

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

**MADIHA KAUKAB
Weekly Report. # 127
3rd July- 9th July 2010**

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

SUMMARY

The second meeting of the Gulf Cooperative Council's (GCC) security media committee concluded in Kuwait on Monday. The committee drew up a list of recommendations to keep the GCC Secretariat up to date with the awareness activities that will be taking place throughout the year. Such activities include celebrating World Civil Defense Day under the theme 'women's role in civil defense' in 2011, and 'civil defense and home fires' in 2012. As recommended, GCC countries are to provide the GCC Secretariat with detailed lists of multimedia awareness productions to be sent to the Saudi Ministry of Interior for future reference. Participants agreed to send a number of clarifications to the committee concerned with following up on the execution of the GCC collective security strategy. The Interior Ministry's official spokesman and head of its security media department, Brigadier General Mohammad Al-Sabr expressed gratitude to participating delegations in a speech he made at the end of the session. He stressed the significance of these meetings to reinforce the media security cooperation of GCC countries. A senior Ministry of Interior official has emphasized the importance of studying the hopes and concerns involved in achieving the shared objectives of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member nations. Brig Gen Mohammad Al-Sabr, the director of the MoI's security department and ministry spokesperson, made the comment during a speech delivered at the first meeting of the GCC committee on information security. The recent visit of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah to the United States has further cemented the existing relations between the two countries, Sen. Robert Casey of Pennsylvania, head of the visiting US congressional delegation, said on Saturday during a discussion with the members of the Shoura Council held at the council's headquarters in Riyadh. Osama Al-Kurdi, head of the Saudi-US Parliamentary Friendship Committee led the Saudi team. Abdul Rahman Al-Barrak, deputy Speaker of the Shoura Council, Saleh Al-Namlah, chairman of the Shoura Foreign Affairs Committee, and US Ambassador to Saudi Arabia James Smith were also present during the talks. During the meeting in Washington, the two heads of state agreed on the need to press for Middle East peace, including establishing a Palestinian homeland. The two parties discussed a number of topics and issues of common interests between the two countries in various fields. Ever since a joint committee for economic cooperation was set up in 1974 between the two countries, Saudi-American relations have been growing steadily in political, economic, social and cultural fields. The signing of a number of bilateral agreements and memorandum of understanding between the two countries has broadened the areas of bilateral cooperation by creating 357 joint venture

projects in the Kingdom worth SR82 billion. The United States is the Kingdom's largest trade partner and the biggest investor. The recent visit of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah to the United States has further cemented the existing relations between the two countries, Sen. Robert Casey of Pennsylvania, head of the visiting US congressional delegation, said on Saturday during a discussion with the members of the Shoura Council held at the council's headquarters in Riyadh. Osama Al-Kurdi, head of the Saudi-US Parliamentary Friendship Committee led the Saudi team. Abdul Rahman Al-Barrak, deputy Speaker of the Shoura Council, Saleh Al-Namlah, chairman of the Shoura Foreign Affairs Committee, and US Ambassador to Saudi Arabia James Smith were also present during the talks. During the meeting in Washington, the two heads of state agreed on the need to press for Middle East peace, including establishing a Palestinian homeland. The two parties discussed a number of topics and issues of common interests between the two countries in various fields. Ever since a joint committee for economic cooperation was set up in 1974 between the two countries, Saudi-American relations have been growing steadily in political, economic, social and cultural fields. The signing of a number of bilateral agreements and memorandum of understanding between the two countries has broadened the areas of bilateral cooperation by creating 357 joint venture projects in the Kingdom worth SR82 billion. The United States is the Kingdom's largest trade partner and the biggest investor. Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretary-General Abdulrahman Bin Hamad Al-Attiyah yesterday strongly praised here Kuwait's commitment to and support of the Arab World Institute (IMA) and he underlined the recent generous donations of the Gulf State to help fund ongoing projects at the Institute. Al-Attiyah was visiting IMA to sign a "Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)" between the GCC and IMA in order to "reinforce and broaden mutual cooperation" between the two parties. The seven-section MOU, signed by Al-Attiyah and IMA Director-General Mokhtar Taleb Bendiab, will pave the way for increased joint cultural initiatives in a variety of areas and bolster existing ties between the GCC nations and IMA. Speaking in exclusive comments to KUNA after the signing of the MOU, Al-Attiyah said he wanted to remark on the very positive role Kuwait, as a Gulf State, has played in the Institute. As Secretary-General of the GCC, I want to say that we support the IMA and Kuwait has been one of the best GCC nations in doing this through its financial support," Al-Attiyah said. The UK is stepping up its activities in Bahrain with increased investment in arts and education. British officials also hope to almost double the number of Bahrain schools linked with those in the UK. Plans to increase ties were revealed by British Council chief executive officer Martin Davidson, who spoke to the Press during his first visit to Bahrain. He said such co-operation was vital if Bahrain was to achieve goals laid out in its Vision 2030, which outlines the future development of the country. "Vision 2030 speaks of a highly educated, talented workforce," he said at the British Council, Manama. "To support that, Bahrain will need young people with English, young people with technical skills and young people with international skills. "So I think there is a big opportunity for the British Council to make sure that the UK is part of that future for Bahrain and that Bahrain is part of the future for the UK." He revealed the British Council was expanding its operations here to keep pace with development. Lt Gen Malik bin Sulaiman al Maamari, Inspector General of Police and Customs, yesterday received Maj Gen Hamad bin Ali al Attiyah, Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces in Qatar, and his accompanying delegation. The meeting discussed security co-operation between the Sultanate and Qatar, procedures of the joint exercises between the concerned authorities in the two countries, exchanging expertise and activating it to serve the interest of the two brotherly countries. It also reviewed issues of common concern. Talks with SAF chief Lt Gen Ahmed bin

Harith al Nabhani, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), and Maj Gen Hamad bin Ali al Attiyah, Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces in Qatar, held a formal talks session yesterday. The session reviewed the good relations binding the two brotherly countries and discussed military co-operation and means of enhancing them. The guest was briefed on SAF and its progress during the prosperous reign of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. Later, Al Attiyah accompanied by Al Nabhani visited the SAF Museum. The guest commended the museum and its contents that depict the Sultanate's ancient past and bright present.

In a renewed move to cut reliance on foreign workers, the Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF) has trained 139,461 Saudis for employment in different areas. The HRDF has “spent more than SR584 million on training and employing Saudis” during the first half of this year alone, said Adel Al-Salih, the organization’s acting director general. Al-Salih, who gave an overview of HRDF’s training and employment programs that aim to create jobs for young Saudis in the private sector, said the fund has signed 1,174 agreements with private companies under an ambitious partnership plan. These companies, he said, would provide training to unemployed Saudis and would in turn be supported by the HRDF with financial assistance and other government incentives. He also urged private companies that have been authorized to implement training and employment programs to present their financial claims to the HRDF. The performance of these private companies, especially in terms of their competitiveness in running training programs and providing employment to Saudis, is regularly monitored by the HRDF.

Full-body security scanners will not be used in Dubai airports, it was announced yesterday. The decision was made because the devices do not correspond with national customs and ethics, said Brig Ahmed bin Thani, the Dubai Police’s director of airport security. “I do not feel that it is necessary for us to implement such a technology while we are operating different methods and have different avenues that have worked so far,” he said. “The use of such a device violates personal privacy and it raises a very sensitive issue for passengers, in addition to the fact that it does not complement our national ethics.” The devices, also known as millimetre wave scanners, or backscatter X-rays depending on which technology they use, have raised privacy concerns because they allow authorities to see underneath clothing to the surface of the skin, although special software normally masks some parts of the body. The scanners could also affect human DNA by interfering with processes such as DNA replication, a study for the Los Alamos National Laboratory in the US has shown. The rejection by Dubai is at odds with an announcement by federal authorities at a regional aviation security conference last month that they intended to introduce body-imaging machines at airports. The Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah stressed the government is keen on accomplishing the state's set development plan and is stressing cooperation among all state bodies and diligent effort to work out difficulties as means towards that end. He was addressing a press conference he held with editors-in-chief of local papers, and stressed all due effort shall be exerted and all due cooperation shall be made within the framework of the constitution. The government shall respect all supervisory tools used by MPs and would cooperate with them "and would not allow differences and conflicts stall development or cause tension in the relationship between the two authorities, and we have relentless determination to overcome all hurdles". Sheikh Nasser expressed thanks to the Almighty for blessing the state "with guidance and strength to utilize constitutional tools and coordinate their usage as well as coordinate efforts by the civil community institutions and all groups within Kuwaiti society, and investing all that to serve the

homeland and push forward development and bring about prosperity". Shaikh Mohammed bin Marhoon al Maamari, Minister of State and Governor of Dhofar, met with Director-Generals and Heads of the Governmental Departments yesterday to review the work and services in the governorate. He urged various sectors to co-ordinate with each other to render best services to citizens and residents. The minister asked them to continue co-operation to remove obstacles in work and activate duties to serve the future goals in the comprehensive building of the country bearing in mind the priorities of development and requirements of each phase of the five-year development plan within the framework of integrated programme that reflects the Royal visions of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. Hundreds of workers at a Bahrain company, who stopped work on Sunday demanding higher wages, have refused to return until management agrees to meet them. The staff from Almoayyed Contracting refused to leave their camps in Manama and Eker for the second day running yesterday, claiming they had been paid BD60 or BD70 a month for the last eight years. "We need the company to increase the wages to a reasonable amount so that we can at least make ends meet," one worker told the GDN. "While those who came 10 years ago are being paid a maximum of BD60 each, those who came in the last two years were promised BD90 a month but are being paid only BD80." However, company officials vehemently denied the accusations, with Almoayyed Group managing director Mona Almoayyed saying no one at the firm was paid less than BD80.

Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia has ordered a halt to oil exploration operations to save the hydrocarbon wealth in the world's top crude exporting nation for future generations, the official Saudi Press Agency, or SPA, reported late on Saturday. "I was heading a cabinet meeting and told them to pray to God the Almighty to give it a long life," King Abdullah told Saudi scholars studying in Washington, according to SPA. "I told them that I have ordered a halt to all oil explorations so part of this wealth is left for our sons and successors God willing," he said. Saudi Arabia, the largest member of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries, pumped oil unchanged at 8.26 million barrels a day in June, a survey by Dow Jones Newswires showed on Thursday. The kingdom is pumping about 209,000 barrels above its target. Oman oil reserves fell 3pc in 2009 Oman's oil reserves slipped just over 3 per cent in 2009 as the country failed to find as much oil as it produced, according to official data in the country's annual central bank report. Oman is a small independent oil producer in a region housing OPEC's largest crude exporters, but its oil has a big influence on international markets, as it is used in benchmark pricing for around 12 million barrels per day (bpd) of crude exported from the Middle East to Asia. The sultanate is drilling more wells to better understand the amount of oil in its Al Ghubar South field, which it estimates could contain a billion barrels. That would add over 20 per cent to its reserves. The UAE has recently signed an agreement on double taxation avoidance on income with the Republic of Ireland in an endeavour to develop, strengthen cooperation and partnership between the two countries in areas of common interest. According to Younis Haji Al Khoori, Director-General of the Ministry of Finance, who signed the agreement on behalf of the UAE, the agreement aims at providing employment opportunities, increasing economic growth, enhancing GDP rates growth and reducing budget deficits. Kuwait will host the second round of negotiations on a bilateral investment agreement between Kuwait and Japan from July 6-8, the Japanese Foreign Ministry announced in a statement on Friday. The three-day meeting will be attended on the Kuwaiti side by Ali Al-Metairef, Director of the Finance Ministry's Tax Liability and Planning Department, and other officials from the Foreign and Finance ministries, according to the statement. The Japanese side will be represented by

Nobuyoshi Chihara, Deputy Director-General of the Foreign Ministry's Middle Eastern and African Affairs Bureau, and other officials concerned from the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. At their first talks held in Tokyo late April, Kuwait and Japan affirmed their commitment to conclude the bilateral investment deal at the earliest possible time in order to further promote economic ties between the two countries. The two sides also agreed to further exchange views on the deal and to resolve outstanding issues. During his summit talks in Japan with then Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda in July 2008, H.H. the Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah expressed Kuwait's desire to start the negotiation for an agreement on the promotion and mutual protection of investments between the two countries. Oman's economic growth rate in 2010 may rise by about 7.3 per cent compared to 3 per cent in 2009 and the rate of inflation may reach 5.2 per cent against 5.3 per cent in 2008, according to a report released by Arab Organisation for Industrial Development and Mining (AOIDM). The report states that the Omani economy performed well for the sixth consecutive year in 2009 despite the repercussions of the global financial crisis. In its newly-released Third Arab Industrial Report, AOIDM attributed the good show to the high global oil prices and the country's public investment strategy which, it said, aims to diversify the economy. Bahrain and Britain are gateways to their regions and should further develop their business relations to maximise the opportunities they present, says a top business leader. Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) chairman Dr Essam Fakhro said Britain was a leading financial centre that could be seen as a gateway to Europe and Bahrain held the same position in the Gulf. "Bahrain's economy is very small in relation to our neighbouring countries in the GCC and when we try to market Bahrain we market it as a gateway to the Gulf, which is a trillion dollar economy," he said. "They can use Bahrain as a launch pad to the Gulf and Iraq and Iran and this is starting to happen and bear fruit." Dr Fakhro said Bahrain and the UK already enjoyed good business relations because of their historical ties and the keenness of leadership on both sides to continue advancing the relationship. Underpinned by its huge natural gas resources, Qatar is poised to become the third largest economy in the GCC region by 2012, research has shown. Beyond an 18.5% real GDP growth forecast for Qatar in 2010, the highest worldwide, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecasts 14.3% in 2011 and 9.2% for the country in 2012. Qatar is set to become one of the top "macroeconomic picks" by investors in the Mena region, Bank Audi says in a study titled "A mix of opportunities and challenges for the World's fastest growing economy". The study says that Qatar's national economy is delivering an "impressive buoyant performance" in the midst of sluggish global conditions. The country's economic growth is apt to display strong two-digit rate in 2010, thanks to the continuing expansion of its natural gas sector, the strong countercyclical policy responses by the authorities and the strengthening of external demand, which can lead to a recovery in the non-hydrocarbon sector. According to the study, Qatar economy is riding on a "massive hydrocarbons capacity expansion boom", which is driving its record high growth rates.

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GCC

Top priority to GCC security

The second meeting of the Gulf Cooperative Council's (GCC) security media committee concluded in Kuwait on Monday. The committee drew up a list of recommendations to keep the GCC Secretariat up to date with the awareness activities that will be taking place throughout the year. Such activities include celebrating World Civil Defense Day under the theme 'women's role in civil defense' in 2011, and 'civil defense and home fires' in 2012. As recommended, GCC countries are to provide the GCC Secretariat with detailed lists of multimedia awareness productions to be sent to the Saudi Ministry of Interior for future reference. Participants agreed to send a number of clarifications to the committee concerned with following up on the execution of the GCC collective security strategy.

The Interior Ministry's official spokesman and head of its security media department, Brigadier General Mohammad Al-Sabr expressed gratitude to participating delegations in a speech he made at the end of the session. He stressed the significance of these meetings to reinforce the media security cooperation of GCC countries. A senior Ministry of Interior official has emphasized the importance of studying the hopes and concerns involved in achieving the shared objectives of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member nations. Brig Gen Mohammad Al-Sabr, the director of the MoI's security department and ministry spokesperson, made the comment during a speech delivered at the first meeting of the GCC committee on information security.

GCC Secretary-General to visit IMA in Paris Monday

Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Abdul Rahman Bin Hamad Al-Attiyah will visit the Arab World Institute (IMA) here next Monday to sign a convention and hold talks with senior members of the staff. Al-Attiyah will meet with IMA's President Dominique Baudis and Director-General Mokhtar Taleb-Bendiab, as well as with Board Chairman Bruno Levallois.

During Al-Attiyah's visit, IMA and the GCC are to sign a "framework convention" to promote cooperation between the two bodies, IMA said in a statement. A visit is also being organized to the site of the new IMA museum, whose construction is underway and which was strongly supported by Kuwait.

GCC business confidence on the rise as crisis ebbs

Business confidence is building in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries as a sense of recovery takes hold, according to the second Oliver Wyman/Zogby International survey of C-Suite executives located in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. The survey of 134 CEOs, CFOs, and COOs, conducted in April and May 2010 which was released on Tuesday, showed GCC executives are broadly upbeat: 58 percent of those surveyed say they find current business conditions improved, and 82 percent expect improved conditions in the next two years. In the UAE, the percentage of executives expressing optimism about two-year prospects is 74 percent, up 29 percentage points from the previous survey in October 2009. Optimism also increased in Saudi Arabia (up 19 points to 85 percent) and Qatar (up 13 points to 96 percent). In the survey last October we saw confidence down in the shadow of the financial crisis," noted James Zogby, of Zogby International. "This time, when we asked more general questions about business confidence and the prospects for the future we found real optimism across the region, with Qataris and Saudis the most confident."

Visa's GCC transactions grow 19pc

Visa has reported a growth of 19.4 per cent in payment transactions across the GCC in the first quarter of the year. The increase in transaction growth followed a successful year for Visa in terms of extending its debit business in the region. The payment solutions provider formed a number of key debit partnerships with leading GCC-based banks last year which aimed to improve the card payment experience for cardholders, by providing increased debit card capabilities and convenience. Visa's successful debit signings for this year include deals with Bahrain Islamic Bank, ADIB, NBD, HSBC, Dubai Islamic Bank, Doha Bank, NBK and KFH Kuwait.

As part of the partnerships, Visa will support all eight banks to develop their debit portfolios and enhance customer experiences by increasing usage capabilities. The increased debit offering will provide GCC cardholders increased flexibility, convenience and security that Visa debit products offer. "The signing of all eight debit deals last year is a reflection of the growing popularity of debit in the region," said Visa Middle East general manager Kamran Siddiqi. "We have seen increased demand for products such as debit which allow cardholders to keep their spending

within a budget while still providing them access to their funds. "The signing of all eight deals, which have extended the debit offering for cardholders across the GCC, combined with growing demand among consumers has led to double digit growth in the first three months of this year in payment transactions," he said.

YEMEN

Yemeni-GCC technical committee holds meeting in Riyadh

The Yemeni-Gulf Joint Technical Committee will hold its meeting on Sunday in the Saudi capital, Riyadh. Undersecretary of the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation for Plans Sector Mutahar al-Abbasi said in remarks to Saba, upon departure to the meeting, that the meeting will evaluate the special needs of Yemen to be financed for the 4th Five Year Plan 2011-2015.

He pointed out that the committee will also address a number of issues including work process of projects funded by the Gulf Cooperation Council and the regional funds and banks, in addition to following up what was agreed on in Riyadh meetings last February. Al-Abbasi made clear that the committee will discuss the Yemeni labor and the extent to contain them in the Gulf markets.

Kuwait Minister highlights Islamic Affairs, Awqaf fields in Yemen

Visiting Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister for Legal Affairs and Minister of Justice and Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Rashid Al-Hammad stressed on Monday the importance of preserving and developing Islamic endowments, which have a positive influence in serving Islamic society. Al-Hammad made his remarks during talks between the Yemeni and Kuwaiti Awqaf ministers here, where discussion focused on a cooperative agreement between the two countries, noting that such an agreement comes after practical steps to bolster bilateral cooperation between the two countries.

In response to such cooperation, the Kuwaiti minister shed light on the current coordination between the two countries and the appointment of 250 Yemeni clerics in Kuwait who are given all the care and keenness they deserve. Al-Hammad also indicated that the signed agreement between the two countries would also enhance bilateral relations and cooperation between the two countries. Meanwhile, Yemeni Deputy Prime Minister for Defense Affairs and Security Dr. Rashid Al-Olaimi hailed bilateral relations between Kuwait and Yemen.

