasted for over two hours, as "wonderful" and "very productive." The ambassador said that he and the minister had held frank and cordial talks on a wide range of issues, ranging from measures to strengthen bilateral ties to how to increase the declining levels of Kuwaiti investment in the country.

Ambassador Al-Enezi condemned the recent terrorist attacks in Lahore, saying that it was distressing to see such events taking place in the brotherly Muslim nation of Pakistan. He praised Pakistan's efforts in the global war against terrorism, stressing that Kuwait would provide all the help possible to Pakistan at any critical period and that Kuwait's government and people would stand by Pakistan whenever needed. Following the meeting, the Chief Minister hosted a lunch in the ambassador's honor.

Social Front

Al-Kharafi receives three requests for special parliamentary sessions

Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Jassem Al-Kharafi said Thursday he received three requests from MPs for holding special parliamentary sessions on Sunday and Monday, next week. "The first request, presented by Dr. Maasouma Al-Mubarak, deals with the social and civil rights of women," Al-Kharafi told reporters at the National Assembly.

"The second, tabled by Dr. Dhaifullah Bourmeih, deals with the interest rates and loans. "Both MPs sought to debate these issues on Sunday," the parliament speaker said, noting that the third

request deals with reforms of the insolvency fund. "The internal statutes of the assembly prioritize the request tabled first which is, in this case, the one tabled by Dr. Al-Mubarak and then the one tabled by Dr. Bourmeih. "No other subject can be debated to the agenda of a special session without a consensus among all the 65 members of the Assembly," he pointed out, citing the statutes. The Assembly is scheduled to probe the draft state budget on Tuesday and Wednesday hopefully before a vote on the draft in the final session in the legislative term on the following day, he added.

Afasi defends Kuwait human rights record

Minister of Social Affairs and Labour Mohammad Al-Afasi yesterday strongly defended Kuwait's human rights record, saying it is clean and will remain so. He said that he met the US ambassador to Kuwait after the US Department of State's annual Trafficking in Persons report kept Kuwait in the third tier or on the blacklist.

Afasi said that he explained to the ambassador the achievements made by Kuwait including allowing workers to change jobs without the employer's consent after working for three years. He also recalled the approval of the new labour law, setting a minimum wage and banning work for certain hours under the sun. The minister described the US report as "unfair".

Meanwhile, National Assembly speaker Jassem Al-Khorafi yesterday appealed for restraint over what appears to be a sectarian controversy over questions in the final exam of the religious education course that some Shiite MPs considered offensive to their faith. Khorafi described sectarian discord like "cancer that must be eradicated" and appealed to the media to avoid sensational reporting on sectarian issues because "Kuwait does not bear that". The speaker said that editors of local newspapers have agreed not to publish material that could spur sectarian tensions and appealed to them to abide by the agreement in order to safeguard national unity.

Kuwait parliament speaker urges national unity

Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Jassem Al-Kharafi on Tuesday urged the need to apply "wisdom and dialogue" in solving any potential differences that could cause unrest in the country. Al-Kharafi responding to reporters on reactions to the issue of the Islamic Studies school exam, stressed the importance of not escalating sectarian issues because "Kuwait would be better off not having to handle such matters." He indicated to a meeting of local newspapers Editor-in-Chiefs not to allow the distribution of statements that could cause conflict in the country. "We hope for compliance on this stance in commitment to national unity," Al-Kharafi said.

Kuwaiti prince shot dead

A Kuwaiti prince has been fatally shot allegedly by his uncle, reports reaching here have said. In a brief statement, the Kuwaiti ruler's court has said the country was "mourning the demise of Shaikh Basel Salem Sabah Al Salem Al Sabah, who passed away at the age of 52," without giving details of what caused his death. However, media reports said Shaikh Basel was allegedly shot several times by an uncle on Thursday evening at his weekly meeting place while the two

had an argument over cars. He was rushed to a local hospital, but died on the way. His uncle reportedly had approached him earlier to say he wanted to speak to him in private. The two left the house and shots were heard shortly after. Medical staff confirmed the prince had been shot multiple times at close range. Police have launched an investigation into the killing, and taken the prince's uncle into custody. Reports also said the prince had been shot several times from a close range and that the alleged killer has been taken into custody.

Economy Front

Kuwait's crude oil exports to China down 42.3 percent

Kuwait's crude oil exports to China fell 42.3 percent in May from a year earlier to 596,000 tons, equivalent to around 141,000 barrels per day (bpd), the latest government data showed. Kuwait provided 3.3 percent of China's total crude oil imports, compared with 6.0 percent in the same month of last year and 5.1 percent in April, according to the General Administration of Customs. For the first five months of this year, OPEC-member Kuwait supplied 3.76 million tons (183,000 bpd) to China, up 6.6 percent, one the back of record-high shipments of 1.08 million tons (264,000 bpd) it logged in April.

China's overall imports of crude in May rose 4.4 percent year-on-year to 17.84 million tons (4.22 million bpd). Saudi Arabia returned to China's top supplier with its shipments surging 35.7 percent from a year earlier to 3.75 million tons (886,000 bpd), followed by Angola with 3.17 million tons (751,000 bpd), up 55.6 percent. Oman became third, with imports from the country growing 20.0 percent to 1.62 million tons (384,000 bpd).

China is the world's second-biggest oil consumer after the US. The Chinese government on May 14 gave preliminary approval to state-run Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) and its partner Sinopec for a USD 9 billion oil refinery project in south China's Guangdong Province, to which Kuwait is expected to supply all the crude.

