

Report # 107 & 108
BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD
GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL
NEWS MONITORING REPORT
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13th February- 26 February 2010
PRESENTATION DATE:

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

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SUMMARY

International Front

Hundreds of *Saudi* and Indian flags have decorated the streets of Riyadh since Tuesday to welcome Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who will begin his three-day official visit to the Kingdom on Saturday. Meanwhile Saudi Arabia's foreign minister on Monday expressed doubts about the usefulness of more sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program. Prince Saud Al Faisal told a news conference in the Saudi capital that the threat posed by Iran's nuclear ambitions demands a more immediate solution than sanctions. He described sanctions as a long-term solution, and he said the threat is more pressing.

Saudi Arabia and Qatar have signed several agreements on the sidelines of the second meeting of the Saudi-Qatari Joint Coordination Council in Doha Monday night, further boosting bilateral ties in various fields. As many as 10 agreements, memoranda of understanding and minutes pertaining to political, health, agricultural, economic, commercial, diplomatic, cultural, media, industrial, Islamic affairs and endowments fields were signed on the occasion.

The *United Arab Emirates* has reiterated its support to the international and regional efforts aimed at resuming the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. The UAE strongly supports multilateral efforts toward improving security in the region, Shaikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, UAE Foreign Minister, said yesterday. Shaikh Abdullah yesterday met US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and several Congressional leaders. Russia will supply *Kuwait* with several types of weapons under a bilateral agreement.

Environment Front

The Gulf nations including the UAE can tackle the possible threat of earthquakes more efficiently as the work towards linking the seismic networks of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries is progressing. "At present, there is no regular communication system to share the data including the earthquake location and strength. But an agreement to link the seismic networks of GCC countries will be discussed in the sixth Seismic Gulf Forum 2010.

Heavy rainfalls over *Makkah* on Saturday submerged some districts and streets in the city.

In *UAE*, thirty small-scale solar-powered desalination plants will be operational in the next 15 months to provide animals with watering holes in Abu Dhabi's desert environment. Two of the plants are already in use desalting brackish water from underground aquifers into fresh potable water, said a water resources expert from the Environment.

Social Front

In *Saudi Arabia*, a primary court in the southern Jizan region of Saudi Arabia sentenced a Saudi religious policeman for keeping six wives at the same time, in clear violation of the Islamic Shariah principles.

Leading religious scholars in *Kuwait* have rejected a fatwa or religious edict seeking to put to death opponents of strict segregation of men and women, saying that it was a call for sedition and chaos within the Islamic nation. Saudi religious figure Shaikh Abdul Rahman Al Barrak on Tuesday said that the mixing of genders at the workplace or in educational institutions was religiously prohibited on the grounds that it allowed seeing what must not be seen and engaging in forbidden conversations. Those who refuse to abide by strict segregation between men and women should be put to death, he said. However, Kuwaiti scholars said that such an edict could come only from a senile person or someone who wants to sow sedition in the nation by allowing the killing of innocent people.

Kuwait has a plan to boost its native population to at least 50 per cent of the total number of people living in the northern Arabian Gulf emirate, a Kuwaiti minister said. The plan includes further reducing the number of foreigners staying illegally in the country.

Human Rights Front

GCC states have been successful in their efforts to curb trafficking of children for employment as child camel jockeys, said Cairo-based human trafficking expert.

In *Saudi Arabia*, an existing "ban" on women to vote or run in elections is a blatant violation of international conventions signed by Saudi Arabia and should be lifted, according to the National Society for Human Rights (NSHR). *Meanwhile*, Minister of

Justice Dr Mohammed Al Eisa clarified that there was no formal decision taken yet to allow women lawyers to argue cases in the Kingdom's courts.

Kuwait is determined to end discrimination against women in the workplace, a woman lawmaker has said. "Kuwait is keen on improving its laws and rules to eliminate discrimination against women in the workplace. On the other side, Islamist Kuwaiti lawmakers have condemned the participation of their women's football team in the Asian championship as a "breakdown in social values" and demanded an investigation.

Terrorism

Saudi forces have foiled a major terror attack, after Ahmad Qateem Mohammad Al Hidhli, the number 10 on the Interior Ministry's "most wanted" list was arrested from his hideout in Yanbu near Madinah.

Economic Front

A free trade agreement between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Turkey will be signed before the end of this year, Turkey's Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek said.

Yemen Turmoil

The Yemeni army redeployed at the borders with Saudi Arabia where Al Houthi rebels were positioning before the war stopped earlier this month, sources close to the mediators said on Saturday. Deployment of the Yemeni army at the borders in place of the rebels is the second thing that Saudi Arabia wanted from the rebels after releasing the Saudi detainees. The efforts to end the armed rebellion in northern Yemen are continuing despite repeated breaches by rebels who try to obstruct the army from deployment in some positions and keep the heavy weapons including the removed mines. A total of 187 children were killed in the war between the Yemeni government and Al Houthi rebels in Sa'ada north of the country, rights group said Monday. The spokesman of Al Houthi rebels said on Tuesday that the Yemeni government has not stopped fighting against them, and the situation of war still remains. Sources said that the rebels did not allow the mediation committee to enter the old city of Sa'ada for removing the mines. Earlier in the day, the government's supreme security committee said Al Houthi rebels are not implementing the six conditions they had accepted for ending the war and they started to do the same things they did before the previous wars.

DETAILED REPORT

GCC

Gulf nations urged to link seismic networks

The Gulf nations including the UAE can tackle the possible threat of earthquakes more efficiently as the work towards linking the seismic networks of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries is progressing. "At present, there is no regular communication system to share the data including the earthquake location and strength. But an agreement to link the seismic networks of GCC countries will be discussed in the sixth Seismic Gulf Forum 2010 to be held in the capital from Monday to Thursday", a spokesman of the organisers

told Gulf News on Wednesday. "It is expected that all efforts will be made to conclude the agreement in the forum," said the spokesman of the National Centre of Meteorology and Seismology (NCMS) in Abu Dhabi, which organises the forum under the patronage of Shaikh Mansour Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Presidential Affairs and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the NCMS. Linking seismic networks will give a clearer picture of the seismic activity in the region, particularly along border areas, said a statement issued by the NCMS to Gulf News. The seismicity of the Arabian plate will become clearer with the establishment of the seismic networks in the GCC countries. These networks would provide a preliminary assessment of the seismic hazards in the region. The region is affected by the tectonics of the Arabian plate, where earthquakes occur along the plate collision boundaries, said the statement. The northern and eastern boundaries formed and shaped by the folds of the Zagros Mountains of Iran and Turkey are known as one of the most seismically active areas in the world. In addition, earthquakes are common occurrences in the Makran fault, close to the borders of the Arabian Gulf region, and where earthquakes as strong as magnitude 8 on the Richter scale could occur. Co-operation in science, seismology, and seismic engineering at the global and regional levels is essential in order to reduce the risk of the impact of earthquakes.

GCC and Turkey to sign trade agreement

A free trade agreement between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Turkey will be signed before the end of this year, Turkey's Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek said. The minister told reporters in Manama that negotiations on the free trade agreement have been going on for almost four years and expressed confidence that trade in the region would benefit from the deal. Simsek, who arrived in Manama last week to co-chair the meeting of the Joint Economic Commission (JEC), has been discussing with Bahraini leaders business issues, global economic developments as well as ways to boost trade and investments between the two countries. According to Turkish media, the volume of trade between Turkey and Bahrain increased to \$404 million (Dh1.5 billion) in 2008, up from \$72 million in 2004.

Child trafficking in GCC 'eradicated'

GCC states have been successful in their efforts to curb trafficking of children for employment as child camel jockeys, said Cairo-based human trafficking expert, Dr. Nihal Fu'ad Fahmy. "The problem of children being forcefully brought to this region as camel jockeys has been completely eradicated," she said. However, Dr. Fahmy said that economic exploitation of labour remains a major cause for concern in the region.