SAUDI ARABIA

International Front

'Saudi Arabia to become a knowledge hub'

Saudi Arabia is in the front ranks of countries combating money laundering and terror financing according to a report by the International Financial Action Group and the Middle East Financial

Action Group, it was reported here today. The report placed Saudi Arabia first in the Arab world and among the top ten of G20 countries.

The Kingdom was awarded those ranks at a meeting held by the well-known international financial institution in Amsterdam from June 23 to 25, based on a report approved by the Middle East group which took place in Tunis from May 2 to 5. In a statement on the occasion, the Governor of the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency for the Standing Committee on Money Laundering Combat Dr. Mohammed Al-Jasser said the achievement has come as a result of the keenness and instructions of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz and the follow-up of the concerned governmental authorities.

Saudi Arabia, France to sign nuke accord

Saudi Arabia will sign a nuclear cooperation pact with France shortly in order to develop atomic energy for peaceful purposes, it was announced Monday. The Council of Ministers has authorized Hashim Yamani, president of the King Abdullah Nuclear & Renewable Energy City, to sign the deal, the Saudi Press Agency said. It did not say when the signing would take place but analysts expect the agreement to be inked during the upcoming state visit of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah to France. The nuclear pact was first proposed by French President Nicolas Sarkozy in talks with King Abdullah in June 2007 in Paris, and the French side submitted a draft when Sarkozy visited Riyadh in January 2008.

Saudi endorsement was delayed last year while Riyadh undertook a formal review of its nuclear policy, which resulted in the April 2010 announcement of King Abdullah City to conduct research on nuclear and renewable energy. The establishment of a nuclear and renewable energy city in Riyadh was seen as the strongest signal yet that the country, which burns large amounts of oil and natural gas to generate electricity and desalinate seawater for domestic consumption, could develop nuclear power. The Cabinet meeting, chaired by Crown Prince Sultan, deputy premier and minister of defense and aviation, authorized Finance Minister Ibrahim Al-Assaf to sign another agreement with France to avoid double taxation on income and inheritance.

King Abdullah approves expo of Saudi antiquities in EU museums

King Abdullah, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, has given approval for the exhibition of Archeological Masterpieces of Saudi Arabia to tour a number of European capitals and major US cities, said Prince Sultan Bin Salman Bin Abdul Aziz, President of the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (SCTA). The Royal approval for the exhibition to tour EU and US museums with its first scheduled show in the Louvre in Paris under the patronage of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and the President of France underlines the Kingdom's historical position and introduces its civilization to the world, Prince Sultan said, adding that it is also a bridge to the understanding of human history.

As regards the intended message of the exhibition at the Louvre, Dr. Ali Bin Ibrahim Al-Ghabban, SCTA Vice President for Antiquities and Museums said: "One of the most important goals of this exhibition is to shed light on the history, culture and civilization of the Kingdom

through the ages,” he said. “By showcasing these artifacts, we are presenting our culture and history to the world,” the official added.

Imam Afzali leaves the United States to Saudi Arabia

Imam Ahmad Afzali, who was involved in the suicide bomb investigation in New York subway, was deported from the United States to Saudi Arabia. Afzali's lawyer, Ron Kuby, said late on Monday that the Imam was deported yesterday afternoon and later the US government confirmed his departure to Saudi Arabia. The New York Imam, born in Afghanistan, pleaded guilty to lying to federal agents during the investigation of the case involving Najibullah Zazi's alleged subway bombing in New York city and his deportation came as part of the plea deal and was given 90 days by the US government to leave the country. Afzali was sentenced on April 15 for the time he served in detention and deportation while Zazi pleaded guilty in the New York subway plot that was disrupted by local and federal officials in New York.

US delegation meets with Saudi Shoura Council members

The recent visit of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah to the United States has further cemented the existing relations between the two countries, Sen. Robert Casey of Pennsylvania, head of the visiting US congressional delegation, said on Saturday during a discussion with the members of the Shoura Council held at the council's headquarters in Riyadh.

Osama Al-Kurdi, head of the Saudi-US Parliamentary Friendship Committee led the Saudi team. Abdul Rahman Al-Barrak, deputy Speaker of the Shoura Council, Saleh Al-Namlah, chairman of the Shoura Foreign Affairs Committee, and US Ambassador to Saudi Arabia James Smith were also present during the talks. During the meeting in Washington, the two heads of state agreed on the need to press for Middle East peace, including establishing a Palestinian homeland. The two parties discussed a number of topics and issues of common interests between the two countries in various fields.

Ever since a joint committee for economic cooperation was set up in 1974 between the two countries, Saudi-American relations have been growing steadily in political, economic, social and cultural fields. The signing of a number of bilateral agreements and memorandum of understanding between the two countries has broadened the areas of bilateral cooperation by creating 357 joint venture projects in the Kingdom worth SR82 billion. The United States is the Kingdom's largest trade partner and the biggest investor.

Social Front

Ministry of Health launches pregnancy health record system

Ministry of Health recently launched a project which aims to maintain the health records of all pregnant women and their children starting from the time the woman first receives pre-natal care and ending when the baby is five years old. The project is part of a program aimed at safeguarding the overall health of the family. We register all the basic health data of the pregnant women and of their babies after birth in order to be able to provide them with the best health

services possible. The data is provided either by governmental or private hospitals,” said Dr. Jamman Al-Ghamdi, assistant undersecretary of therapeutic medicine at the Ministry of Health.

He added that these health records will play an important role in decreasing birth-related fatalities and illness in both mothers and babies and that they will also lead to the early detection of any disabilities and other medical conditions that infants may have. “One of the main targets of this project is to increase the communication and relationship between health providers and beneficiaries in addition to upgrading the level of health services for expectant mothers in the Kingdom,” Al-Ghamdi said.

Campaign to solve problem of spinsters in Saudi

A group of young Saudis have launched a Facebook campaign to promote polygamy as a way to end spinsterhood among women in the country. Called “We Want Them Four,” it asks every capable Saudi man to marry four women to reduce the number of spinsters in the country. There are no statistics on the number of unmarried women in Saudi Arabia, but their number is believed to be high due to high wedding costs. “Every Saudi and Arab man who is financially and physically able to marry more than one wife should not hesitate to do so in order to end spinsterhood among our women and help cap the high marriage costs that have deterred many young men from getting married,” the campaign page says.

Arab families have also been urged not to complicate marriage preparations by asking for a huge dowry and other financial obligations that young men are unable to meet. The campaigners also ask men who marry more than one wife to be fair and treat them equally as advocated by Islam. Another group of young men has launched another similar Facebook campaign, which says Islam did not invent the idea of polygamy but only formalised it. They said the West was looking suspiciously at Muslims who marry more than one woman, especially as some of them did not observe Islam’s rules on the matter.

Saudi HRDF intensifies efforts to cut dependence on foreign labor

In a renewed move to cut reliance on foreign workers, the Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF) has trained 139,461 Saudis for employment in different areas. The HRDF has “spent more than SR584 million on training and employing Saudis” during the first half of this year alone, said Adel Al-Salih, the organization’s acting director general.

Al-Salih, who gave an overview of HRDF’s training and employment programs that aim to create jobs for young Saudis in the private sector, said the fund has signed 1,174 agreements with private companies under an ambitious partnership plan. These companies, he said, would provide training to unemployed Saudis and would in turn be supported by the HRDF with financial assistance and other government incentives. He also urged private companies that have been authorized to implement training and employment programs to present their financial claims to the HRDF. The performance of these private companies, especially in terms of their competitiveness in running training programs and providing employment to Saudis, is regularly monitored by the HRDF.

Over 800,000 Saudis waiting for govt jobs

More than 800,000 Saudi men and women with various qualifications are waiting to be employed by the government, local Arabic daily Al-Madinah reported Friday, quoting an official source at the Ministry of Civil Service. The official said those on the waiting list consisted of 315,000 women teachers with various specialties while the rest were graduates of elementary, intermediate and secondary schools. "Some of them have diplomas, university degrees, master's and even Ph.Ds," he said. He said the opening of applications for men and women in all specializations will enable his ministry to create a database for those wishing for government jobs according to their potentials and in complete transparency. The official said a large number of graduates in medical specializations such as nursing, laboratories, pharmacology and physiotherapy, were among those included in the waiting list for government positions. He said the number of government employees rose from 674,550 in 2000 to 920,000 last year.

Economy Front

Saudi-UAE banks seek high-potential markets

While the global financial crisis has forced commercial banks in other parts of the world to close expensive branches and look for ways to cut costs, the focus in the UAE and Saudi Arabia has been on finding ways to grow in a high-potential market. For every 17,000 people in Saudi Arabia there is only one bank branch. There are roughly 2,000 people per branch in most European countries. With such an underdeveloped banking sector, the challenge of attracting new customers many of whom have never used a bank before is central to bankers in the region, according to Julien Faye and Philippe De Backer, partners in Bain & Company in the Middle East and members of the firm's financial services practice.

Some banks are adopting a nimble approach to expansion, opening small stores and kiosks in malls and other high-traffic locations. These outlets have a fraction of the footprint of a traditional, full-service branch, which can cost five times as much to build and operate. This light-retail model emphasises product sales and new-customer acquisition over routine transaction processing, which is increasingly carried out through low-cost electronic channels like ATMs and the Internet, they say.