Kuwait pledges \$ 100m to support Mauritania

The Prime Minister of Mauritania, Moulaye Ould Mohamed Laghdaf, expressed here yesterday his thanks and gratitude to Kuwait for its support and assistance to the development programme of Mauritania. "I want to express my gratitude to the Amir of Kuwait, the government and the people of Kuwait for their support," he told a press conference after a two-day international meeting on Mauritania in Brussels yesterday afternoon. The Prime Minister said Kuwait has pledged over \$ 100 million at the meeting held for Mauritania. He expressed his appreciation for the support by Arab and Muslim countries to Mauritania and noted that over 60% of the \$ 3.2 billion pledges made at the Brussels conference came from Arab and Muslim countries. The two-day meeting was organized by the government of Mauritania with the support of the European Union, the World Bank and the United Nations Program for Development.

Abdullah Khalil Al-Musaibeh, regional manager for Latin America and Caribbean countries in the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) took part in the conference. Al-Musaibeh, said the meeting aimed at mobilizing funds for the development and assistance for

Mauritania and "we from the Fund thank the government for inviting us to the meeting.

He noted that KFAED is a major partner in the development of Mauritania and added that "we are here to boost our help to Mauritania." He said that as part of this programme, KFAED will be funding the construction of the university campus in Nouakchott capital of Mauritania. The project will be evaluated in the first week of July.

Kuwait, Tunisia sign three trade, customs-related deals

The fourth Tunisian-Kuwaiti joint technical trade committee conference ended here with the signature of three cooperation agreements in the fields of customs, investment and exhibitions.

The agreements overseen by Kuwait's Ministry of Commerce and Industry Undersecretary Rasheed Al-Tabtabaei and Secretary of State for Foreign Trade Shokri Mamaghli, include a cooperation protocol in the field of attracting direct foreign investment, an administrative cooperation agreement in customs affairs and a memorandum of understanding in the field of exhibitions.

Al-Tabtabaei stressed the importance of the deals in enhancing the traffic of goods, while expressing hope this would reflect in a positive manner on supporting trade and investment between both countries. For his part, the Tunisian official reflected these views, hoping this would usher forward efforts for joint projects.

Kuwait to host agricultural meeting

Kuwait will host next Wednesday the 21st ministerial meeting of the GCC agricultural cooperation committee, said the Public Authority for Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAFR) on Monday. PAAFR said in a statement that the GCC ministers of agriculture will discuss during the meeting a number of items chiefly the standardization of rates in the lists of pesticides and soil enhancers, in addition to the unified GCC phytosanitary certificate and the abolition of fees for agricultural quarantine.

It added that the ministers would also look into a technical cooperative project for the establishment of a trust fund to meet the needs of GCC countries in the field of pest control provided by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). It noted that the conferees will also discuss a model health certificate associated with the movement of sport horses between the GCC states as well as the importance of the collective purchase of medicines and materials used in veterinary field.

Kuwaiti parliament to discuss power issue

Today's parliamentary session has been reserved to discuss the power shortage issue and black outs that occurred in various areas, said officials. He noted that MPs have been demanding an immediate, temporary solution to ensure availability of power. A special committee has been formed to take follow up action on the situation. This is to refer previous emergency power plans and projects, such as the 2007 issue, to Public Prosecution Office (PPO).

Officials also predicted that the Minister of Electricity and Water (MEW), Bader Al-Shuraian will be fiercely criticized for passing remarks on the flaws and violations of the 2007 Emergency Plan. "The project was full of errors and tenders that was offered to parties that did not deserve them," officials said. He noted that MPs would ask for a special investigation committee to be formed in order to investigate the '2007 Emergency Project.' Furthermore, officers said that the session would discuss MEW's failure to collect over KD 50 million as consumption fees. This is in addition to failure to collect over KD 100 million from contractors for the delay that was stated in the contracts signed with them.

Kuwait backs creative youth: Minister of Commerce and Industry

Minister of Commerce and Industry Ahmad Al-Haroun said on Wednesday that Kuwait presents all means of assistance to its creative youth, in support of the society as a whole, particularly in the field of information technology. Al-Haroun added in a speech held at an inauguration ceremony of 'Amali', a website launched by a group of young Kuwaitis, that the government has adopted a set of productive policies to support and broaden contributions from the private sector, for it to practice a more effective role in the production, employment and income generation process.

"The Kuwaiti government is well aware of the challenges that face the economy, and is exerting huge efforts to put in order the right political environment to combat such obstacles through national economic harmony followed by tangible steps," he said. He called on all to help make Kuwait an attractive environment for Arab and foreign investment, noting to the development plan which has presented a number of visions and targets for further achievements in the infrastructure like the railway, ports, development of electric plants and health and housing projects.

Kuwait calls for finding new energy strategies

The meeting of the Sub-Committee on Integrated Energy Market in Asia kicked off here yesterday with the participation of a delegation from the Kuwaiti National Assembly (parliament). Head of the delegation Member of Parliament (MP) Saleh Ashour said that the meeting would focus on energy and environmental issues. He said that the event is attended by parliamentary members from 10 countries, who will discuss ways to benefit from alternative energy, solve energy problems, and ensure the safety of transferring energy among Asian countries.

The aim of the meeting is to prepare legislations on issues related to energy dangers and the reduction of the negative effects of energy consumption, and to prepare a clear policy to deal with countries that are lacking in energy resources, he noted. He pointed out that there was a shortage in international legislations on benefitting from alternative energy, adding that it was important to find new legislations to deal with problems that could result from the transfer of energy and the leakage of radiations. He said Kuwait conducted studies on benefitting from solar energy and nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, noting that countries like Jordan and Turkey used solar energy. In a speech at the meeting, Ashour said that uniting the energy market in Asia

was a good base for cooperation and Asian economic unity which could achieve a secure and a stable market. He said that Asia has 70 percent of the world's petroleum and gas reserves.