"Labour exploitation, especially economic manipulation, is something that needs to be addressed seriously in this part of the world," she explained in a forum at the Royal Oman Police Officers' Training Institute. Oman, was the third country in the Gulf to promulgate a law against human trafficking, following the UAE and Bahrain. In the last two years, five human trafficking cases have been reported in Oman, of which 19 Omanis and 14 expatriates were found to be involved. "Some have been convicted and some of the cases are still under proceedings," revealed Shaikh Hamad Al Wahaibi, Head of Preliminary Courts in Muscat.

YEMEN

Al Houthi rebels cooperating despite isolated breaches: Sources

Al Houthi rebels are on track with the implementation of the six conditions for ending the war in Sa'ada, aside from isolated breaches, sources close to the mediation committee revealed Thursday. In a sign of great progress, roads have reopened in the three main areas of fighting around Sa'ada City, Harf Sufyan, and Al Malahaid. Efforts continue to remove mines, barricades and checkpoints. Rebels have been cooperating but have showed some resistance to issues relating to spreading the influence of the government in their areas, sources who did not wish to be named told Gulf News. Government forces have yet to deploy in the Al Houthi-controlled areas. "The task is very difficult, we ask for patience, but the level of implementation is good as people are able to move normally and farmers have returned back to their lands after mines were removed," Abdul Malik Al Makhlafi, a member of the national committee, which supervises the implementation of the six conditions to the end war, said.

Yemeni army redeployed in rebel positions

The Yemeni army redeployed at the borders with Saudi Arabia where Al Houthi rebels were positioning before the war stopped earlier this month, sources close to the mediators said on Saturday. Deployment of the Yemeni army at the borders in place of the rebels is the second thing that Saudi Arabia wanted from the rebels after releasing the Saudi detainees. Earlier last week, Al Houthi rebels handed over three Saudi soldiers captured during battles last November. Al Houthi rebels hinted that the three captives handed were all they had, but the Saudi authorities kept saying five soldiers went missing in the battles with Al Houthis. Over the last eight days since the ceasefire was declared, the mediators have been exerting great of efforts to meet these two conditions of Saudi Arabia, reopening the blocked roads, removing mines, check points, barriers, and barricades. On Saturday, the local authorities have started to work in their offices in the areas which were under the control of the rebels, said mediators. Abdul Wahab Yahya Al Durah, member of the mediation committee in Al Malahaid, west of Sa'ada, said that local authority officials returned to their offices and started working late last week and Saturday in six districts in Sa'ada, which were under the control of the rebels. The six districts are Ketaf, Razeh, Al Hashwah, Al Safra, Al Malahaid, and Shada.

On February 12, Al Houthi rebels accepted the implementation of all the six conditions set by the Yemeni government for ending the war through four separate mediation committees in which Al Houthi rebels were represented. The four committees were to supervise the implementation of the six conditions in the areas around Sa'ada city, Harf Sufyan, Al Malahaid, and the borders with Saudi Arabia. The two committees in Al Malahaid, and at the borders, which are close to each other, and both of them being in the far west of Sa'ada, apparently face less difficulties in implementing the six conditions which include the rebels going down from the mountains and handing over the weapons and not attacking the territories of Saudi Arabia. The committee in Sa'ada, however, has complained of repeated violations and breaches by the rebels while the committee in Harf

Sufyan says they did not start working because the rebels did not send their representatives yet.

Efforts of ending Al Houthi rebellion continue

The efforts to end the armed rebellion in northern Yemen are continuing despite repeated breaches by rebels who try to obstruct the army from deployment in some positions and keep the heavy weapons including the removed mines, sources close to the mediators said on Sunday. The sources confirmed that the four committees in charge of supervising the implementation of the six conditions set by the government and accepted by the rebels for ending the war, were working according to the agreed mechanism and timetable in the four main areas: the areas around Sa'ada city, Harf Sufyan, Al Malahaid, and the borders with Saudi Arabia. The strategic road, which connects the Yemeni capital Sana'a with the province of Sa'ada via the mountainous areas of Harf Sufyan, was opened on Saturday. More than 20 lorries carrying food and relief materials for the displaced people moved from Sana'a to Sa'ada through this road for the first time since the war erupted on August 10. "Re-opening the road of Harf Sufyan-Sa'ada is a big achievement for ending the war and bringing peace to Sa'ada," said MP and tribal shaikh, Ali Abdu Rabu Al Qadi, chairman of the mediation committee in Harf Sufyan. "We are determined to bring peace and ignore all breaches and difficulties facing the implementation of the six conditions," Al Qadi added. The relief lorries passed through the most difficult and most sensitive positions of the rebels until they arrived in Sa'ada.

187 children killed in Yemen's war with rebels

A total of 187 children were killed in the war between the Yemeni government and Al Houthi rebels in Sa'ada north of the country, rights group said Monday. About 71 per cent of those died by weapons, and 29 died because of not having food and medical services, said the Seyaj organisation for children care in a report released Monday in Sana'a. The report also said that 87 children became disabled. Four children were sexually abused, 43 were exploited for begging, 158 children were beaten, 232 children were ignored, and 89,000 children were displaced. Al Houthi rebels recruited 402 children as fighters and the tribesmen loyal to the government recruited 282 children. A total of 383,332 children were deprived of education because of the war, which means 93 per cent of the children in Sa'ada province were not able to attend schools because of the war. A total of 17 schools and education utilities were destroyed out of 701 utilities in the province of Sa'ada, and 16 of them were used for purpose of the war.

No real ceasefire between Yemen government and rebels: Al Houthi

The spokesman of Al Houthi rebels said on Tuesday that the Yemeni government has not stopped fighting against them, and the situation of war still remains. Sources said that the rebels did not allow the mediation committee to enter the old city of Sa'ada for removing the mines. Earlier in the day, the government's supreme security committee said Al Houthi rebels are not implementing the six conditions they had accepted for ending the war and they started to do the same things they did before the previous wars. Al Houthi rebels have started kidnapping citizens and plundering their houses, practices that mirror what they were doing before the sixth round of war which erupted in August last year,

said the committee in a statement carried out by state-run media. "The only thing that Al Houthi rebels have done so far is reopening some roads [and] removing some mines," the statement said. The committee holds the rebels responsible for failing to implement the six conditions set by the government at the beginning of fighting which the rebels accepted six months after the war. However, Al Houthi refused to hand over the removed mines, heavy weapons, the military and civil equipment they plundered during the war and release the people they kidnapped from Saudi Arabia and Yemen, the statement said. Al Houthi rebels did not comment on the statement, or on previous government statements accusing them of breaching the ceasefire.

Al Houthi rebels fail to carry out truce conditions

Al Houthi rebels are not implementing all of the six conditions they accepted for ending the war and have started doing the same things they did before the previous wars, Yemen's supreme security committee said on Tuesday. Al Houthi rebels have started kidnapping citizens and plundering their houses, practices that mirror what they were doing before the sixth round of war which erupted in August last year, said the committee in a statement carried out by state-run media. "The only thing that Al Houthi rebels have done so far is reopening some roads [and] removing some mines," the statement said. The committee holds the rebels responsible for failing to implement the six conditions set by the government at the beginning of fighting which the rebels accepted six months after the war. However, Al Houthi refused to hand over the removed mines, heavy weapons, the military and civil equipment they plundered during the war and release the people they kidnapped from Saudi Arabia and Yemen, the statement said. Al Houthi rebels did not comment on the statement, or on previous government statements accusing them of breaching the ceasefire. Some observers say Al Houthi rebels are only focused on solving the conflict with Saudi Arabia and keep procrastinating with the Yemeni government to gain time to re-organise themselves for war. Despite these difficulties, all four committees in charge of supervising the implementation of the six conditions are continuing their work in four main places — the areas around Sa'ada, Harf Sufyan, Al Malahaid, and the borders with Saudi Arabia.