First floating water desalination barge launched in Saudi Arabia

Fehied F. Al-Shareef, governor of the Saline Water Conversion Corporation (SWCC) and Engineer Nabil Azmaruli, general manager of the General Directorate of Water in Al-Madina, launched the first floating water desalination barge which has a production capacity of 25,000 cubic meters per day on Wednesday. The barge will provide its production to Madina and Yanbu. Al-Shareef, then inspected the second floating water desalination barge which also has a production capacity of 25,000 cubic meters per day. He also inspected the site to follow up on the progress of anchoring and full operation of the barges. Al-Shareef also witnessed the completion of all required work in record time with a high degree of quality ensuring the safety of the barges and their installed equipment during operation after the barges had been transferred from Shuqaiq in the southwest to Yanbu. The visit included a site inspection of the suitability of

the location, running operations, site facilities, the barges workforce and the SWCC barges management team from the Yanbu desalination plants. The barges were first put into operation in 2008 to support the season increased requirement in the western region and were anchored on the coast of Shuaibah. In 2009 the barges moved to the shores of Shuqaiq city in record time and with minimal resources, making mobility one of the most important features of the barges.

Saudi Shoura reviewing articles in proposed mortgage law

The Shoura Council is currently reviewing some of the articles of the Kingdom's draft mortgage law on real estate since the council and the Cabinet have a difference of opinion on certain issues, Assistant Chairman Abdul Rahman Al-Barrak told newsmen following the 40th regular session of the council held on Monday. The session, held under Al-Barrak's chairmanship, focused on various issues related to the draft mortgage law such as financing real estate, control over funding agencies and lease schemes.

The draft mortgage law includes five statutes — a mortgage registration law that allows the use of mortgages in real property financing, including mortgage registration; an execution (enforcement) law that expands a judicial court's authority to provide injunctive and declaratory relief, and enforce such orders; a financial leasing law that regulates the incorporation, activities, and governance of financial leasing companies; a real estate finance law that regulates the incorporation, activities and governance of companies engaged in real estate financing; and a control of finance companies law that regulates the incorporation, activities and governance of finance companies. Shoura Council Secretary-General Dr. Muhammed Al-Ghamdi said the proposed law was approved by the council in 2008 and was sent to the Cabinet for approval. He added that since there are some differences of opinions on some of the bill's important articles, the Cabinet returned it for review.

Canada, Saudi firms plan first ever property exchange

Canadian firm has teamed up with a Saudi Arabian company to create the first global real estate securities exchange, with the first group of exchanges slated for autumn of 2012 in Dubai, Canada and London. Saudi's International Real Estate Exchange Group (IREX) and Canada's egX announced yesterday the establishment of IREX Group, which will create and operate a securities marketplace for listing and trading of real estate assets in the world's key financial hubs.

For its Middle East and North Africa branch, the company is looking at Dubai as a main option to set up an exchange, but is not ruling out other areas in the Gulf Arab region, Safar al-Harhi, executive chairman of the group, told reporters on the sidelines of a conference. Qatar and Bahrain are among areas being considered, he said.

Saudi king orders a halt to oil exploration

Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia has ordered a halt to oil exploration operations to save the hydrocarbon wealth in the world's top crude exporting nation for future generations, the official Saudi Press Agency, or SPA, reported late on

Saturday. "I was heading a cabinet meeting and told them to pray to God the Almighty to give it a long life," King Abdullah told Saudi scholars studying in Washington, according to SPA. "I told them that I have ordered a halt to all oil explorations so part of this wealth is left for our sons and successors God willing," he said.

Saudi Arabia, the largest member of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries, pumped oil unchanged at 8.26 million barrels a day in June, a survey by Dow Jones Newswires showed on Thursday. The kingdom is pumping about 209,000 barrels above its target. Oman oil reserves fell 3pc in 2009 Oman's oil reserves slipped just over 3 per cent in 2009 as the country failed to find as much oil as it produced, according to official data in the country's annual central bank report. Oman is a small independent oil producer in a region housing OPEC's largest crude exporters, but its oil has a big influence on international markets, as it is used in benchmark pricing for around 12 million barrels per day (bpd) of crude exported from the Middle East to Asia. The sultanate is drilling more wells to better understand the amount of oil in its Al Ghubar South field, which it estimates could contain a billion barrels. That would add over 20 per cent to its reserves.

Saudi Arabia plans to waive citizens' loans

Saudi Arabia plans to write off debts its citizens owe to public agencies. Plans are also under way to waive the loans Saudi nationals have taken from non-government organisations. The Saudi government plans to set up a unique settlement system to clear citizens' loans, a Saudi Arabic daily reported yesterday. A committee with representatives of the ministries of justice, interior and finance has approved the loan write-off proposal. If a national is indebted to non-government entities, the government will coordinate with these agencies to clear his debts. The proposal has been approved by the financial panel of the Advisory Council and will be put for a vote in it.

New oil fields saved for future generations: King Abdullah

Saudi Arabia has stopped exploration missions of new oil fields to save the wealth and pass it on to future generations, King Abdullah, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, said here Thursday. The King was speaking during a reception of a group of Saudi students studying in the United States. The number of Saudi students pursuing their higher education in the United States has reached 30,000 thanks to the King's Scholarship Program.

King Abdullah, who expressed hope that oil will last for a long time, said that when recent exploration for underground resources started, he ordered that it be ended because the oil should be left for future generations. The King said once in a meeting of the Cabinet he asked the ministers to repeat a prayer after him "May Allah prolong its life." "What is it?, the ministers replied," the King said. "It is the oil wealth," he answered them. "Just leave the underground wealth for our sons and their sons," the King said as he continued his response to the ministers.

Health Front

Swine flu shot must for pilgrims

Taking vaccination against swine flu and meningitis is still a condition to receive Umrah visas, a number of pilgrims arriving at King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah told Arab News. The swine-flu vaccine requirement is being maintained despite the global retreat of the virus. With the waning threat of a major epidemic, vaccine stocks are no longer being built up. This week the United States began destroying a quarter of its vaccine stock (40 million doses) that has expired.

However, the Saudi Health Ministry has said it is continuing to take all precautions against the disease. Indeed, the virus is still out there. Mumbai registered about 100 cases of the A/H1N1 in June. “We have installed thermal cameras at entry points including airports to detect those passengers and pilgrims having high temperatures. Those tested positive to H1N1 would be quarantined,” the ministry said in a statement. “We are also following up World Health Organization reports about swine flu in order to take appropriate action.” Officials at King Abdulaziz International Airport are far more subdued about the swine flu than they were this time last year. Fear of the potentially fatal flu reached a point where the Health Ministry was urging the public to avoid crowded places.

UAE

International Front

UAE strengthens links with Central Europe

The United Arab Emirates participated for the first time in the Central European Rotation Group (CERG) Executive Meeting, which took place from 30 June to 1 July in Paiana Brasov, Romania. Capt. Aysha Al Hamili, the UAE Permanent Representative on the ICAO Council attended the meeting which includes represents from the Civil Aeronautical Authorities of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovak Republic and Slovenia.

‘UAE participation at this event reflects the close cooperation that CERG countries and the UAE have recently developed’ said Capt. Aysha Al Hamili. ‘CERG member States and the UAE discussed ways to strengthening training cooperation in civil aviation with particular emphasis on human resource capacity building’, she added. Capt. Al Hamili also noted that in this collaborative spirit in civil aviation, the UAE has also worked very closely with a number of EU member States at several of ICAO’s high-level meetings, including the latest High-level environmental meeting and the High-Level Safety Conference. In addition, as a testimony of the trust vested in the UAE, the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) recently selected the UAE to host EASA’s international cooperation forum in its second session, the first outside Europe, which discussed the latest developments in safety standards applied by EASA and followed by several civil aviation authorities around the world.

FANR issues two licences to the Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation

The Federal Authority for Nuclear Regulation (FANR), the UAE's independent regulator for the nuclear sector, has issued two licences to the Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation (ENEC). The issued Licences are titled: "Licence for Preparation of a Site for the Construction of a Nuclear Facility" and "Limited Licence for the Construction of a Nuclear Facility". The Site Preparation Licence provides FANR's authorisation to ENEC to conduct site preparation activities at the Baraka site, such as the installation of site infrastructures, and construction of parts of the facility not related to nuclear safety. ENEC also needs to obtain a separate authorisation from the Environment Agency –Abu Dhabi to begin this work, according to a press release by FANR. The Limited Construction Licence authorises ENEC to manufacture and assemble structures, systems and components.

No use of force against Iran: UAE

A senior UAE official says his country rejects the use of force against Iran over its nuclear program, despite reports that a top diplomat suggested a military strike is an option if sanctions fail. Tareq Al-Haidan, UAE's Assistant Foreign Minister for Political Affairs, says his country flatly opposes military action and favors talks to end Iran's nuclear standoff with the West. His comments follow reports quoting UAE's Ambassador to the United States, Youssef Al-Otaiba, as saying that the regional upheavals from an attack are preferable to having Tehran develop nuclear weapons. Al-Haidan says the ambassador's comments were taken out of context, but offered no other clarifications.

Mauritanian Minister hails UAE support to cultural movement

UAE Ambassador to Mauritania Abdullah Mohammed Al-Tikkawi and Mauritanian Minister of Culture, Youth, '&' Sports Sisa Bint Al-Sheikh Ould Bida have discussed cultural relations and cooperation between their two countries. In remarks at the meeting, Bida noted the support extended by His Highness Dr Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qassimi, UAE Supreme Council member and ruler of Sharjah through the dedication of an award for School theatre in her country. She also hailed the UAE's support to Arabic poetry through the organization of the

Prince of Poets' contest which is patronized by H.H General Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces.

UAE airports continue to refuel Iranian planes

UAE airport authorities on Monday denied reports they had stopped refuelling Iranian passenger flights after Washington imposed sanctions on Tehran last week. Dubai Airports clarified that the sanctions would not affect flights of Iran Air, the national airline of that country, and Mahan Air, a private carrier. "Dubai Airports confirms that Iranian airlines operating in and out of Dubai International continue to be refuelled," a Dubai Airports spokesman, said. The capital's airport authority also denied accusations that Iranian passenger jets had been banned. Reuters quoting a spokeswoman for Abu Dhabi Airports Company said that there had been no change in policy

over Iranian jets refuelling in the capital. “We have contracts with Iranian passenger flights and continue to allow refuelling,” the spokeswoman said.