OMAN

International Front

Alawi attends meeting on Arab-Pacific Islands ties

Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdallah, Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs, left here yesterday heading for Abu Dhabi to lead the Sultanate's delegation taking part in the deliberations of the conference 'Prospects for co-operation between the Arab world and the Pacific Islands', which is being held during June 23 and 24. The conference will discuss the political, economic and cultural partnerships between the Pacific Islands and the Arab World, exchanging views on issues and challenges facing the Arab and Pacific regions and strengthening the Arab-Pacific relations in areas of common concern. He was seen off by Najeem bin Sulaiman al Abri, Deputy Head of the Protocols Department at the Foreign Ministry.

Oman emerges most successful Arab country

The Sultanate emerged as the most successful Arab country this year, according to a US-based Foreign Policy magazine's rating supported by the Global Peace Fund. The rankings were published on the magazine's website in English on Monday. The index classifies countries in a cline starting from "most stable" to "under threat". The gross index includes 12 sub-social, economic, political and military indices. The Sultanate ranks 146th globally and occupied first place among Arab states.

King Hamad, Qaboos discuss bilateral ties

Strong ties linking Bahrain and Oman were highlighted last night as His Majesty King Hamad held talks with visiting Sultan Qaboos bin Said. The talks were held in the presence of His Royal Highness Prime Minister Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa. His Majesty praised the steadily growing ties and described the visit as a major contributor to further strengthening them.

The leaders praised the satisfactory GCC march and joint projects to serve the region. His Majesty praised the Omani leader's keenness to promote bilateral ties. They also reviewed regional and international developments of mutual interest. His Majesty later hosted, in the presence of HRH the Premier, a dinner banquet at Al Safriya Palace in honour of Sultan Qaboos. His Majesty and HRH the Premier earlier welcomed Sultan Qaboos on his arrival at Sakhir Airbase.

Oman-UK relations reviewed

Lt Gen Malik bin Sulaiman al Maamari, Inspector General of Police and Customs, received here yesterday the delegation of the Royal College of Defence Studies in the United Kingdom headed by Sir Jeffrey James. The two sides reviewed relations and various aspects of co-operation.

The meeting was attended by Maj Gen Salim bin Mussalam Qatan, Assistant Inspector General of Police and Customs, and senior officers of the Royal Oman Police. Delegation visits SAF Museum: The delegation also visited the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) Museum yesterday. The guests were briefed on the SAF's progress under the prosperous reign of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. The guest admired the beauty of the building and Oman's rich heritage. Meanwhile, Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Under-Secretary of for Commerce and Industry, received the delegation here yesterday. They discussed issues of common concern.

UK defence studies team arrives in Oman

A delegation from the Royal College for Defence Studies in the United Kingdom, headed by Sir Jeffrey James, arrived here yesterday in a visit to the Sultanate lasting several days. Sir Jeffrey and his delegation were received upon their arrival at Muscat International Airport by Brigadier Awadh bin Mohammed al Mshaikhi, Head of the Committee for the National Defence College Establishment, as well as the military attaché at the British embassy and senior officers of the Sultan's Armed Forces. Sir Jeffrey will meet with senior military and civil officials and key institutions and installations, including the Command and Staff College.

Sultan Qaboos, Shaikh Sabah to discuss bilateral ties

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos arrived here yesterday on a private visit to Kuwait that will last for several days and Shaikh Sabah al Ahmed al Jabir al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait, led the welcome party to greet His Majesty on arrival at the Amiri Airport. His Majesty's visit comes in the context of the strong fraternal ties that bind the two countries to advance co-operation in the service of the Omani and the Kuwaiti peoples. Issues of common concern in light of developments in Arab and world arenas will also be reviewed. His Majesty and Shaikh Sabah will discuss the strong fraternal relations that bind the two countries and means of enhancing co-operation in the service of the peoples of the two countries.

Earlier yesterday, His Majesty the Sultan left Sharm El-Sheikh concluding a private visit to Egypt during which he discussed with President Mohammed Hosni Mubarak bilateral ties and Arab and world developments of common concern. His Majesty the Sultan and the president reviewed the good fraternal ties and means of enhancing them in all fields to serve the interest of the brotherly Omani and Egyptian peoples. They also reviewed the latest regional and global developments.

Oman, Russia co-operation in higher education explored

Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Sarmi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, and his delegation has returned from an official visit to Russia. The delegation visited the Belgorod State Technological University (BSTU) which is named after the renowned Russian engineer, inventor and scientist Vladimir Grigorievich Shukhov.

The Omani delegation consisted of Dr Sarmi, Dr Mahmood Mubarak Habib al Suleimi, Director-General of the MoHE scholarship department, Dr Said al Rahbi, the Head of Department for the

Recognition of Foreign Universities in the Sultanate, Dr Jami Fadel, the Cultural Attaché of the Oman Embassy in Moscow, and Dr Murad Ahmed al Mamari, representative of a Company offering marine services. Dr Sarmi mentioned that the visit to Russia took place in view of possible co-operation between universities in Oman and Russia. Dr Sergey Nikolaevich Glagolev, Rector of the BSTU, and Lesovik V S, Vice-Rector of scientific, innovative and international activities, and other officials received the guests. During a meeting both sides discussed possibilities of training of Omani students in the BSTU.

Human rights panel assured of co-operation: Oman

Sayyid al Mutassim bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat, received in his office here yesterday members of the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR). NCHR Chairman Mohammed bin Abdullah al Riyami gave a briefing about the duties and responsibilities of the commission according to its prerogatives aimed to raise public awareness about human rights. Sayyid Al Mutassim expressed his support and the governorate's willingness to co-operate with the commission to achieve the inspired goals.

Oman to host GCC disaster control panel meeting

The Sultanate will host a meeting on Monday and Tuesday on the establishment of a GCC Oman to host GCC disaster control panel meeting. The meeting, to be organised by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs, will study the Sultanate's experience in the handling natural and environmental disasters. The technical committee entrusted with the project will meet with Lt Gen Malik bin Sulaiman al Maamari, Inspector General of Police and Customs and Chairman of the National Committee for Civil Defence, and Mohammed bin Khamis al Araimi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs. The centre, due to be set up in Kuwait, is expected to enhance the GCC states preparedness and rapid response.