Al Houthi rebels to leave the old city of Sa'ada

All Al Houthi rebels will start withdrawing from the houses they have occupied in the old city of Sa'ada so that the displaced people can now return to their houses said a mediator. "We agreed with the representative of Al Houthi rebels that their followers who barricade in some houses of the old city, will all withdraw today," said Ali Abu Hulaika, the chairman of the mediation committee in Sa'ada city. The people, who left their houses once the war erupted last August, will return to their houses in the old city, said Abu Hulaika. Abu Hulaika said the time set for implementing the conditions of ending the war is now almost over while his committee is yet to finish the task which it should have completed. "The procrastination of the Al Houthi rebels was behind that delay, but we are seeking additional time to finish our task," he said. Meanwhile, the Yemeni Prime Minister Ali Mohammad Mujawar, said in press statements Thursday, that his government is ready to launch a new round of war if Al Houthi rebels fail to abide by the six conditions for ending the conflict. The decree of ending the war came only after the

rebels yielded to the six conditions, which were set by the government. If the rebels recanted at any point, this decree will be reconsidered , Mujawar said.

SAUDI ARABIA

International Front

Riyadh gears up to receive Indian PM

Hundreds of Saudi and Indian flags have decorated the streets of Riyadh since Tuesday to welcome Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who will begin his three-day official visit to the Kingdom on Saturday. At the same time, senior Saudi and Indian government officials are busy in making elaborate arrangements to host the Indian political and business establishments as well as fine-tuning several draft accords to be signed during the visit, the first by an Indian premier since 1982. "The visit of Prime Minister Singh, which takes place four years after the visit of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah to New Delhi, will boost Saudi-Indo relations further and change the dynamics of our strategic ties," said Saudi Ambassador to India Faisal H. Trad, here on Tuesday. Trad, who is here to prepare for Singh's visit, said that some 11 agreements had been finalized for signing during the visit of the Indian premier, who will be accompanied by ministers and officials. "History will be made in Saudi-Indo relations when Singh holds talks with King Abdullah," said Ambassador Trad. A media office has been set up by the Indian Embassy at the Riyadh Palace Hotel to help local journalists and take care of the needs of the newsmen accompanying the premier. Referring to major agreements to be signed during the visit, Trad pointed out that an agreement to promote media cooperation involving the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) and the Press Trust of India (PTI) would be signed.

Saudi FM expresses doubt over Iran sanctions, calls for immediate measures

Saudi Arabia's foreign minister on Monday expressed doubts about the usefulness of more sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program. Prince Saud Al Faisal told a news conference in the Saudi capital that the threat posed by Iran's nuclear ambitions demands a more immediate solution than sanctions. He described sanctions as a long-term solution, and he said the threat is more pressing. The Saudi minister spoke at a joint appearance with US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, who is in the Arabian Gulf to shore up support for new sanctions against Iran. The Saudi minister also said efforts supported by the US to rid the Middle East of nuclear weapons must apply to Israel. "Sanctions are a long-term solution," the Saudi minister said. "But we see the issue in the shorter term because we are closer to the threat," referring to Iran. "We need immediate resolution rather than gradual resolution." He didn't identify a preferred short-term resolution. US officials traveling with Clinton said privately they were uncertain what al-Faisal meant, since the Saudi government has been explicit in its support of sanctions against Iran. They said he appeared to be suggesting that sanctions may not be effective and that other action could be required. Was Clinton's visit to the Gulf successful in winning support for sanctions? Are sanctions an effective way to curb Iranian nuclear enrichment? Or does the West have to come to terms with a nuclear Iran?

Saudi prisoners in Yemen to be handed over

The five Saudi prisoners, held by Al Houthi rebels during the war, will be handed over to the Yemeni government, said sources close to the mediation on Sunday. The prisoners will then be handed over to Saudi authorities. Shaikh Nasser Kersha, the tribal shaikh from Sa'ada, who is leading the mediation between the Yemeni government and Al Houthi rebels, will hand the five Saudi prisoners to the Yemeni government on Sunday, the sources said. Handing over the Saudi prisoners was the first condition by the Saudi government. The Saudi authorities also want the Yemeni troops to deploy in the border areas where Al Houthi rebels were positioned. The spokesman of Al Houthi rebels, Mohammad Abdul Al Salam, said the Saudi prisoners would be handed to the mediator Nasser Kersha. The Saudi army liberated about 25 prisoners after Al Houthi rebels arrested about 30 Saudi soldiers during battles with the Saudi forces, which erupted early November after the rebels launched attacks in Saudi.

Saudi Arabia, Qatar agreements to boost ties

Saudi Arabia and Qatar have signed several agreements on the sidelines of the second meeting of the Saudi-Qatari Joint Coordination Council in Doha Monday night, further boosting bilateral ties in various fields. As many as 10 agreements, memoranda of understanding and minutes pertaining to political, health, agricultural, economic, commercial, diplomatic, cultural, media, industrial, Islamic affairs and endowments fields were signed on the occasion. The meeting was co-chaired by the Saudi Second Deputy Premier and Minister of Interior Prince Nayef Bin Abdul Aziz and Qatar's Crown Prince Shaikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani. In his presidential speech Prince Nayef reaffirmed that creation of the Council comes as further enhancement for the march of Gulf Cooperation Council and reflects the great keenness of the leadership of the two countries in boosting bilateral relations in all fields. Addressing a joint press conference after the meeting, Prince Nayef and Shaikh Tamim underscored the keenness of both the countries to further strengthening the unity and integrity of the GCC. Replying to queries with regard to the recent harsh statement of US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton about Iran's nuclear programme, Prince Nayef said that Saudi Arabia's position on the issue is the same with that of other GCC states. "The GCC position was clearly stated at the GCC summit held in Kuwait last year.

Social Front

Call to end Saudi election ban on women

An existing "ban" on women to vote or run in elections is a blatant violation of international conventions signed by Saudi Arabia and should be lifted, according to the National Society for Human Rights (NSHR). In 2005, Saudi Arabia held municipal elections for the first time since the 1960, but women were excluded. Currently, the four-year term of the municipal councils is expired as elections were due in 2009. Dr. Muflih Al Qahtani, chairman of NSHR, said that denying women's rights by preventing them to vote or run in elections was a flagrant violation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, of which Saudi Arabia signed on December 18, 1979. Saudi Arabia then joined the convention in 2000 and changed its electoral law so that "all citizens" could vote. Before the 2005 elections,

authorities claimed there was not enough time to organise segregated voting facilities for women, but hinted that women would be allowed to vote in the next elections. "Currently, no steps have been taken to ensure women's participation in the next elections," Al Qahtani told Al Madinah Daily. Al Qahtani said he hoped that postponement would give the authorities enough time to complete the legal procedures to enable women access. "Saudi women have proved that they can score excellent performance results in various fields and this is evident by the many success stories of Saudi businesswomen," he said.

Religious policeman sentenced for keeping six wives

A primary court in the southern Jizan region of Saudi Arabia sentenced a Saudi religious policeman for keeping six wives at the same time, in clear violation of the Islamic Shariah principles. The 56-year-old man is a member of the Commission for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (known as religious police outside the Kingdom). The general court in Ahad Al Masariha has sentenced him to 120 lashes. In addition, he was slapped with a five-year travel ban and was ordered to memorise the last two sections of the Holy Quran. Islam permits polygamy under strict conditions. A man can take up to four wives on the condition that he treats them equally. The defendant plead to the court that he was ignorant of the Islamic principle as having only completed elementary schooling. "I find it hard to believe that he was unaware of such a major religious rule that even newcomers to the religion are aware of," Judge Shaikh Salman Al Wida'ani said. It was also noted that none of his relatives attended ceremonies of his marriages to foreign women.