US-UAE panel on Defence Strategies concludes meetings

Senior military and governmental officials from the United States and the UAE have concluded the first meeting of the UAE-US Committee on Defence Strategies and Policies last Tuesday. The said committee aims to establish government-to-government dialogue between the two countries on security and strategic issues and mutual interests as well as to define the aspects of future bilateral cooperation. The UAE delegation to the meeting was led by Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr Anwar Mohammed Gergash and UAE Air Force, Air Defence Commander, Major General Mohammed bin Suwaidan Saeed Al Qamzi.

US Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Michele A. Flournoy and U.S Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs William J. Burns were also present in the meeting. Laying emphasis on the growing UAE-US security ties, UAE Ambassador to the US, Youssef Mana’ Al Otaiba said, “the launch of these meetings represents a major shift in the UAE-US relations as they seek to further cement our common goals of promoting regional peace, security and stability”. “With the inauguration of this strategic dialogue at the highest governmental and military levels, we lay foundations for a strong bilateral relationship between the two countries.”

Pact between UAE and India could send prisoners home

Human rights and welfare groups yesterday welcomed an anticipated agreement that would allow Indians imprisoned in the UAE to serve their jail terms at home. The deal was likely to be completed over the next few months, said MK Lokesh, the Indian Ambassador to the UAE. Details of the agreement are still being worked out, but it is believed many of the 1,300 Indian prisoners in the UAE could be affected. “In principle, prisoners who have already been sentenced can then request to undergo their sentences in India,” Mr Lokesh said. “This agreement is taking into account humanitarian considerations of a crime being committed in a foreign country,” Mr Lokesh said. “It is to facilitate normal humanitarian practices.”

Social Front

Dubai says no to full-body scanners

Full-body security scanners will not be used in Dubai airports, it was announced yesterday. The decision was made because the devices do not correspond with national customs and ethics, said Brig Ahmed bin Thani, the Dubai Police’s director of airport security. “I do not feel that it is necessary for us to implement such a technology while we are operating different methods and have different avenues that have worked so far,” he said. “The use of such a device violates personal privacy and it raises a very sensitive issue for passengers, in addition to the fact that it does not complement our national ethics.”

The devices, also known as millimetre wave scanners, or backscatter X-rays depending on which technology they use, have raised privacy concerns because they allow authorities to see

underneath clothing to the surface of the skin, although special software normally masks some parts of the body. The scanners could also affect human DNA by interfering with processes such as DNA replication, a study for the Los Alamos National Laboratory in the US has shown. The rejection by Dubai is at odds with an announcement by federal authorities at a regional aviation security conference last month that they intended to introduce body-imaging machines at airports.

Economy Front

Emirates sells stake in SriLankan

Sri Lanka said on Wednesday that it bought back Emirates Airline's stake in SriLankan Airlines for \$ 53 million. An Emirates spokesperson, confirming the conclusion of the sale deal, told Khaleej Times on Wednesday that "the sale of its shares in SriLankan Airlines to the Government of Sri Lanka has now been completed." He did not elaborate. Emirates, the Arab world's largest carrier, held a 43.6 per cent stake in SriLankan Airlines which it bought for \$ 70 million when the airline was privatised in 1998. It was Emirates' only investment in another airline.

In May this year, Sri Lankan government offered to buy back the stake held by Dubai-based airline for a third of the \$ 150 million price that Emirates had reportedly valued for its share two years ago. Emirates said it was willing to sell the stake "at the right price." On Wednesday, Sri Lanka's Treasury Secretary PB Jayasundera was quoted in Colombo as saying that the government acquired Emirates' stake through Bank of Ceylon, the island's biggest state-owned lender. "Payment has been made and shares are held by Bank of Ceylon," Jayasundera said. "We are looking for a strategic partner or somebody from the government to take that stake and maintain the commercial character of SriLankan," he said.

Dubai's green buildings to get incentives

The Dubai Government is working on a plan to offer incentives to green buildings with the 'green building code' all set to be unveiled in the next two months, a top government official has revealed. "The government is working on an incentive plan for green buildings. Dubai has been on the forefront of introducing green concepts... now the code has gone into printing and will be released in two months," Essa Al Maidoor, Assistant Director-General for Planning and Engineering, Dubai Municipality, told Emirates Business.

Jesse Downs, Director, Research and Advisory Services at Landmark Advisory, said on Wednesday government subsidies are critical to induce landlords to retrofit their buildings as well as to induce developers to build green buildings. Al Maidoor did not disclose the incentives that the government is planning to offer, but said: "The savings they get are the best incentives... the owners will benefit in the long term." He said no building permit will be issued if the developers do not meet the green requirements. "There has been no resistance from anyone. There is a lot of awareness among developers, consultants and contractors," he added.

UAE dominates inter-Arab investment

The UAE has pumped over \$ 62 billion into fellow Arab countries over the past 15 years to emerge as the dominant investor in the region, according to official data. The capital channeled by the UAE, the second largest Arab economy, accounted for more than a third of the total inter-Arab investment during 1995-2009, showed the figures by a key Arab League financial organization.

Saudi Arabia, the largest Arab economy, accounted for nearly 70 per cent of the UAE's investments while Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon, Libya and Tunisia were also key recipients, the Kuwaiti-based Inter-Arab Investment Guarantee (IAIGC) said in its annual report on the investment climate in the Arab region. The report showed cumulative foreign direct investment (FDI) channeled by the UAE into the other Arab markets totaled \$ 62.4 billion during 1995-2009 while the country received around \$ 13.1 billion in capital from fellow Arab nations.

UAE, Ireland ink deal to avoid double taxation

The UAE has recently signed an agreement on double taxation avoidance on income with the Republic of Ireland in an endeavour to develop, strengthen cooperation and partnership between the two countries in areas of common interest. According to Younis Haji Al Khoori, Director-General of the Ministry of Finance, who signed the agreement on behalf of the UAE, the agreement aims at providing employment opportunities, increasing economic growth, enhancing GDP rates growth and reducing budget deficits.

“The financial and tax benefits generated by this agreement is in line with the attempts to increase the volume of economic exchange, free movement of capital , in addition to providing full protection against economic and financial double taxation; something that will have a positive impact on enhancing the development goals of both countries,” said Al Khoori. The signing of the agreement followed the G20 meeting in Toronto on June 27, 2010 whereby the group urged not to impose new barriers against investment and trade in goods, in addition to minimising all impacts on trade and investment caused by internal policy measures including fiscal policy.

Health Front

UAE medical authorities still alert on swine flu

While seasonal flu cases are down this year, doctors say they are still keeping a tab on swine flu even after the pandemic has died down worldwide. It's almost a year on since the H1N1 virus nearly crippled global air travel and shut down cities. Local health authorities, however, say holidaymakers need not panic while returning to the UAE this year.

Last year, thermal scanners placed at all entry and exit points in the country kept an eye on those bringing the virus back to the UAE from their home countries. Though a number of deaths have been reported in India, authorities say all kinds of tests on travellers coming in to the country have been stopped. “There are no new recommendations regarding the disease so travellers need

not panic,” said Dr Ali Marzouqi, director of Public Health and Safety Department at the Dubai Health Authority. Though the World Health Organisation stopped recording deaths last year, it says over 15,000 people have succumbed to the disease since the outbreak early last year. “Though we are still keeping an eye on suspected cases, we are no longer required to carry out the rapid tests on patients,” said Dr Ashok Cherian, general practitioner (GP) at Al Rafa Clinic. “Suspected cases still have to be referred to government hospitals,” he said. “Since people are taking adequate precautions during travel, it is highly unlikely that we will have huge numbers in the country during this peak travel time,” he added.

Education key to changing youth’s attitude towards AIDS victims

peer-based educational intervention study on misconceptions about HIV among UAE youth has found that though women had slightly lower basic awareness about the disease, they showed greater improvement. The study carried out by a research team from UAE University in Al Ain found a 26 per cent increase in knowledge among the study group after the intervention. It also found that concise integrated teaching and workshops can be effective in changing the stigmatising and intolerant attitudes the youth have towards persons living with the disease.

Titled ‘Effects of a rapid peer-based HIV/AIDS Educational Intervention on Knowledge and Attitudes of High School Students in a High Income Arab Country’, the study was undertaken last year by a team from Al Ain-based UAE University in response to a 2005 study that highlighted intolerant attitudes of youth towards persons living with HIV.

KUWAIT

International Front

Kuwait, Mauritania sign several joint agreements

Kuwait and Mauritania signed several joint agreements in the presence of Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah and the visiting Mauritanian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Naha Mint Ould Mouknass on Thursday.

A memorandum of understanding for political consultations was signed along with an agreement for the formation of a joint cooperation committee. The agreements were signed by the two foreign ministers here in Kuwait. On the Kuwaiti side, those also present were Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Khaled Sulaiman Al-Jarallah, Head of the Follow-Up and Coordination Department Khaled Al-Maghames, Director of the Arab World Department Jassem Mubarak Al-Mubarak, Director of the Protocol Department Dhari Al-Ajran, Acting Director of the Minister's Office Saleh Salem Al-Loghani, and Kuwaiti Ambassador to Mauritania Adnan Al-Ahmad. The Mauritanian Ambassador to Kuwait and his accompanying delegation also attended the signing ceremony.

'Kuwait interested in promoting ties with Africa'

Kuwait is interested in promoting ties with Africa at a bilateral level and within the framework of the Arab League, said a ranking diplomat here on Monday. Ambassador Jassem Al-Mubarak, the head of the Arab World Department at the Foreign Ministry, said participants in today's meeting, preparatory for the fourth Arab-African Summit, tentatively approved a plan for "Arab-African strategic partnership."

He indicated that the conferees, during today's meeting, worked out some draft plans that would be referred to the Arab League Secretariat General for any possible amendments, before submission to another meeting at this level, due on August 7, to be followed with another one on September 17. Elaborating, Ambassador Al-Mubarak said a final text of the aspired strategy would be referred to the African-Arab summit, scheduled in the Libyan city of Sirte next October.