Economy Front

Oman Oil eyes gas block ceded by BG

State-run Oman Oil Company (OOC) is in talks with the Ministry of Oil and Gas to take on an exploration block exited by Britain's BG Group, a senior Oman Oil official said yesterday. Like most of its Gulf neighbours, Oman is short of the gas it needs to meet rapidly rising demand for industry and power. Across the region, governments have embarked on exploiting unconventional gas reserves, such as Oman's tight gas. The gas is in complex formations that is more expensive to produce than more conventional reserves. "Oman Oil Company is in discussion with the Ministry of Oil and Gas to take over the BG concession in Oman," Nasser Al Jashmi, undersecretary for oil and gas, said.

BG pulled out of its deal to develop Oman's oil and gas Block 60 earlier this month to focus on global opportunities elsewhere. OOC is the government's energy investment arm, and holds both domestic and international oil and gas assets.

Institutional investors keen on Oman's capital market

Oman's capital market looks set to benefit in the future from increased participation among institutional investors, Arab Global Network reported Saturday citing NCB Capital's recent note.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) will increasingly attract international institutional investors looking to benefit from the region's stable economy, high-net-worth individuals and big-ticket infrastructure projects. One of the knock-on effects of this type of investment should be to help reduce some of the volatility that has previously affected the region's markets - until now dominated largely by individual retail investors.

The Muscat Securities Market, the Omani exchange, has generally been more open to foreign institutional investors than other bourses in the region. In May (the most recent month for which figures are available), foreign institutional investors accounted for 12.3 percent of sell and 8.7 percent of buy transactions on the MSM. By contrast the Saudi Tadawul - the region's largest bourse, accounting for 49 percent of GCC market capitalization - is mostly composed of individual investors (91 percent), with non-financial institutions accounting for only 4 percent of investments.

Oman-Brunei discuss co-operation in key areas

The Oman-Brunei Joint Committee held a two-day session which concluded here yesterday. The Omani side at the first session of the panel this year was headed by Shaikh Al Fadhl bin Mohammed al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of National Economy for Development Affairs, while Haji Nadhmi Haji Mohammed, Deputy Secretary General for Business Affairs at the Brunei Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, headed his country's side. The two sides discussed co-operation in the fields of taxes, e-governance, oil and gas discovery, investment, tourism, education, training, statistics, agriculture and fisheries.

Oman-Tunisia boat factory deal inked

An agreement for setting up an Omani-Tunisian boat factory at the Raysut Industrial Estate, or RIE, in the southern Dhofar governorate has been signed in Salalah. The RO800,000 plant will use Tunisian expertise to build European-style boats ranging between 11 and 18 metres. The boats will be priced between RO35,000-42,000, depending on specifications. The deal for the Al Bahini Ship Manufacturing Company was signed by RIE Director-General Said bin Ali Al Maashani and Chairman Hussain bin Hathith Al Bathari. He said the factory was the "outcome of a partnership between Oman and Tunisia," adding that the unit would start production within months.

In the first year, it will produce 20 boats that will be equipped with the latest technology to survey the seabed and quantity of fish. Maashani said the factory, which will also have a maintenance facility, was the first of its kind in the sultanate to produce large fishing boats using European design. He added that RIE was selected for the project owing to its strategic location and proximity to the Port of Salalah and access to the Yemeni and African markets.

Five MoUs, programmes to enhance Oman-Tunisia ties

The Sultanate and Tunisia yesterday signed five memoranda of understanding (MoU) and three executive programmes aimed at enhancing co-operation in various key sectors. The MoUs were signed in the fields of education, vocational training, tourism, environment protection and climatic affairs and archives and restoration of historical documents. The MoUs were signed at the conclusion of the 13th session of the Oman-Tunisia Joint Committee here yesterday. The two sides were represented at the session by Yahya bin Saud al Sulaimi, Minister of Education, and his Tunisian counterpart Hatim Ben Salim. The Ministries of Education in both countries signed an MoU that seeks to encourage the exchange of expertise in the use of technological equipment. Emphasis was laid on the training of the disabled in this area. The Ministry of Manpower and the Tunisian Ministry of Vocational Training and Labour signed an MoU to exchange programmes and expertise in technical education and training.

The MoU aims to develop employment and upgrade programmes to facilitate young people joining the labour market. The third MoU was signed by the Ministries of Tourism to encourage the citizens of both countries to visit each other's countries. The MoU seeks to foster tourism promotion and regulate participation in international tourism exhibitions. The fourth MoU was signed between the governments of the Sultanate and Tunisia in environment protection, climate affairs and nature conservation. The fifth MoU was signed by Dr Hamad bin Mohammed al Dhowyani, Chairman of the National Authority for Archives and Documents, and Dr Salwa al Ayashi, Director -General of National Archives in Tunisia. The MoU provides for the use of technology and exchange of expertise in the restoration of documents. It also seeks to organise scientific meetings and exhibitions. The Sultanate and Tunisia also signed executive programmes for co-operation specifications and measurements, restoration of historical buildings and archaeological areas, cultural co-operation and higher education.

BAHRAIN

International Front

Bahrain beats UN deadline

Bahrain has achieved all of its UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), five years ahead of the global deadline, a top official said yesterday. However, the country is placing its focus on reaching its Economic Vision 2030 goals, which exceed the UN criteria, said Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr Nazar Al Baharna. "We have met and even exceeded the UN criteria, but we have our own, in keeping with our Economic Vision 2030," he told a Press conference at the UN House, Manama. "We are happy at the achievement of meeting the MDGs before the 2015 deadline, but we have a long way to go because we want to have a top performance in all its eight categories." The eight MDGs were agreed on during the UN Millennium Summit in 2000 and to be achieved by 2015. They include eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating Aids and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability and developing a global partnership.