UAE woman says she was assaulted in Saudi Arabia

Saudi police have arrested two women accused of assaulting a young Emirati woman in broad daylight on a public street in the Eastern city of Dammam. Duwa Al Attar, 20, visited the city to see her daughter, of whom her Saudi ex-husband has custody. The day of her visit coincided with her former husband's second marriage. She went to the wedding hall to see her child, but was not allowed to do so. Instead, she claims the sister of her former husband and his brother's wife beat her. The Emirati woman had earlier secured a Saudi court order to see her four-and-a-half-year-old child for the first time in one-and-a-half years. Dammam police transferred the assault case to the Public Prosecution and Investigation Authority. Speaking to Gulf News, UAE Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Al Asari Saeed Al Daheri said that the embassy had received a directive from the Foreign Ministry to follow up the case. He said that the UAE authorities were confident that the Saudi authorities would see justice done. However, he noted that this is a family dispute and the embassy cannot interfere. "Our role is restricted to providing consultancy and to follow up the case," he said. On her part, Duwa Al Attar, the alleged victim, said that there has been a dispute over the custody of her daughter ever since she was divorced two-and-a-half-years ago. "My daughter has been living with her father for one-and-a-half years. I arrived in Dammam last Thursday after securing a court order to see my daughter. When I reached the house of my former husband and knocked on the door several times, nobody was there to respond. "By chance, I found the mother and sister of my former husband at a nearby beauty parlour. They were preparing for my

former husband's wedding ceremony. I went there [to the wedding hall] directly and pleaded to see my daughter.

Move to allow women lawyers in Saudi courts hailed

Saudi Arabia's Minister of Justice Dr Mohammed Al Eisa clarified that there was no formal decision taken yet to allow women lawyers to argue cases in the Kingdom's courts. Speaking to Gulf News, he said that the Justice Ministry is currently working on a draft law that would allow women lawyers to practice in courts. "Under the draft law, female lawyers will be granted licence to practice in courts and their jurisdiction will be restricted to personal matters in the initial stage," he said adding that the draft will be made public in the coming few days. Two days ago, the minister noted that the new bill is part of the comprehensive judicial reform plan of King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz. He noted that the ministry is giving the finishing touches to the draft law prior to be presented to the authorities concerned for approval. The minister's announcement was the outcome of the long-standing demand by female lawyers and law graduates as well as rights and legal activists. In remarks to Gulf News, several activists in the legal field said that granting licence to women lawyers to practice in courts is the need of the hour. "It is high time to allow women lawyers to argue cases for women in courts. They can present grievances of women and injustice meted out to their clients in a stronger way possible than those of their male counterparts do," they said adding that the Saudi women can also complete procedures with notaries without presenting any witnesses under the new law. Currently, women law graduates can work in government offices and in court offices, but cannot argue cases in court. Under the new law, women would be allowed to argue cases on civilian matters such as child custody, divorce and other family-related issues. Abdullah Mohammad Al Nasiri, a leading Saudi lawyer and director-general of the Arab Lawyers' Network, said that the proposed law is part of the major overhaul being taken place in the judicial system, initiated by King Abdullah.

Kuwaiti scholars reject Saudi fatwa to kill those who refuse gender segregation

Leading religious scholars in Kuwait have rejected a fatwa or religious edict seeking to put to death opponents of strict segregation of men and women, saying that it was a call for sedition and chaos within the Islamic nation. Saudi religious figure Shaikh Abdul Rahman Al Barrak on Tuesday said that the mixing of genders at the workplace or in educational institutions was religiously prohibited on the grounds that it allowed seeing what must not be seen and engaging in forbidden conversations. Those who refuse to abide by strict segregation between men and women should be put to death, he said. However, Kuwaiti scholars said that such an edict could come only from "a senile person or someone who wants to sow sedition in the nation by allowing the killing of innocent people." "Officials need to step in promptly and make the authors of such edicts face legal measures to ensure that no innocent people are killed or abused by those who want to implement the fatwas," said Dr Ajeel Al Nashmi, the head of the GCC Religious Scholars League. Islamic Studies professor, Dr Bassam Al Shatti, warned that edicts that allowed the killing of people were very dangerous. "Only the authorities have the right to apply legal punishment or penalties. Religious figures can advise and explain matters to people, but sentences are the prerogative of the rulers," he told Kuwaiti daily Al Watan on Wednesday. "Allowing people to take the law into their hands would result in social

chaos and in killings which are forbidden in Islam," he said. Leading Kuwaiti scholar Shaikh Ahmad Hussain blasted the fatwa, saying that Islam was very strict about killing people intentionally. "All the teachings in the Quran and in the Prophet's Sayings stress that killing is not allowed. God said that 'whoever kills a believer it is as if he killed all people'. So we have to be careful about issuing edicts that encourage or allow people to kills others," he said.

Scholars reject fatwa seeking death for gender mixing

Scholars in Kuwait have rejected a fatwa seeking to put to death opponents of segregation of men and women, saying that it was a call for sedition and chaos within the nation. Saudi Arabia's Shaikh Abdul Rahman Al Barrak said on Tuesday that mixing of genders at workplace or in educational institutions was prohibited. Those who refuse to abide should be put to death, he said. However, a Kuwaiti scholar said such an edict could come only from "a senile person or someone who wants to sow sedition in the nation by allowing the killing of innocent people". "Officials need to step in promptly and make the authors of such edicts face legal measures," Dr Ajeel Al Nashmi, the head of the GCC Religious Scholars League, said yesterday. Islamic studies professor Dr Bassam Al Shatti said: "Only the authorities have the right to apply legal punishment or penalties. Religious figures can advise and explain matters to people, but sentences are the prerogative of the rulers," he told Kuwaiti daily Al Watan. Shaikh Ahmad Hussain, another scholar, said: "All the teachings in the Quran and in the Prophet's [PBUH] sayings stress that killing is not allowed. God said that whoever kills a believer it is as if he killed all people."

Environment

Heavy rains hit Makkah, sparking flood fears

Heavy rainfalls over Makkah on Saturday submerged some districts and streets in the city, Saudi media reported, raising fears of a repeat of deadly floods in a neighbouring city in November. State-owned Al Ekhbariya television channel showed a few pilgrims praying on wet white-marbled floors of the Grand Mosque while others walked around the cubic-shaped Ka'aba dome at its centre. Makkah's location at the heart of a mountainous desert valley makes it vulnerable to flash floods that can be caused by unusually strong rainfalls. The Ka'aba had to be repaired several times in the past after being damaged by floods.

6 Bangladeshis die in house collapse in Makkah following torrential rain

Saudi civil defence official says at least six people have been killed in a house collapse in the holy city of Makkah. Captain Saleh Al Alyani said on Monday that all six victims were members of a Bangladeshi family working in Makkah. The house collapsed on Sunday after heavy rain, which caused flooding in many parts of Saudi Arabia's western coast on the Red Sea.

Terrorism

Saudi Arabia foils terror attack, nabs No. 10 in wanted list

Saudi forces have foiled a major terror attack, after Ahmad Qateem Mohammad Al Hidhli, the number 10 on the Interior Ministry's "most wanted" list was arrested from his hideout in Yanbu near Madinah. Al Hidhli was nabbed before he was able to carry out a major terror strike. He was captured in a tent shortly before Friday prayers last week, after a tip-off alerted authorities, according to security sources. The ministry has kept Al Hidhli's capture top secret for five days to facilitate detailed investigation. "Investigators are studying the details of his plans," Major General Mansour Al Turki said. The remaining terrorists on the list have been urged to come forth to the authorities and surrender. "We will deal with each case separately taking into the account the crimes they have committed and ask them to take advantage of a counselling program launched by the ministry to correct their ways and lead a normal life," he added.