Al-Attiyah hails Kuwait's support of IMA

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretary-General Abdulrahman Bin Hamad Al-Attiyah yesterday strongly praised here Kuwait's commitment to and support of the Arab World Institute (IMA) and he underlined the recent generous donations of the Gulf State to help fund ongoing projects at the Institute. Al-Attiyah was visiting IMA to sign a "Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)" between the GCC and IMA in order to "reinforce and broaden mutual cooperation" between the two parties. The seven-section MOU, signed by Al-Attiyah and IMA Director-General Mokhtar Taleb Bendiab, will pave the way for increased joint cultural initiatives in a variety of areas and bolster existing ties between the GCC nations and IMA.

Speaking in exclusive comments to KUNA after the signing of the MOU, Al-Attiyah said he wanted to remark on the very positive role Kuwait, as a Gulf State, has played in the Institute. As Secretary-General of the GCC, I want to say that we support the IMA and Kuwait has been one of the best GCC nations in doing this through its financial support," Al-Attiyah said.

Media forum to strengthen Kuwait-Syria relations

Kuwait and Syria enjoy strong and progressing relations in all fields, including in media, and the current Kuwaiti-Syrian media forum which is in its second day is an effort to further cooperation in this field, the Syrian minister of information told KUNA on Monday. Minister Mohsen Bilal was speaking to KUNA on the sidelines of the Kuwaiti-Syrian Media Forum, and he noted there is a desire to see more cooperation and coordination between Kuwait Journalists Association and the Syrian Journalists Union to better serve Arab causes and make sure Arab views and stances are heard and given heed. Arab media, he said, has a duty to defend Arab rights and the main issue of Palestine and occupied Arab territories in particular.

Minister of Culture Riyad Nassan Agha meanwhile said the forum came to give a more official and organized venue for meetings of representatives of media in the two states. The issues reflected upon and raised at meetings are those of the two peoples and those of the Arab nation, he added. The minister hailed the cultural atmosphere in Kuwait and its great contributions to the

different Arab fields of cultural, scientific, and literary composition. Al-Arabi Magazine, Alam Al-Maarifa series, and the many cultural and media productions such as the Arab version of the world renowned Open Sesame educational project are among the many contributions and initiatives to Kuwait's credit.

Social Front

Kharafi urges govt to take steps towards development drive

National Assembly Speaker Jassem Al-Kharafi called on the Kuwaiti government to take steps to put in place recently passed national development blueprints and projects. Exclusively interviewed by Kuwait Satellite Channel late Thursday, Al-Kharafi said the governmental duties of development programs and projects would be a high topic on the agenda of the next parliamentary session. The parliament has done its job by unanimously passing the development drive, so the government is required to do its duty by putting it in force, he said. "Otherwise, it (the government) will be in a difficult situation, and will consequently bear its responsibility," he admonished.

He recognized that the relationship between the assembly and the government was tensed in the last parliamentary session due to interpellations, grilling and no-confidence motions. However, he said there were no serious problems as everyone was given the opportunity to speak out freely, eventually leading to fruitful and constructive criticism. Al-Kharafi believed that the interpellations are not the sole approach to resolve outstanding issues between the assembly and the government.

Kuwaiti PM outlines development plan

The Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah stressed the government is keen on accomplishing the state's set development plan and is stressing cooperation among all state bodies and diligent effort to work out difficulties as means towards that end. He was addressing a press conference he held with editors-in-chief of local papers, and stressed all due effort shall be exerted and all due cooperation shall be made within the framework of the constitution.

The government shall respect all supervisory tools used by MPs and would cooperate with them "and would not allow differences and conflicts stall development or cause tension in the relationship between the two authorities, and we have relentless determination to overcome all hurdles". Sheikh Nasser expressed thanks to the Almighty for blessing the state "with guidance and strength to utilize constitutional tools and coordinate their usage as well as coordinate efforts by the civil community institutions and all groups within Kuwaiti society, and investing all that to serve the homeland and push forward development and bring about prosperity".

Al-Kharafi urges media to be keen on national unity

Maintaining national unity and renouncing discords is a common responsibility for all segments of the society, affirmed Speaker of the National Assembly Jassem Al-Kharafi on Sunday. The national unity is a blessing for the society that should be preserved by "refraining from

publishing anything that may harm it," said the speaker at a seminar late on Sunday, adding that "enemies of the national unity failed to disintegrate the society, thus they resorted to discords as a cancerous arm." Al-Kharafi expressed satisfaction at the level and status of the national media compared to that of the media in other Arab states, but expressed regret that the performance of the national media has been marred with failure to assess sensitivity of some of the publicized items.

While expressing understanding of the journalists' vying for exclusive information, he cautioned that information that "are harmful to the homeland and the society" should not be published, strongly urging writers and journalists to give no chance "for our enemies to rejoice over our misfortunes, for the national unity is a common responsibility for all, particularly the media." He cautioned that those with ill sentiments towards Kuwait, when they failed to partition the society, resorted to the "Cancerous arm, sowing seeds of strifes." Appealing anew on the media to refrain from publishing such items, he said, "We have no interest to air our laundry abroad," noting that many people read the local press regularly. "Matters discussed in closed sessions are suppose to be kept within such meetings," said Al-Kharafi who expressed approval towards holding grilling sessions in the parameter of such meetings.

Kuwait keen on countering all forms of corruption: officials

Kuwait is keen on fighting all forms of corruption, and is a pioneer in administrative and financial reform at the regional and international levels, said two officials from the Gulf state on Sunday.

Civil Service Commission Assistant Undersecretary for Legal Affairs Faisal Al-Ghareeb, and Assistant Undersecretary for Parliamentary Affairs at the Office of the State Minister for National Assembly Affairs Ahmad Al-Haifi, were speaking to KUNA on the sidelines of their participation in a conference on 'Creativity in Arab Management' organized by the Arab Administrative Development Organization (ARADO). Al-Ghareeb noted that Kuwait has signed many international counter-corruption agreements, and that it had many monitoring bodies such as the Civil Service Commission, the Audit Bureau, financial auditors at the Finance Ministry, and other agencies that worked to spread transparency and integrity for administrative reform.

Economy Front

Syria hopes to promote economic ties with Kuwait

Syria's Ministry of Economy aspires to elevate the level of cooperation with counterpart authorities in Kuwait to the level that bonds the Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, a ranking official said.

Khaled Sallotah, Syria's Assistant Minister of Economy and Trade, said in a statement to KUNA on Monday that these relations could be promoted to higher levels, on the basis of signed accords between the two sides. "We also hope that the enterprise sectors in the two countries would capitalize on these agreements for further hiking of the commercial exchanges and the execution of (joint) ventures," he added. Sallotah, who was speaking on sidelines of the First Kuwait-Syria

Media Forum, said Syria hopes to attract larger Kuwaiti investments. He praised results of the recent visit to Syria by HH the Amir, and the Kuwaiti contributions to several infrastructural projects in the country.

Food, power wastage 'way of life' in Kuwait

Is there a general awareness about how much water, electricity and food is wasted in Kuwait? This is a question that is in everyone's mind, today more than ever as the skyline gets darkened in the aftermath of unscheduled blackouts. Speaking of waste, one should note that no party held in Kuwait is complete without a big buffet of a large quantity of food. Another legitimate question is where do all the leftovers go? The Kuwait Times addressed these queries to families and catering companies that supply buffet to parties. Adel Mounem, an Egyptian and a father of six said, "I raise my children on two important values: How to save electricity and water for the future. I tried to teach them how to save water while brushing their teeth. Thank God, they know how to save water now.

He added that he is appalled at the callousness displayed by individuals in public places, especially at some clubs and beaches. He explained with an example of how it has become common practice for those who take showers to carelessly leave the tap open. "They don't care and don't know that they waste water in this way; if every person closed the tap after taking a shower, I think water can be saved," Adel added.

Kuwait, Japan to hold bilateral investment agreement talks

Kuwait will host the second round of negotiations on a bilateral investment agreement between Kuwait and Japan from July 6-8, the Japanese Foreign Ministry announced in a statement on Friday. The three-day meeting will be attended on the Kuwaiti side by Ali Al-Metairef, Director of the Finance Ministry's Tax Liability and Planning Department, and other officials from the Foreign and Finance ministries, according to the statement. The Japanese side will be represented by Nobuyoshi Chihara, Deputy Director-General of the Foreign Ministry's Middle Eastern and African Affairs Bureau, and other officials concerned from the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry.

At their first talks held in Tokyo late April, Kuwait and Japan affirmed their commitment to conclude the bilateral investment deal at the earliest possible time in order to further promote economic ties between the two countries. The two sides also agreed to further exchange views on the deal and to resolve outstanding issues. During his summit talks in Japan with then Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda in July 2008, H.H. the Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah expressed Kuwait's desire to start the negotiation for an agreement on the promotion and mutual protection of investments between the two countries.

Kuwait, Vietnam discuss cooperation

Kuwaiti Consul General in Vietnam Najib Al-Bader discussed yesterday ways to boost cooperation in the fields of investment, economy and commerce with president of Real Estate Union in the city of Ho Chi Minh, Lu Huang Jo. Al-Bader said that he was briefed on investment

opportunities, major investors and projects in the city of Ho Chi Minh, adding that the city is witnessing a robust economic development accompanied with an increase in direct foreign investment. The Vietnamese side expressed keenness on boosting commercial and investment ties with Kuwaiti businessmen, he said and hoped that the cooperation would prove "fruitful." Meanwhile, Lu said that Kuwaiti-Vietnamese relations were deeply-rooted and expressed his keenness in developing ties with Kuwaiti businessmen.

OMAN

International Front

Omani woman scales Africa's tallest mountain

Muna Al Shanfari has become the first Omani woman to scale the famous Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, Africa's tallest mountain and one of the most iconic natural wonders on the continent. Travelling with her friend Catherine Lonie, Muna endured the seven-day trek on schedule and reached the summit in high spirits as she waved the Oman flag from Uhuru peak. "This was a dream of mine for a long time, and after taking up this challenge I really hope that other Omani women will feel empowered to follow their own dreams and know that nothing is impossible," she said. "Despite the risks involved and the obstacles that life sometimes presents, I think it's important for younger generations especially to have the courage to pursue their goals wherever those may lie," she added.