Bahrain 'keen on stability'

His Royal Highness Prime Minister Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa yesterday stressed Bahrain's support for efforts to preserve regional security and stability and achieve development. He was speaking as he received Yemeni Foreign Minister Dr Abu Bakr Al Qirbi, who conveyed greetings of President Ali Abdulla Saleh, reiterating an invitation for the Premier to visit Yemen. HRH the Premier hailed solid relations, pointing out growing co-operation. He also stressed the importance of the GCC foreign ministers' meeting with their Yemeni counterpart to discuss the prevailing situation and needs of his country under the development plan. The two sides discussed current regional and international developments. Dr Al Qirbi praised Bahrain's stance in support of security, stability and economic development in his country.

Bahrain vow to boost Iran ties

Bahrain yesterday stressed its firm commitment to promote bilateral relations with Iran. "The kingdom stands firmly against all that compromises these solid relations," Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa said. He was speaking as he received Iranian Ambassador Hussain Amir Abdullahyan. He also slammed anti-Iranian media reports, dismissing them as "totally unacceptable". "These stances do not reflect His Majesty King Hamad's directives," Shaikh Khalid asserted.

He reaffirmed Bahrain's full respect for the Islamic Republic, stressing its resolve to preserve outstanding relations and further anchor them. He stressed the importance of bolstering relations with Iran, in the light of current regional developments. "The precarious and volatile situation required multilateral efforts to avert any rift which may jeopardise and derail regional security and stability," he said.

Bahrain reforms push hailed

Bahrain's sweeping reforms have been praised at an international forum in France. Leading French and Bahraini politicians praised His Majesty King Hamad's reforms and highlighted the democratic developments, the safeguarding of public freedoms and human rights, the empowerment of women and the respect for religious, cultural and intellectual diversity within the constitution and the rule of law. The forum, organised by the Press and Foreign Media at the Jean Jaures think-tank in Paris, highlighted the success of Bahrain in presenting a highly attractive model of reforms, development and modernisation.

"His Majesty has been playing a very significant role in democratic reforms and is setting up a highly interesting example to others in the Arab world," French Senate member Bariza Khiari said. She appreciated the achievements accomplished by Bahraini women and their active economic, social and political involvement.

King Hamad, Qaboos discuss bilateral ties

Strong ties linking Bahrain and Oman were highlighted last night as His Majesty King Hamad held talks with visiting Sultan Qaboos bin Said. The talks were held in the presence of His Royal

Highness Prime Minister Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa. His Majesty praised the steadily growing ties and described the visit as a major contributor to further strengthening them.

The leaders praised the satisfactory GCC march and joint projects to serve the region. His Majesty praised the Omani leader's keenness to promote bilateral ties. They also reviewed regional and international developments of mutual interest.

Detained Bahrain fishermen will be released: Qatari Shura Council

The Qatari Shura Council has pledged that the detained Bahrain fishermen will be released in the coming few days, it was claimed yesterday. It was also agreed at a meeting with a delegation of Bahraini MPs that there was a need to draw up a clear agreement on using sea resources similar to the GCC land agreement. "It is also important to treat Bahrainis on equal footing with other GCC nationals," MP Adel Al Ma'awda, who led the delegation, said in a statement.

He called for a GCC agreement allowing fishermen access to Gulf waters, within the framework of the law in each country. The two-day visit to Doha, which concluded yesterday, was conducted by parliament's Foreign Affairs, Defence and National Security Committee. Mr Al Ma'awda said that the meeting was held to avoid any tension between, "members of the same family". "The good efforts of the leaderships of both countries in settling the issue symbolised the brotherly relations," he said.

BD2.3m Bahrain lifeline for Gaza

Bahrain has launched a major drive to help the Palestinians rebuild war-torn Gaza. It is set to plough more than \$ 6 million (BD2.26m) into the territory to help set up a school, a health centre, university laboratories and a library for children. A delegation, accompanying a 40-tonne aid shipment of medicines and medical equipment on its way to Gaza, will sign a series of landmark deals to shore up its beleaguered infrastructure. They will be signed by the Royal Charity Organisation (RCO) and United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, said RCO secretary-general Dr Mustafa Al Sayed. He was speaking at Bahrain International Airport before departing for Egypt with a cargo plane carrying aid worth \$ 2m (BD756,000) as a gift from the people of Bahrain.

Dr Al Sayed said the deals would include a \$ 2.25m (BD850m) school, a \$ 2.64m (BD997,920) health centre a \$ 500,000 (BD189,000) library for children and a \$ 372,000 (BD140,616) laboratory at the University of Gaza. "In addition, we have organised the manufacture and installation of 1,000 artificial limbs to men, women and children of Gaza, as part of a project costing \$ 550,000 (BD207,000)," he said. "All this is in line with the directives of His Majesty King Hamad, who has ordered immediate relief for the people of Gaza.

Bahrain backs bid to boost Gulf stability

His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince and Deputy Supreme Commander, yesterday stressed Bahrain's backing for all efforts to boost regional security and stability and protect achievements. He emphasised the kingdom's commitment to international

conventions to promote peace worldwide in line with His Majesty King Hamad's directives. He was speaking as he received at Riffa Palace a delegation from the British Royal College of Defence Studies (RCDS) headed by Jeffrey James.

Present were the Crown Prince's Court head Shaikh Khalifa bin Daij Al Khalifa and British Ambassador Jamie Bowden. Bahrain's Economic Vision 2030 has been drawn up in concordance with our aspirations for the future and is based on three fundamentals: competitiveness, justice and sustainability, HRH the Crown Prince said, stressing the importance of planning and investing in human beings as the core of development. He also pointed out the kingdom's success in maintaining the development pace by embracing new policies that take into account global changes and the international economic momentum.