Saudi stands trial over Jakarta hotel bombings

A retired Saudi Arabian school teacher went on trial on Wednesday; charged with financing suicide bombings at two Jakarta hotels that killed seven and wounded more than 50. Al Khelaiw Ali Abdullah, 55, denied any involvement in the July 17, 2009, attacks on the downtown J.W. Marriott and Ritz Carlton hotels.

UAE

International Front

UAE condemns Israeli aggression

The United Arab Emirates has reiterated its support to the international and regional efforts aimed at resuming the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. In a statement read in Friday by Abdul Aziz Nasser Al Shamsi, UAE Ambassador to Rome, before the international meeting in support of Israeli-Palestinian peace organised by the United Nations and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, the UAE said the negotiations were facing a major political deadlock due to the continued expansion and aggression committed by Israel, which have affected the people of the region, particularly the Palestinians. "Here we wonder how the world explains the ongoing acts of Israel ... in confiscating lands, homes and natural resources of the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Al Quds Al Sharif, despite the fact that two decades have elapsed since the launching of the peace process in the Middle East and the bilateral agreements made in this regard," Al Shamsi said. "The series of crimes against humanity committed by Israel have included the killing of hundreds of civilians, destruction of the Palestinian economic and social infrastructure, particularly in Gaza, and imposition of sieges and blockades to prevent the Palestinian people from having access to the necessary food and medical supplies and other humanitarian stuff such as fuel and construction materials, in violation of all international laws and legal traditions, which incriminate such practices," he said.

Al Shamsi went on to say the security approach under the present Israeli government did not work, citing illegal practices including building additional colonies in Al Quds Al Sharif and taking away the identification of thousands of Palestinian residents, with a view to preventing them from living in the holy city.

UAE stresses support for Middle East peace process

The UAE strongly supports multilateral efforts toward improving security in the region, Shaikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, UAE Foreign Minister, said yesterday. Shaikh Abdullah yesterday met US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and several Congressional leaders. During his meeting, Shaikh Abdullah reaffirmed the UAE's strong ongoing support for Afghanistan-Pakistan stabilisation initiatives, and for multilateral efforts toward improving security in the region and commitment to comprehensive peace, and to the common objective of achieving a two-state solution in which Israelis and Palestinians live in peace and security. The Foreign Minister and Clinton also discussed the progress in Iraq, and the two countries' efforts to support the ongoing relief efforts in Haiti. The US and the UAE have a strong partnership and share a common vision for a secure, stable, and prosperous Middle East, according to a joint statement issued yesterday. Shaikh Abdullah also met Senator Joe Lieberman and Congressman Gary Ackerman to discuss issues of mutual interest. Yousuf Al Otaiba, UAE Ambassador to US, was also present.

Mohammad Bin Zayed orders aid to Yemenis

In line with the directives of President His Highness Shaikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, General Shaikh Mohammad Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, ordered a donation of Dh50 million to help Yemeni people living in the Emirati camp in Yemen. The Al Mazraq Camp 2 was set up by the UAE Red Crescent Authority (RCA) to provide shelter to people affected by events in some parts of northern Yemen. The RCA provides humanitarian assistance to 10,000 people in the camp. Shaikh Hamdan Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Ruler's Representative in the Western Region and Chairman of RCA, instructed the authority to continue efforts aiming at providing humanitarian services and meeting the essential needs of Yemenis.

Environment

Solar-powered plants to desalt water for animals

Thirty small-scale solar-powered desalination plants will be operational in the next 15 months to provide animals with watering holes in Abu Dhabi's desert environment. Two of the plants are already in use desalting brackish water from underground aquifers into fresh potable water, said a water resources expert from the Environment. However the cost of using solar power for bigger desalination plants that produce millions of litres of fresh water for mass human consumption is still too high, said Dr Mohammad Dawoud, Manager of Water Resources Department at EAD. Currently the cost of one desert desalination plant is Dh3 million. Each plant will be of identical size with the same desalination capacity of five cubic metres of water per hour. The plants will be operated remotely and solar power will be harnessed by solar panels spanning 300 square metres at each site — enough to create 45 kilowatts of electricity per hour. "The purpose of the plants is to establish a water source for the thousands of animals in the middle of the desert where there is no power. There will be no impact on the environment and the

operating cost for the next 15 years is lower than transporting oil to use to create energy," said Dawoud.

Social Front

UAE mourns death of Mubarak

The Ministry of Presidential Affairs has mourned the death of Shaikh Mubarak Bin Mohammad Al Nahyan who passed away on Wednesday. Funeral prayers will be held on Thursday after Dhuhur prayers at the Shaikh Sultan Bin Zayed Mosque in Al Bateen. The ministry announced a three-day mourning period. Condolences will be accepted at Al Mushrif Palace after Asr prayers. He was married with three sons and two daughters. His sons are Shaikh Ahmad Bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, Shaikh Nahyan Bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research and Shaikh Hamdan Bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, Minister of Public Works.

Private sector employees to be compensated for working on Friday

All private sector employees who work on Friday, February 26 will be compensated, the circular said.

UAE President receives condolences from Rulers

President His Highness Shaikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan yesterday received condolences from Their Highnesses the Rulers of the Emirates, shaikhs and senior state officials who expressed deep-felt grief on the death of Shaikh Mubarak Bin Mohammad Al Nahyan. Shaikh Khalifa also received a cable of condolence from President Abdullah Saleh of Yemen. Their Highnesses the Supreme Council Members and Rulers of the Emirates, as well as the crown princes and deputy rulers, also offered condolences to Shaikh Tahnoun Bin Mohammad Al Nahyan, Ruler's Representative in the Eastern Region.

KUWAIT

International Front

Russia supplies new weapons to Kuwait

Russia will supply Kuwait with several types of weapons under a bilateral agreement, Kuwaiti media said yesterday. Quoting Alexander Kinshchak, Russia's ambassador to Kuwait, Al Anba reported that the two countries have agreed on all the details and that Kuwaiti experts will be trained on the use of the new weapons. A Kuwaiti military delegation is expected to fly to Russia for matters related to the training, the paper said. Kinshchak said that Kuwaiti-Russian military cooperation is robust and includes technical reinforcement in military areas, but he ruled out joint exercises.

Political Front

Kuwait government has no plans to resign

Kuwait's government has no plans to resign or to swap ministerial portfolios to avoid possible investigation of its ministers, Kuwaiti sources have said. Rumours of a limited cabinet reshuffle to dodge an impending grilling of the information minister gained in intensity this week in Kuwait City, forcing parliamentary blocs to retreat into a "wait and see" situation. "The government is standing and ready to confront any grilling of its ministers," the unnamed sources were quoted as saying by the Kuwaiti daily Al Anba. "Whatever is happening, there will be no resignation, no reshuffling of the cabinet, no dismissing of a minister or swapping of ministerial posts. The government is well determined to move forward and to face any call to quiz ministers," they told the newspaper. The minister has come under fire following the broadcasting of a controversial programme by a privately owned television station, which contained an alleged denigration of Bedouins who make up half of the elected lawmakers in the parliament. A series of street rallies and angry media comments have pressured MPs to seek to quiz the minister. The Popular Bloc in the parliament has suggested a compromise that would allow Al Abdullah to remain in charge of the oil portfolio, but leave the information ministry for a new minister.