Shanfari, a bank executive and mother of three living in Muscat, is a keen mountain walker and active health enthusiast, regularly travelling to locations like the Hajar Mountains in search of a new adventure. The entire expedition was sponsored by Oman-Qatar telecom firm Nawras. "This truly was a mental, physical and spiritual journey; one I will never forget," she said. Ascending the 5,895-metre Mt. Kilimanjaro is widely regarded as a journey of a lifetime by all who take on the challenge. "Mt. Kilimanjaro was a tremendous challenge, but it was also incredibly rewarding to be able to interact with the local people as a representative of my country and Omani people," Muna said. "There is a strong historical connection between Tanzania and Oman, and this being my first trip to Africa, I was really touched by how much our people had in common. Almost everyone I talked to had some sort of a family connection to Oman, and sharing stories of our history and customs was a very meaningful experience for me as an Omani woman," she added.

Oman-Qatar security co-operation discussed

Lt Gen Malik bin Sulaiman al Maamari, Inspector General of Police and Customs, yesterday received Maj Gen Hamad bin Ali al Attiyah, Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces in Qatar, and his accompanying delegation. The meeting discussed security co-operation between the Sultanate and Qatar, procedures of the joint exercises between the concerned authorities in the two countries, exchanging expertise and activating it to serve the interest of the two brotherly countries. It also reviewed issues of common concern. Talks with SAF chief Lt Gen Ahmed bin Harith al Nabhani, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), and Maj Gen Hamad bin Ali al Attiyah, Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces in Qatar, held a formal

talks session yesterday. The session reviewed the good relations binding the two brotherly countries and discussed military co-operation and means of enhancing them. The guest was briefed on SAF and its progress during the prosperous reign of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. Later, Al Attiyah accompanied by Al Nabhani visited the SAF Museum. The guest commended the museum and its contents that depict the Sultanate's ancient past and bright present.

Oman's Majlis slams detention of Palestinian representatives

Israel's detention of more than 20 members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, elected through fair and transparent parliamentary elections, is a blatant violation of all international and humanitarian laws and norms, Oman's Majlis Ash'shura said in a statement here. The detention, it added, was a chain in a series of “Israeli criminality as the world realises day after day the accumulated and constant aggression against all sects of the Palestinian people in the whole of the occupied lands”. The Majlis said it had noted with distress the Israeli minister of interior’s decision to revoke the recognition of the Jerusalem representatives in the Palestinian Legislative Council and the consequences of such a brutal procedure.

This blatantly “violates their personal rights, cancels their citizenship, uproots them from their lands and houses and places their family under stress and threatens them with deportation,” the statement said. The Majlis called on the world in general and parliamentary organisations in particular to stand by the Palestinian parliamentarians. The global community, it said, must condemn the Israeli actions at international forums and resist its continuous and repeated efforts to Judaise Palestine, evacuate it of its Arab Muslim and Christian residents, especially in Al Quds Al Shareef and Hebron Mosque. The Majlis “condemns in the strongest possible terms the Israeli procedures and affirms its full support to the members of the detained Palestinian Legislative Council, especially the Bait Al Maqdis delegates”.

Social Front

Priorities, requirements of each phase of Oman' 5-year plan discussed

Shaikh Mohammed bin Marhoon al Maamari, Minister of State and Governor of Dhofar, met with Director-Generals and Heads of the Governmental Departments yesterday to review the work and services in the governorate. He urged various sectors to co-ordinate with each other to render best services to citizens and residents. The minister asked them to continue co-operation to remove obstacles in work and activate duties to serve the future goals in the comprehensive building of the country bearing in mind the priorities of development and requirements of each phase of the five-year development plan within the framework of integrated programme that reflects the Royal visions of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos.

Oman' public prosecutors to tackle human trafficking

In line with the national strategy for 'Combating Trafficking in Persons', the Attorney General has issued a judicial order assigning prosecutorial responsibilities to a number of public prosecutors. The appointees will be involved at both investigational and decision-making levels,

the Public Prosecution said in a statement, while ascribing the order to the need to uphold high standards while prosecuting cases of this nature. Further, in an effort to promote awareness of the campaign against human trafficking, the Public Prosecution conducted a series lectures at The Directorate General of Public Prosecution in Muscat Governorate, as well as the regional police headquarters in the Batinah and Dakhiliya regions. The lectures were designed to help reach a common understanding of the underlying issues among key stakeholders within the criminal justice system.

Economy Front

GE's gas turbine to bolster Oman water, power supply

GE has received contracts totaling nearly \$ 300 million to provide advanced 6FA gas turbines and long-term services for the Salalah Independent Water & Power Project (IWPP), which will help support strong economic growth in the Dhofar region of southern Oman. GE is supplying five heavy-duty Frame 6FA gas turbines, which are equipped with GE advanced emission control technologies. GE also has signed a 15-year contractual service agreement (CSA) for the project, which will include the supply of parts, repairs and field services, and will provide performance services for the gas turbine-generators and accessory equipment. To date, GE has service agreements, including CSAs, in place at more than 600 sites worldwide. The plant, located in the Taqah area of Salalah, about 1,000 kilometers southwest of the Omani capital city of Muscat, will have a capacity of 445 megawatts of electricity and 15 million imperial gallons per day of desalinated water to help meet the region's growing power and clean water needs.

“Both the power and water demands in the Dhofar region have been increasing steadily over the past several years,” said Bob Whitelaw, chief executive officer of the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company. “The Salalah IWPP is a critical part of the growth and investment plans for the Sultanate's continued social and economic development.” All of the electricity and water output from the plant will be sold under a 15-year power and water purchase agreement executed by the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company and Sembcorp Salalah Power & Water Company, which is 60 percent owned by Sembcorp Utilities and 40 percent owned by the Oman Investment Corporation. “The Salalah IWPP project demonstrates our commitment to deliver advanced technology solutions and services to support the Sultanate of Oman's and the region's growing power and water needs, which are critical to providing its citizens with a high quality of life,” said Joseph Anis, GE Energy's president for the Middle East. “This project is another example of the worldwide trend we are seeing toward the integration of power and water production at a single site, especially in the Middle East where population and industrial growth rates exceed many other regions of the world.

Oman may hit 7.3 per cent economic growth this year

Oman's economic growth rate in 2010 may rise by about 7.3 per cent compared to 3 per cent in 2009 and the rate of inflation may reach 5.2 per cent against 5.3 per cent in 2008, according to a report released by Arab Organisation for Industrial Development and Mining (AOIDM). The report states that the Omani economy performed well for the sixth consecutive year in 2009 despite the repercussions of the global financial crisis. In its newly-released Third Arab

Industrial Report, AOIDM attributed the good show to the high global oil prices and the country's public investment strategy which, it said, aims to diversify the economy.

The report analyses the development of industry in the Arab countries during the period from 2008 to 2009 with forecasts for 2010 and is the third of a series of reports prepared by the organisation. It noted that Oman's government was keen to pursue a policy of broad diversification of the country's economy "in order to ease the sultanate's reliance on energy by giving priority to projects that are aimed to develop a programme for large investments in infrastructure services, oil and manufacturing industries." The report said Oman's GDP recorded a steady rise over the last 35 years with the per capita income growing to about \$ 18,000 in 2008. It underlined that the large investment programmes followed by the government had helped to develop non-oil sectors such as tourism, services, trade and manufacturing which, it pointed out, witnessed a boom during this period.

BAHRAIN

International Front

UK set to boost education ties with Bahrain

The UK is stepping up its activities in Bahrain with increased investment in arts and education. British officials also hope to almost double the number of Bahrain schools linked with those in the UK. Plans to increase ties were revealed by British Council chief executive officer Martin Davidson, who spoke to the Press during his first visit to Bahrain.

He said such co-operation was vital if Bahrain was to achieve goals laid out in its Vision 2030, which outlines the future development of the country. "Vision 2030 speaks of a highly educated, talented workforce," he said at the British Council, Manama. "To support that, Bahrain will need young people with English, young people with technical skills and young people with international skills. "So I think there is a big opportunity for the British Council to make sure that the UK is part of that future for Bahrain and that Bahrain is part of the future for the UK." He revealed the British Council was expanding its operations here to keep pace with development.

Social Front

Top-class security for Bahraini airport

Full-body scanners are not in the pipeline for Bahrain International Airport, officials declared yesterday. But top priority is being given to safety and security, said the Bahrain Airport Company. "Bahrain Airport Company is not currently considering installing body scanners at Bahrain International Airport," it said in a statement. "Nonetheless, Bahrain Airport Company is committed to maintaining the highest standard of safety and security for all Bahrain International Airport users, by adopting the latest and best techniques and technologies available, in co-ordination with the relevant authorities. The latest advancement at the airport has been the installation of a multi-level screening system which has allowed the traditional luggage scanners before check-in to be removed.

Bahrain labourers' strike enters second day

Hundreds of workers at a Bahrain company, who stopped work on Sunday demanding higher wages, have refused to return until management agrees to meet them. The staff from Almoayyed Contracting refused to leave their camps in Manama and Eker for the second day running yesterday, claiming they had been paid BD60 or BD70 a month for the last eight years. "We need the company to increase the wages to a reasonable amount so that we can at least make ends meet," one worker told the GDN. "While those who came 10 years ago are being paid a maximum of BD60 each, those who came in the last two years were promised BD90 a month but are being paid only BD80." However, company officials vehemently denied the accusations, with Almoayyed Group managing director Mona Almoayyed saying no one at the firm was paid less than BD80.