Qatar-Bahrain relations reviewed

HH the Deputy Emir and Heir Apparent Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received a phone call from Bahrain's Crown Prince and Deputy Supreme Commander of the Bahrain's Armed Forces Prince Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifah. Bilateral relations as well as issues of mutual interest were reviewed.

Bahrain plan space satellite with Russia

Bahrain could soon work on a project to launch a satellite into space in co-operation with Russia. There are also talks of Bahrain building a small nuclear power plant here as the two countries mark nearly 20 years of diplomatic relations. Other joint ventures include establishing an Arab-Russia bank in Bahrain and Moscow as well as a regional Russian trade centre here. High-level visits, such as His Majesty King Hamad's to Moscow in December 2008 and Russian Prime Minister Victor Zubkov's to Bahrain in January, have provided a good impetus for bilateral relations, said Russian Ambassador Victor Smirnov.

Bahrain's participation in the second Arab-Russian Exhibition, Arabia Expo 2010 in Moscow and the meeting of the Arab-Russian Council in Moscow last week emphasised the need for stronger economic partnership between Russia and the Arab world. The Bahrain Economic Forum on the sidelines of Arabia Expo and the Bahrain-Russian Business Council's first meeting last week also helped to bolster bilateral co-operation, said Mr Smirnov. Mr Smirnov was speaking as his country marks Russian National Day (Russia Day), which is celebrated annually on June 12.

Social Front

Safeguarding human rights in Bahrain

Law enforcement officials are discussing ways to strengthen Bahrain's safeguards against alleged cases of torture. Interior Ministry, Public Prosecution and Justice and Islamic Affairs Ministry officials are examining the country's measures against international standards during a workshop, which concludes at the Golden Tulip Hotel today. It is the second workshop on safeguards against torture organised by the Foreign Affairs Ministry and United Nations Development

Programme (UNDP). The two-day event is being conducted by human rights experts from the Swiss-based Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT). Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr Nazar Al Baharna said the workshop was part of Bahrain's efforts to protect and promote human rights in the country.

204 candidates for Bahrain local, general polls

A total of 204 candidates, including eleven women have announced their participation in 2010 municipal and parliamentary elections. According to Zajil Press , only nine quit after highlighting plans to contest the elections. As many as 138 candidates, including 9 women are contesting the parliamentary election and 65 candidates, including two women are trying their luck in the municipal election. The Bahrain-based news agency is dedicating a web site with English and Arabic news on election is expected the number to double.

Economy Front

Financial crisis clips wings of Bahrain investment houses

Bahrain needs to reinvent itself as a financial center if it wants to return to growth and remain a destination for the region's oil wealth after the financial crisis clipped the wings of its investment houses.

Analysts say the only opportunity for Bahrain lies in funding the large infrastructure projects planned in the Gulf region, but building up expertise will be a long, hard grind with uncertain outcome.

Bahrain shelled out new banking licenses in particular to Islamic investment houses during a five-year regional oil and property boom that ended in 2008, with banks living on upfront fees on money raised for property and private equity projects. Bankers and analysts say the country's financial industry faces years of limited growth as this business model has been swept away by the crisis and retail banking is overcrowded in Bahrain and elsewhere in the region. "The outlook is grim if there is no change," said John Sandwick, a consultant on Islamic wealth and asset management.

Bahrain' expo industry surges despite global crisis

Bahrain's exhibition industry surged in the first five months of this year despite the challenging global financial climate, it was revealed at a key meeting yesterday. The Bahrain Exhibition and Convention Authority (BECA) said that by the end of last month, it has already reached 50 per cent of last year's annual achievement with more than 69 confirmed bookings at the Bahrain International Exhibition and Convention Centre (BIEC). Industry and Commerce Minister and BECA chairman Dr Hasan Fakhro chaired BECA's second quarterly board meeting.

The meeting reviewed BECA's operational performance for this year and its projects for next year and reviewed the exceptionally strong results, which showed continued growth for the kingdom's exhibition industry. The authority is projecting that it will exceed last year's annual

total of 139 events and is already working on expanding its facilities in order to cope with increased future demand.

Bahrain International Air show preparations reviewed

Preparations are already underway for the second Bahrain International Air Show (BIAS), to be held from January 19 to 21, 2012. The success of this year's show was owed to the support of His Majesty King Hamad, BIAS supreme organising committee head Shaikh Abdullah bin Hamad Al Khalifa stressed yesterday. He also praised the directives and support of His Royal Highness Prime Minister Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa and His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Economic Development Board chairman.

A promotional campaign is to be launched for the show, in co-operation with the Culture and Information Ministry and Bahrain Radio and Television Corporation (BRTC), it was revealed as the committee met at Shaikh Abdulla's office yesterday. The committee also discussed logistic arrangements for the next show underlining the need to augment the space of the exhibition to meet the increasing demands of companies wishing to take part.

Bahrain signs accords to boost trade with US

Bahrain has signed two memoranda of understanding to boost economic co-operation with the US. Economic Development Board chief executive Shaikh Mohammed bin Essa Al Khalifa sealed the first deal with Greater Houston Partnership (GHP) chairman Patrick Oxford.

The GHP is the primary advocate of Houston's business community and is dedicated to building regional economic prosperity. It is considered the biggest coalition of businessmen and decision-makers in Houston, Texas. It includes thousands of companies operating in key fields, particularly industrial sectors. Shaikh Mohammed also signed a second memorandum of understanding with the US-Arab Chamber of Commerce (BUSACC) representative David Philip.

Under the tripartite deal, the EDB, the GHP and the BUSACC commit to draw up a framework to promote joint ventures, exchange data and promote technical co-operation. Bahrain has already signed other deals with the Atlanta Development Agency, the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce and the US State of Georgia Ministry of Economic Development. The agreements aim to boost the already strong commercial and economic ties between the kingdom and US.