Kuwait minister under fire for TV show 'offensive' to tribes

A Kuwaiti lawmaker has filed a request on Tuesday to grill Information and Oil Minister Shaikh Ahmad Abdullah Al Sabah over a controversial TV show deemed offensive to Bedouin tribes. MP Ali Al Deqbasi, a member of the opposition Popular Action Bloc, charged the minister of failing to apply the 2006 law on the financial auditing of establishments and companies licenced to publish and broadcast. However, the more significant charge against the minister is his "leniency in applying the provisions of the law towards seditious channels that are unauthorized or that break the law," Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) reported. The minister was dragged into a controversy after a private television channel Al Soor (The Wall) aired a talk show in December that claimed that the tribesmen were not true citizens of Kuwait and that many of them broke the law by holding dual citizenship. Only the people who lived inside the walls of Kuwait City were the genuine inhabitants of the emirate, the programme claimed. Angry tribesmen who make up half of the country's native population - and around half of the parliament - staged rallies demanding action against the television station and its owner Mohammad Al Juwaihel. They threatened to grill the prime minister and several other officials for allowing the channel to divide Kuwaitis into entities.

Derogatory remark against tribe on TV irks Parliament

The move to grill the information minister following the airing of a show that allegedly denigrated Kuwait's tribes has gathered pace among lawmakers. "Things look bright and three more MPs have joined the 20 lawmakers who have already signed up for the quizzing of the minister," said MP Ali Al Deqbasi, who sought the questioning of Shaikh Ahmad Al Abdullah. "We are confident that more MPs will join us within the next few days," he said in a statement published in the Kuwaiti media. MP Mislim Al Barrak said that the evidence in the possession of the MPs was enough to make other members of the

Social Front

Kuwait determined to end discrimination against women

Kuwait is determined to end discrimination against women in the workplace, a woman lawmaker has said. "Kuwait is keen on improving its laws and rules to eliminate discrimination against women in the workplace," Rola Dashti has said. "Despite all the difficulties and challenges there has been some positive progress and we plan to continue the movement forward," said Rola, a Johns Hopkins University PhD holder who heads the health and work committee in the Kuwaiti parliament. Rola, listed among the world's 100 most influential Arabs in 2007 and 2008, was one of four women elected last year to the parliament, ending the men's monopoly that marked it since it was formed. Women in the conservative Kuwaiti society have been facing an uphill struggle for more rights despite visible support from the country's amir and government members. Recently activists have been pushing for amending the laws to allow Kuwaiti women married to non-Kuwaitis to benefit from government-sponsored housing schemes and to be able to transmit their nationalities to their children. On Saturday, Rashed Al Radaan, a Kuwaiti columnist writing for Al Watan daily highlighted the suffering and pain of a Kuwaiti woman who was told that she could not give her two properties to her two children because she was married to a foreigner and her children could not obtain the Kuwaiti nationality, a major condition for owning real estate in the country. "I wanted to give the properties to my two children to ensure their future, but I was told by the competent authorities that I had no legal right to do that," she said. "They told me that my children, even though they were born and raised in Kuwait, were not Kuwaiti citizens and as such could not own property," the unnamed woman said, according to Al Radaan. Women's rights activists have been challenging long-established socially-driven rules they see as too restrictive or unfair. In October, Kuwaiti women won the right to obtain passports without the consent of their husbands. The constitutional court argued the husband's signature requirement, stipulated in a 1962 law, violated the constitution which guaranteed freedom and gender equality. The historic decision, which cannot be challenged, was made after a woman sued her husband for preventing her and her children from leaving the country.

Kuwait wants nationals to make up at least 50% of the total population

Kuwait has a plan to boost its native population to at least 50 per cent of the total number of people living in the northern Arabian Gulf emirate, a Kuwaiti minister said. The plan includes further reducing the number of foreigners staying illegally in the country. "Under the recently approved development plan, there will be greater opportunities for Kuwaiti nationals to contribute to the growth of their country," Mohammad Al Afassi, the social affairs and labour minister, said. "Kuwaitis now make up between 25 and 30 per cent of the total population, but the government wants to use the development plan to boost their number to 50 per cent of the total population," the minister told Kuwaiti daily Al Rai. Part of the plan includes reducing the number of foreigners staying illegally in the country, he said. "We have succeeded in bringing down the number of foreigners staying illegally in the country in 2009 by 10 per cent or around 200,000 people. We resorted to deportation and to a better management of work permits," the minister said. Al Afassi said that the measures would touch more foreigners in the future as the country

implements its development plan. "We have suffered in Kuwait for years from numerous serious demographic issues that have resulted, among other things, in a rise in the crimes perpetrated by marginal foreigners. We are serious about our zero-tolerance policy and anyone who violates the law will be deported or severely punished," the minister said. Kuwait has a total population of 3.4 million.

Ministry warns against use of slimming tea and coffee

Kuwait's health ministry has warned against the consumption of "Green Coffee 500" and "Slimming Bag Green Tea", two tea and coffee drinks promising health benefits. Health ministry says they could have negative effects on the heart. Dr Omar Al Syed Omar, assistant deputy of Drugs and Medical Supplies Affairs, told Kuwait News Agency (Kuna) that the Drug Monitoring Directorate found that the herbs contained a chemical element that could be used only under a strict medical prescription. The official said that such products are brought to Kuwait unchecked by the competent health authorities and without a proper medical license. "They are usually brought in through unofficial means such as the Internet, passengers or personal parcels," he said. Omar said that people should avoid purchasing such drugs or herbs through the Internet or bringing them from abroad without being aware of their latent hazards. "Smuggling and counterfeiting products containing chemical materials or getting drugs without medical licenses is a crime punishable by law. The Ministry of Health takes all necessary legal measures and refers all violators to the legal agencies concerned with protecting human health even if the amount seized is small and is for personal use," he said.

Scholars condemn growing sectarian tendencies

Kuwaiti intellectuals and academics have warned of the growing dangers of tribal and sectarian tendencies within the society, saying that they were having ominous effects on society. According to a study presented at a forum on citizenship in Kuwait, 70 per cent of Kuwaiti students tended to look at issues through the prism of sectarianism and their tribe. Dr Eisa Al Ansari, the author of the study, said that the university immunity supposed to shield students against subcultures and "narrow" tendencies has weakened under the onslaughts of sectarianism and a sense of belonging to the tribe. "Today at the University of Kuwait, you could detect these negative elements in the conversations between students, in their verbal standoffs and in their writings," he said. "The sense of belonging to a tribe or to a sect could replace the sense of belonging to a state," he was quoted as saying by Al Siyassah daily. Political science professor Mohammad Al Faili said that drawing a line between loyalty to the tribe and to the country was crucial. "To be proud of your tribe or your sect is not something that is shameful. Our society is a mixture of ethnic backgrounds, sects and tribes and this is what makes us who we are. However, our loyalty to these elements should never override our loyalty to Kuwait," he was quoted as saying by Kuwait Times on Monday. Several intellectuals in Bahrain, another Gulf country where sectarianism has gained dangerous ground in the last few years fuelled by partisan media, have repeatedly warned against the consolidation of sectarian tendencies that would erode the status of the state and undermine national unity.

Kuwaiti MPs argue over women's football team

Islamist Kuwaiti lawmakers have condemned the participation of their women's football team in the Asian championship as a "breakdown in social values" and demanded an investigation. "The minister of labour and social affairs should take action against those who allowed the participation," MP Mohammad Al Hayef said. "The matches are part of the chaos to dilute the values and identity of Kuwait," the MP said. In its first participation in an international tournament, the Kuwaiti women's squad was routed 17-0 by a stronger Palestinian side. The Third West Asian Women Soccer Tournament in the United Arab Emirates started on Saturday and will last until Sunday. The Kuwaiti team was assembled by Shaikha Naemah Ahmad Al Sabah, the chairwoman of Kuwaiti Women Soccer Committee. However, MP Khalid Soltan said that the Kuwaiti participation reflected "a breakdown of social values" that could have been averted by those in charge of youth and sports. "What do we gain from such participation? Has Kuwait stooped so low? Regretfully, we are simply imitating countries that boast of showing off," he said. For Salafi MP Waleed Al Tabtabai, the participation in the championship was a violation of Islamic tenets.