Pick up the slack: Bahraini PM

Bahrain's civil servants were ordered yesterday to pick up the slack to fast-track government-funded projects and public services. Ministries and government departments were told to double their efforts and ensure there is no delay to services because of the summer holidays. The orders came from His Royal Highness Prime Minister Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, as he chaired the weekly Cabinet meeting at Gudaibiya Palace. Public service transactions and government-funded projects should be fast-tracked to cut out any delays, said HRH the Premier. "Government services should always gain citizens' satisfaction and meet their needs," he said. He stressed the importance of ensuring that administrative procedures are not affected by the officials' and employees' annual leave.

Bahrain endorses law to counter corruption

Bahrain on Wednesday endorsed a legislation to fight corruption in the public sector under which top government officials are forced to provide regular financial statements of theirs' and their wives' wealth. The financial disclosure law that was ratified by Bahrain's leader, covers parliamentarians, deputies of the prime minister, ministers, undersecretaries, assistant undersecretaries and general directors, in additions to governors, heads of diplomatic missions, judges and public prosecutors. Any unexpected and illegal increase in the wealth of top officials and their families can make them at the risk of paying a fine of up to BD15,000, a five-year jail term, losing their job or all punishments. The law was proposed by Al Manber Islamic bloc in 2002 and it was officially enforced after eight years. The law stresses the formation of a financial closure authority that reports directly to the King.

Economy Front

Bahrain guide highlights major investment issues

Industry and Commerce Minister Dr Hassan Fakhro yesterday highlighted the government's keenness to improve the investment atmosphere in Bahrain. It also included efforts to enhance economic growth, removal of obstacles hampering trade licensing and registration and continual

support for all initiatives, contributing to the success of the Bahrain Investors Centre (BIC).

Speaking as he patronised the opening ceremony of 'Guide to Investing in Bahrain', co-organised by the ministry and the Economic Development Board (EDB) at the Bahrain International Exhibition and Convention Centre, Dr Fakhro lauded BIC's efforts to keep Bahraini funds and attract foreign capital into the kingdom, benefiting the national economy and helping achieve the Economic Vision 2030. "This guide is a living proof of BIC's success and guarantees credibility and transparency of business procedures," he said.

Bahrain emerges as diversified financial center

Over the years, Bahrain has emerged as a highly diversified financial center in the world with a mix of retail and wholesale banks, asset management firms and insurance companies, a Bahraini government minister said on Tuesday. "Bahrain is host to both conventional and Islamic firms in each of these categories and has become one of the world's primary locations for Islamic finance," Bahrain's Finance Minister Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed Al-Khalifa said on Tuesday. "Bahrain is also home to the largest concentration of Islamic banks in the world - currently they number 27 - as well as many Islamic insurance and fund management businesses," he said.

In his speech during the opening session of the Bahrain/Bermuda Seminar on "Global Financial and Insurance Services" held at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, Sheikh Ahmed said that the economies of Bahrain and Bermuda have many similarities. "In both cases firms based in our countries provide a broad range of financial services for clients who are based in other jurisdictions," he said.

Bahrain-Britain urged to boost key trade ties

Bahrain and Britain are gateways to their regions and should further develop their business relations to maximise the opportunities they present, says a top business leader. Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) chairman Dr Essam Fakhro said Britain was a leading financial centre that could be seen as a gateway to Europe and Bahrain held the same position in the Gulf. "Bahrain's economy is very small in relation to our neighbouring countries in the GCC and when we try to market Bahrain we market it as a gateway to the Gulf, which is a trillion dollar economy," he said. "They can use Bahrain as a launch pad to the Gulf and Iraq and Iran and this is starting to happen and bear fruit." Dr Fakhro said Bahrain and the UK already enjoyed good business relations because of their historical ties and the keenness of leadership on both sides to continue advancing the relationship.

Bahrain, Singapore reach agreement on afforestation

Bahrain and Singapore have reached an agreement on the implementation of a MoU for the setting up of a strategic plan for afforestation and landscaping works in Bahrain. Minister for Municipalities and Agricultural Affairs Dr. Juma Ahmed Al Kaabi stated yesterday that the key focus of the memorandum is to provide technical support in the preparation of a general plan for afforestation and landscaping as well as the preparation of a detailed urban plan for the Kingdom. The agreement between the two sides was arrived at in Singapore, where dr. Al Kaabi

has been participating in a conference on urban development. The seminar discussed international developments in the field of sustainability and cities of the future.

QATAR

International Front

QR4m relief for Sudan's Darfur

A Qatari convoy of relief aid valued at QR4m, will leave for Sudan's Darfur region next Monday, driven by the Sheikh Thani bin Abdullah Al Thani Society for Human Services (RAF), with the support and coordination of the Department for International Development Department at the Foreign Ministry. The Qatari delegation including representatives from the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Social Affairs, RAF and local media is scheduled to arrive in Khartoum on Sunday. RAF Board Chairman and Director General, Aayad Qahtani said the convoy will be the largest to carry different food items, medicines and a variety of accommodation and rehabilitation supplies.

Oman-Qatar security co-operation discussed

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The session reviewed the good relations binding the two brotherly countries and discussed military co-operation and means of enhancing them. The guest was briefed on SAF and its progress during the prosperous reign of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. Later, Al Attiyah accompanied by Al Nabhani visited the SAF Museum. The guest commended the museum and its contents that depict the Sultanate's ancient past and bright present.

Minutes of Eritrea-Djibouti pact signed in Qatar

The minutes of the agreement to resolve the border dispute between Eritrea and Djibouti were signed at the Foreign Ministry headquarters here yesterday. The agreement was signed in Doha on June 6 this year by Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki, Djibouti President Ismail Omar Guelleh and HH the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al- Thani as a mediator and witness. The minutes were signed by Eritrean Ambassador to Qatar Ali Ibrahim Ahmed on behalf of the government of Eritrea, and Djibouti's Ambassador to Qatar Mahamade Ali Mahamade on behalf of the government of Djibouti. The minutes were also signed by HE the Minister of State for

Foreign Affairs Ahmed bin Abdullah al-Mahmoud, on behalf of the government of Qatar as the mediator and witness.

Economy Front

Qatar, Germany in talks to boost aviation ties

A round of official talks started yesterday between the civil aviation authorities of Qatar and Germany, aimed at enhancing co-operation. The German side is led by Hartmut Spickemann, the Deputy Director General of the German Civil Aviation Authority (Luftfahrt-Bundesamt) at the Federal Ministry of Transport. “This meeting comes as part of the previously signed MoU between the two countries to enlarge and to be in harmony with the future of the brilliant relationship among the two countries,” said the Chairman of Qatar Civil Aviation Authority, Abdul Aziz Mohamed al-Noaimi.

“The co-operation between the State of Qatar and the Federal Republic of Germany is based on the basics of growing and the permanent development in all fields, as the two countries are looking to continually strengthen the relationships, especially in the field of aviation,” al-Noaimi added, praising in this regard the economic relations between Qatar and Germany.

Qatar on path to become GCC's 3rd largest economy

Underpinned by its huge natural gas resources, Qatar is poised to become the third largest economy in the GCC region by 2012, research has shown. Beyond an 18.5% real GDP growth forecast for Qatar in 2010, the highest worldwide, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecasts 14.3% in 2011 and 9.2% for the country in 2012. Qatar is set to become one of the top “macroeconomic picks” by investors in the Mena region, Bank Audi says in a study titled “A mix of opportunities and challenges for the World’s fastest growing economy”.

The study says that Qatar’s national economy is delivering an “impressive buoyant performance” in the midst of sluggish global conditions. The country’s economic growth is apt to display strong two-digit rate in 2010, thanks to the continuing expansion of its natural gas sector, the strong countercyclical policy responses by the authorities and the strengthening of external demand, which can lead to a recovery in the non-hydrocarbon sector. According to the study, Qatar economy is riding on a “massive hydrocarbons capacity expansion boom”, which is driving its record high growth rates.

Health Front

Qatar's equitable healthcare model lauded at Amman meet

The Qatari model providing equal access to healthcare to nationals and expatriates won accolades at a regional health conference held in Amman last month. A study presented by the Supreme Council of Health (SCH) titled “Access to healthcare among nationals and expatriates: Evidence from Qatar” won the “best paper award” at the conference. The conference — “Achieving better health equity and efficiency in the Middle East and North Africa” — was

organised by the Middle East and North Africa Health Policy Forum, in partnership with the World Health Organization, the World Bank, the Department of Health of UK, and the Ministry of Health, Jordan. The SCH paper won the prize for its clarity and relevance, and scientifically reliable and sound approach towards a new research idea, not merely replicating other studies using regional data, SCH said yesterday.

The paper was co-authored by Dr Faleh M Ali, Assistant Secretary General for Policy at SCH and Altijani H Hussain, Manager, Health Economics. "This study has scientifically demonstrated, and with acknowledgement by our colleagues and specialists participating in this conference, the equitable distribution of healthcare services in Qatar among nationals and expatriates and we are proud of that equity," said Faleh. He added that these findings could be utilised in future healthcare policies, especially for implementation of the proposed Social Health Insurance Scheme. "There must be safeguards to maintain at least the current level of equity, if not improve it, through clear laws and regulations."

Diabetes rate alarmingly high in Qatar

The prevalence of diabetes is alarmingly high in Qatar and other GCC countries, and significantly, all the six GCC nations rank among the top 12 countries of the world which have the highest incidence of the disease. With the World Diabetes Day falling on November 14, Qatar Diabetes Association has already launched its awareness campaigns. According to the CIA World Fact Book, a reference resource produced by the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States, the comparative prevalence estimate of diabetes mellitus in the adult population of Qatar is 15.4 percent and the country is ranked sixth among 223 countries and territories.

The United Arab Emirates, which is ranked second on the list, has the highest comparative incidence in the region at 18.7 percent. But the national prevalence of diabetes, which indicates the percentage of the county's population that has the disease, is 12.2 percent. Saudi Arabia is ranked third, with a comparative prevalence of 16.8 percent and national figure of 13.6 percent. Kuwait has a comparative prevalence of 14.6 percent and Oman, ranked 12th, has a prevalence of 13.4 percent.