Bahrain' privatisation plan rapped

Economists and finance experts have strongly criticised government's plans to privatise Alba, reports our sister paper Akhbar Al Khaleej. The move totally contradicts the company's policy and government strategy aiming to diversify sources of income and will cause high inflation rates in the markets, they said. The government will also lose an important source of revenue that may go into the hands of foreign investors, they said, voicing concern over the possible lay off of Bahraini workers. The announcement of the government's intention to privatise some of its shares is very untimely, as it has not been preceded by technical procedures including marketing

campaigns aimed at attracting regional and international companies, while maintaining limited levels of individual shares, they said.

QATAR

International Front

Qatar signs IRENA pact

Qatar's endorsement of IRENA's Statute was made yesterday during the 5th Administrative Committee Meeting held in Abu Dhabi, where the IRENA General Secretariat is based. The endorsement was signed on Qatar's behalf by HE Dr Mohamed Saleh al-Sada, the Minister of State for Energy and Industry Affairs. IRENA was established in Bonn on January 26 last year. To date, 146 countries and the European Union have signed IRENA's Statute. IRENA member states pledge to advance renewables in their own national policies and programmes, and to promote, both domestically and through international co-operation, the transition to a sustainable and secure energy supply.

\$ 10mn emergency aid for Darfur areas by Qatari govt

The Qatar government has decided to initially provide an emergency relief support worth \$ 10mn for areas affected by the crisis in Darfur. The initiative is taken in collaboration with charity associations in Qatar within the scope of the emergency assistance programme in Darfur, a Foreign Ministry official told QNA.

Qatar 'committed to strengthening' rights panel

Qatar has reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening the Human Rights Council. In a speech, Abdullah Falah Abdullah al-Dossari, Qatar's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and other international organisations in Geneva said he hoped for further dialogue and co-operation among all the states to promote and protect human rights for all.

He congratulated Sihasak Phuanketkeow of Thailand who was earlier elected as the new head of the Human Rights Council. Al Dossari also thanked all states that renewed confidence in Qatar to support its re-election to the council. Thanking outgoing council president Alex Van Meeuwen of Belgium, Al-Dossari noted that the Human Rights Council had a productive and eventful year, which required in many cases the determination and courage and statesmanship in the management of its work.

Qatar Cooperates with Bosnia-Herzegovina in the Spheres of Security

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) on security cooperation between the government of the State of Qatar and the Bosnia-Herzegovina Cabinet was signed here on Sunday. The MoU aims at promoting ties of friendship , cooperation and coordination in crime combat , security preservation and exchange of expertise.HE minister of state for the interior affairs sheikh abdullah bin nasser bin khalifa al thani signed the MoU for qatar while Bosnian minister of

security sadeq ahmitovicy signed for the other side. HE sheikh abdullah bin nasser bin khalifa al thani has earlier conferred with the Bosnian security minister on enhancing and cementing scopes of joint cooperation in the security domains.

Qatar, Iran discuss bilateral ties

HE Qatar's Assistant Foreign Minister for Follow-Up Affairs Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Rumaihi, who is currently visiting Tehran, has met with Adviser to the Deputy President of the Islamic Republic of Iran's economic affairs Agha Mohammad Discussions during the meeting dealt with means of strengthening bilateral relations in all domains. HE Assistant Foreign Minister for Follow up Affairs chairs the Qatari side to the meetings of the joint technical committee on the maritime border between the two countries, which began yesterday in Tehran and lasts for two days. The Iranian side is chaired by the Director General of the Legal and International Affairs at the Iranian Foreign Ministry Benahi Azer.

Qatar hails action plan to end child soldier recruitment

Qatar has welcomed the progress being made by signing action plans to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers, as well as secure their release, Qatar's acting permanent delegate to the United Nations, Sheikha Alia Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani, has said. Despite international community's serious attention on the violations of children's rights in armed conflicts, she said there were some fragility among the protection offered to children in situations of foreign occupation. Speaking at a session of open debate at the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflicts in New York, she said: "We see from the report of the secretary-general on developments in the occupied Palestinian territories, a total of 374 Palestinian children had been killed and 2,086 wounded during the reporting period. This includes having at least 350 killed and 1,815 injured in Gaza alone during military operations by Israeli forces." The report also said that seven Palestinian children were used by Israeli soldiers as human shields.

She urged the Security Council to consider these violations and take necessary action to hold accountable those responsible and prevent their recurrence. To overcome this problem, she suggested that education is the optimal tool to contain the violence and the spreading of tranquility and peace, and stressed the need for action towards the implementations. "We, in the State of Qatar, under wise leadership of HH the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, believe that education is the optimal way to contain the violence and the spreading of tranquility and peace," she said.

US hails Qatar Emir's mediation efforts

The United States has welcomed the efforts made by HH the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani to mediate the border dispute between Djibouti and Eritrea that led to the signing of a peace agreement. In a press conference held at the White House, US Department of State Spokesman Phillip Crowley said: "This agreement is an important first step towards achieving renewed peace and stability in the region", urging Eritrea and Djibouti to work together on a rapid, peaceful, and sustainable settlement.

Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki and President of Djibouti Ismail Omar Guelleh have signed an agreement authorising Qatar to undertake mediation efforts to find a solution to their border dispute. They have authorised HH the Emir, who signed the agreement as a mediator and witness, with the full authority to issue an executive working document to the agreement.

Qatar reviews ties with Jordan and Iran

HE the Minister of Social Affairs Nasser bin Abdullah al-Hemaidi who is also Acting Labour Minister, has separately met Iranian Minister of Labour and Social Affairs Dr Abdel Reza Sheikh al-Eslami and Jordanian Labour Minister Ibrahim al-Amosh on the sidelines of the International Labour Conference currently in session in Geneva. Talks dealt with bilateral relations, especially on issues related to labour sector. The meetings were attended by Labour Undersecretary Hussein al-Mulla and several members of the Labour Ministry delegation participating in the conference.