12 hoax bomb calls in one month in Kuwait

The recent spate of hoax bomb calls, with 12 such calls in the last month alone, has brought back memories among some Kuwaitis of a similar series of such calls in the country in the 1980s, which also took place during a period of increasing political and sectarian tensions in the region. An Information Technology (IT) expert explained, however, that in the modern day, with the use of more advanced communications technology, it's possible for such hoaxers to make these calls from within Kuwait using computer programs which make it appear that the calls originate abroad. A Ministry of Communications (MoC) official explained that the ministry is unable to trace the calls due to a lack of specialist equipment, which was "lost during the Iraqi invasion 20 years ago. Kuwait's security services have been frustrated in their efforts to apprehend the culprits, having uncovered the identity of only one of the hoax callers among the 12 over the last month, with only the culprit behind the Box Hill College calls traced.

Gas and Oil

Kuwait to tap tougher gasfields

Kuwait, which has been struggling to expand the capacity of its energy sector, has struck a deal with Royal Dutch Shell to tap into the emirate's technically challenging deep gas deposits. The project is crucial to economic prosperity because Kuwait is short of gas to supply its power and industrial sectors, and for years has experienced summer power cuts. Last summer, as OPEC cuts forced the emirate to lower both oil and gas output from its oilfields, Kuwait started importing liquefied natural gas from as far away as Russia's Sakhalin Island. Because of the chronic gas shortage, the discovery and development of pure gas deposits has been an important strategic goal for the government-owned Kuwait Oil Company (KOC). "We looked for gas [not associated with oil] since 1960, but didn't find any until 2000," Mohammed Hussain, the deputy chairman of the company, said this month in Abu Dhabi at an industry forum on developing economically marginal fields. "For us it's the gas, not the fields, that are the issue."

BAHRAIN

International Front

Arabs have to be more pragmatic to end Palestinian suffering, says Bahrain Crown Prince

Palestinians have been suffering and losing precious lives because of the Arabs' unclear policies, Bahrain's crown prince has said. "We have to put an end to the senseless bidding and be realistic and responsible in our approach to the Palestinian issue," Prince Salman Bin Hamad Al Khalifa said. "The Palestinians have been suffering and paying a heavy price because of the Arab's blurred and confused policy towards their sensitive issue," he said in an interview published in Al Ayam. The prince reiterated a call he first made in July to the Arabs to be more pragmatic in seeking solutions to the conflict that has plagued the region for generations. "We need to reach out to the Israeli people through a constructive dialogue and use the media to highlight the importance of a fair solution in their minds," Prince Salman said. "We need to drive the concept that we favour a negotiated peaceful solution over irresponsible claims," he said. Last summer, he suggested that Arabs begin talking to the Israeli media to better communicate their desire for a lasting Middle East peace and to influence the Israelis' mindset and help them see the significance of a peaceful solution to the crises in the region. "We as Arabs have not done enough to communicate directly with the people of Israel," he wrote in an opinion article published in July in the Washington Post. Arab leaders should "tell our story more directly to the Israeli people by getting the message out to their media" and emphasizing support for the Arab Initiative that promises normalized relations between Israel and the Arab world in exchange for the creation of a Palestinian state. "Essentially, we have not done a good enough job demonstrating to Israelis how our initiative can form part of a peace between equals in a trouble land holy to three great faiths," he wrote.

Bahrain lauds Turkey's 'constructive' role in Arab countries

King Hamad Bin Eisa Al Khalifa said that Bahrain fully appreciated Turkey's drive to achieve peace and stability in the region. Turkey's Parliament Speaker Mehmet Ali Sahin wrapped up a three-day visit to Manama, signing an agreement for inter-parliamentary cooperation. Bahrain's speaker of the lower chamber, Khalifa Al Dhahrani, said he was optimistic that the ties between the two countries would steadily increase. "Such a strategic decision is very important under the current circumstances and during these critical times," he said. Manama and Ankara have been drawing closer in the wake of a breakthrough visit by King Hamad to Turkey in August 2008. During his visit to Bahrain last April, Turkish President Abdallah Gul said that Manama and Ankara "shared similar thoughts on world matters and supported each other in the political sphere."

Political Front

Clash between MP and speaker threatens to derail Bahrain parliament session

A rare clash between the lower chamber speaker and an MP representing Al Asala threatened to derail today's parliamentary session before both sides regained their

composure. Speaker Khalifa Al Dhahrani said the government wanted to delay a much-anticipated discussion on an ongoing investigation into the status of national carrier Gulf Air. His announcement sparked angry comments among the MPs who had planned to devote time for the debate on the struggling airline. MP Abdul Halim Murad said the letter was eroding the prestige of the lower chamber, prompting the speaker to comment that the lawmaker's reaction was an election campaign manoeuvre. However, Abdul Halim said he was shocked by the speaker's attitude and left the hall, shouting that he was not honoured to be an MP and that he was resigning. Some MPs followed him to calm down the situation, but Abdul Halim did not go back to the hall. Al Dhahrani, a speaker during the 2002-2006 term as well, later told the MPs that he regretted his remark and urged them to convey his apologies to Murad. "I see that my brother Abdul Halim is not here, but please do inform him that I am sorry," he told the session. "I should hate to talk about the incident because I want it closed, but my heart is wide open for my brother," Al Dhahrani said. Abdul Halim later said his announcement to resign from the parliament was uttered when he was angry, but that he would still consider his options.

Social Front

Teacher sacked for requesting a minute's silence for Saddam Hussain

An Arab teacher has been sacked for asking her students at a private university in Bahrain to observe a minute's silence in tribute to Iraqi former president Saddam Husain. The university administration fired the teacher after incensed Bahraini and Kuwaiti students complained about the teacher's request, Bahraini daily Al Ayam reported on Tuesday. The political science teacher allegedly called for the tribute before the start of the class, saying that the students had to pay respect to the "martyr and hero of the nation." However, several students took the request to the president who launched an investigation into the incident. Years after his downfall and subsequent execution, Saddam remains a controversial figure in Bahrain. A Jordanian law professor at private university in Manama has recently waded into controversy following complained by students that he had expressed views supporting the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The professor denied the allegations and said that he would sue the students who "propagated false and misleading information." In March 2008, an American professor was sacked from a private university in Manama for publishing the highly controversial Danish cartoons of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) on his website routinely surfed by students to download notes about his course and related articles.

Bahraini offers 40 tickets to MPs to watch 'My Name is Khan' and learn from its message

A Bahraini man is trying to use the Bollywood hit 'My name is Khan' starring Shah Rukh Khan to help his country's lawmakers overcome the sectarianism that has gripped the parliament and threatened to divide society. Khalid Al Khayyat, a Bahraini who works with a bank, has offered the 40 MPs tickets to watch the movie in Manama and use its message to spread greater tolerance in the lower chamber and society and foster national unity. "My name is Khalid and I am not a sectarianist," said Khalid, taking the words from the main line in the movie, 'My name is Khan and I am not a terrorist' that Rizwan Khan, the main Muslim character, needs to tell the people and president of the

United States to win back his angry Hindu wife. "This tickets gift is humble, but the objective is highly significant. I am offering you 40 tickets so that you can watch the movie 'My Name is Khan' and learn from it how mutual love and tolerance are crucial for the development of any society," Khalid said in the letter he sent to the MPs. "The movie demonstrates how hatred and resentment will only drag us into a maze of ugliness that has terribly affected our lives. The movie is a reminder of a wonderful message, and that is terrorism has no religion or sect. The people of one country, regardless of their sects, must live together as one people, and not as two sects," Khalid said.