Qatar, Syria seek stronger security cooperation

Syria and Qatar said Sunday it was important to develop security cooperation for the best interest of regional security and stability. Qatari Minister of State for Interior Affairs Sheikh Abdullah Al-Thani and Syrian Interior Minister Saeed Sammoor discussed ways of fostering cooperation and exchanging expertise. Both officials called for holding training courses for experts and officers.

Sheikh Abdullah said the Qatari Interior Ministry was keen on providing all facilities for the Syrian community in Qatar. Sammoor said Syria was interested in boosting cooperation with Qatar to positively reflect on security and stability on the two countries.

Qatar region's most peaceful nation: Study

Qatar has been rated as the most peaceful nation in the region, according to the recently released Global Peace Index (GPI) 2010. Japan, ranked third, is the only Asian country listed ahead of Qatar on the report. GPI is an attempt to measure the relative position of nations' and regions' peacefulness.

The index is composed of 23 qualitative and quantitative indicators from respected sources, which combine internal and external factors ranging from a nation's level of military expenditure to its relations with neighbouring countries and the level of respect for human rights. With a rank of 15 out of 149 countries on the index, Qatar is rated the most peaceful nation out of the 18 that constitute the Middle East and North Africa region. Qatar has moved up two slots in the 2010 GPI.

Economy Front

Work starts on Doha Metro's first station

Construction has started on the first underground metro station, which will be the terminus for the future Doha Metro line, a source said yesterday. The New Doha International Airport (NDIA) Terminal Metro Station is designed by Mott MacDonald, a global management, engineering and development consultancy. The Metro line is to provide the rail link between Doha city and the NDIA main terminal. Mott MacDonald was commissioned in 2008 by Qatar (represented by the NDIA Steering Committee), to develop designs for the metro connection from the New Doha International Airport to the wider Doha network. The project included developing a metro system based on conservative parameters and space proofing of 1.3km single track twin-bored tunnels and a 305m-long by 25m-wide and 20m-deep "cut and cover" underground station.

Qatar: Lusail Expressway project tender soon

The tender for the Lusail Expressway project, one of the Public Works Authority's (Ashghal) largest road and infrastructure project, is expected to be floated soon, Ashghal's Manager of Roads and Drainage, Networks Design Department, said yesterday.

The expressway will service all new areas of high development concentration north of Doha, starting from the Arch Roundabout all the way to Ritz- Carlton Hotel, the Towers Zone, New Diplomatic Area, Cultural Village, Lusail as well as The Pearl-Qatar. "The Lusail Expressway tendering process will start in 40 to 60 days," Engineer Jamal Shareeda Al Kaabi said yesterday at MEED's Qatar Transport Projects 2010 conference. "The tendering process might take anywhere between four to six months and before the end of the year we should be having a contract on board," he said. Al Kaabi said the construction work for the project is expected to begin before the end of the budget year which for Ashghal starts in April, noting that the timeframe for the completion of the project is being fine-tuned but is anticipated to take some 36 months.

Call for more investment in Qatar' transport sector

With all the benefits that it can offer, demand for public transportation in Qatar is on the rise, said the Acting Director of General Transport Affairs at the Ministry of Business and Trade.

Speaking at the opening of the Qatar Transport Projects 2010 Conference organized by Meed, Nasser Qadad said: "If we are going to make the most of the opportunities public transport has to offer, we need much more investments and public transportation system has to be improved." He said investment in public transportation system would create more jobs for the people and taken together, those benefits add up to a better quality of life for the community.

Qadad also underlined the importance of creating partnership between the public and private sectors to develop transport sector, noting that the government was looking forward to

partnerships in the field of roads rehabilitation and development and also financing plans to establish a rail road network that meets international standards. "Public transportation is an investment for a better quality of life," he said.

Qatar 'to become largest overseas property investor'

Fuelled by the rapid growth in its oil and gas sectors, Qatar is likely to emerge as the new "powerhouse" in global real estate capital flows this year, leading real estate consultancy Jones Lang LaSalle has said in a report. "Qatar is the epitome of energy-rich GCC nations, with a large appetite for real estate investment, fuelled by the rapid growth in oil and gas revenues over recent years," Jones Lang LaSalle regional director Fadi Mousalli said. "With a relatively small domestic real estate market, much of this interest is being directed towards real estate markets overseas, making Qatar an increasingly important player in terms of global real estate capital flows," Mousalli added.

After an adjustment period in 2009, Qatar-based institutions are back in the spotlight and the state is projected to rank as the number one global overseas real estate investor in 2010, he said. The return of the Qataris on the global real estate scene has been marked by an "aggressive and bold" investment strategy. As relatively young entities, Qatar-based institutions have shown a hunger for high-profile acquisitions and an eagerness to leave their footprint on the global map. "Cash-rich and with a strong appetite for splashy overseas assets, Qatari vehicles have lately outshined their counterparts from the region and are projected to carry on with their rapid expansion across the real estate world," Mousalli said.

Qatari market important, says top US trade official

US Undersecretary for Commerce and International Trade Francisco Sanchez has said the Qatari market is important for American investors as it is one of the fastest growing economies in the world. He was speaking at a luncheon hosted in his honour by Qatar Businessmen Association at the majlis of QBA second deputy chairman Sheikh Khalid bin Thani al-Thani at the weekend. "Between 2000 and 2008 US exports to Qatar increased by 580%. This made the US, Qatar's largest import partner," Sanchez said.

He also explained the trade delegation's objectives in introducing major US companies to Qatar. The delegation comprised 15 CEOs and presidents of US companies focusing on and dealing with healthcare and water & waste management, hospital and clinical laboratories equipment, pharmaceuticals, health care technologies, public health, hospital's construction and design and IT. Sanchez thanked QBA and Sheikh Khalid for the reception extended to the US delegation and invited Qatari businessmen to visit the US and explore mutually beneficial business opportunities.