Bahraini parents favour English as learning medium

Around two-thirds of Bahraini parents prefer to send their children to schools where the curriculum is taught in English, a survey indicates. The study found that only 14 per cent of the parents who responded to the questionnaire want their children to learn mainly Arabic at school, while 64 per cent put English as the preferred instruction medium. The remaining 22 per cent think that both languages should be given equal attention at school and outside. The survey was conducted by a local media group ahead of the International Mother Language Day observed on February 21 since 2000. The day was proclaimed by Unesco's General Conference in November 1999 to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism. "Whether we like it or not, English is the language of the modern era and we should not underestimate its significance for the future of our children," said Mariam Yousuf, a media specialist. "Despite repeated calls by the parliament to favour Arabic, we see that English remains far ahead in daily communication in Bahrain. In business, it is used almost exclusively and I should hate to see my son suffer if he has problems to understand or to communicate with others," she said. However, Nozha Al Shaikh, a teacher of Arabic at a private school, said that children who failed to acquire a minimum of communication and comprehension standards in Arabic, are at risk of losing their identity.

Human Rights Front

Bahrain vows to look into torture allegations

Bahrain on Tuesday evening pledged to investigate torture allegations highlighted by Human Rights Watch (HRW) in a report on Bahrain. "The government will now be examining the allegations and findings mentioned in the report to ensure that Bahrain continues to meet international best practice in support of human rights," Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmad Al Khalifa, the foreign minister, said in a statement. "If, during the course of this examination, it can be established that events not in accordance with the law and international conventions have taken place, then these matters will be passed to the appropriate authorities for necessary action," the minister said. In its report released in Manama on Monday, HRW said that it had recorded several cases of torture against detainees and urged Bahraini authorities to "investigate promptly and impartially all allegations of torture or ill-treatment by security or law enforcement officials of any rank." The HRW also recommended to the authorities to "prosecute to the fullest extent of the law, in a court that meets international fair trial standards, any official found responsible for ordering, carrying out, or acquiescing in torture or ill-treatment." Shaikh Khalid in his statement said that Bahrain "unequivocally condemns the mistreatment of

any individual in custody and will not tolerate the slightest deviation from this position," reiterating his country's commitment to "the highest international standards of human rights."

Secretary General of Bahrain's first human rights society resigns

The secretary-general of the oldest human rights society in Bahrain has resigned following a row with society members over a press statement. Bahrain Human Rights Society (BHRS) said that Abdullah Al Durazi has resigned after he realised he made a mistake by making a statement in which he said that some of the officers named and shamed as torturers in a report by Human Rights Watch were in fact innocent. The report released on Monday in Manama quoted former detainees who said that they had been subjected to instances of physical and mental torture during their interrogations and gave names of some of the torturers. The New York-based watchdog mentioned the names in its report. However, Al Durazi who was flanked by Joe Stork, HRW deputy director for the Middle East and North Africa and Joshua Colangelo-Bryan, a senior attorney at Dorsey and Whitney LLP, at the launch and accompanied Stork during meetings, told the local media on Tuesday that some of the security people who were named in the report were not involved in acts of torture. His statement has irked those who fully supported the report and at an impromptu meeting on Wednesday evening, BHRS members said that Al Durazi had given a personal view that did not reflect the society views and blamed him for not consulting with the society before sending his statement to the media. The members said that they had full faith in the HRW report and that they had no reservation whatsoever about it.

Bahrain journalists reject draft amendments to press law

The Bahrain Journalists Association (BJA) has rejected the draft press law submitted by a parliamentary committee, saying that it failed to meet the aspirations of the media. "We deplore the insistence of the service committee in the lower chamber on a link between the press law and the penal law," said BJA chairman Isa Al Shaiji. "We resent this link because it makes it possible to imprison journalists. We have repeatedly warned against allowing this link, but the committee did not care about our demands," he said in a statement ahead of the first parliamentary debate on the draft. The 40-member lower chamber is scheduled to review the draft on Tuesday amid concerns that it would reinforce controversial articles. "We want all journalists in Bahrain to head to the parliament on Tuesday to show to the MPs their displeasure with the draft law. We have often said that putting journalists in prison clashes with the reforms launched by King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa and with the demands of the people working in the media sector," said Al Shaiji whose association is the main umbrella for hundreds of Bahrain-based journalists.

Bahrain minister rules out tension with Human Rights Watch

Bahrain's interior minister has ruled out the existence of tension or disputes with a New York based human rights watchdog following the release of a controversial report. However, the minister said that Bahrain, while welcoming cooperation with international organisations, rejected "foreign tutelage." "There is no confrontation or dispute between us and Human Rights Watch. In fact, we agree with the organisation as long as the

objective is to secure the highest standards of human rights," said Shaikh Rashid Bin Abdullah Al Khalifa. "Bahrain is deeply committed to international agreements to promote human rights, including the Universal Declaration for Human Rights and the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment," the minister told a parliamentary committee. Human Rights Watch (HRW) issued in Manama last week a report in which former detainees have reportedly said that they had been tortured to exact confessions on security-related murder charges. The report caused a rift within the Bahraini society, but the foreign ministry said that Manama would look into the allegations and would take the appropriate action.

Labor Front

Bahrain labour authority wants help in sending illegals home

Bahrain's labour market regulatory authority (LMRA) said that embassies and consulates should be actively engaged in addressing the issue of their nationals staying illegally in the country. "Diplomatic and consular sections should promote awareness among their citizens to comply with the regulations and to leave Bahrain when their residence or work permits expire," an LMRA official told diplomats from several Arab and Asian countries. "The representations also need to encourage their citizens to approach their offices as a first step to facilitate their deportation process," the official said at the meeting attended by representatives from India, Iraq, Pakistan, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Tunisia, Bangladesh, The Philippines, Thailand, Turkey, Iran, Germany, Japan and Malaysia. According to the LMRA, a positive role from the diplomatic missions will help tackle the growing problem of illegal foreigners staying in the country. A national campaign to address the issue and help the exit of expatriates who do not possess proper documents has been recently launched in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Ministry of Municipality and Agriculture, Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Bahrain Contractors Society. LMRA said that the going home process would enable foreign workers who leave the country to come back regularly. However, some diplomats said that they would have difficulties reaching out to people staying illegally in the country and who usually tend to keep away from their diplomatic missions.

Bahrain to deport 20,000 illegal foreigners

Bahrain plans to deport around 20,000 illegal foreigners, the labour minister said on Wednesday. The figure is about half of the total number of illegal expatriates, estimated at 41,000, Majeed Al Alawi said at a meeting of an ad-hoc ministerial committee tasked with addressing the phenomenon of "free visa" foreigners. "Tackling illegal workers in Bahrain is a national duty to protect the country's national economy and security. There are many negative repercussions from the presence of massive numbers of illegal foreigners on all aspects and we therefore need to eradicate this dangerous phenomenon through joint action with all ministries," Al Alawi said. Bahrain last month launched several campaigns to chase vendors off streets and detain those without proper residence or work permits prior to the deportation. The 16-member committee said that businessmen will, under the auspices of the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry,

sign a code of honour in April not to deal with companies that employ illegal expatriates and to hire foreigners who do not have valid documents.

QATAR

International Front

Clinton in Gulf to shore up support on Iran move

US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton began a visit to two Gulf allies on Sunday as part of a broader Obama administration effort to shore up support for taking a tougher stance against Iran's nuclear programme. Her stops in Qatar and in Saudi Arabia coincide with a string of diplomatic and military contacts in the Middle East, including a visit to Egypt on Sunday by Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Clinton's top three deputies - James Steinberg, Jacob Lew and William Burns - will be in the region in coming days, and a Clinton aide said Gen. David Petraeus, chief of US Central Command with responsibility for US military operations across the Middle East, would also be in the region. Their agenda is not focused exclusively Iran. There also is an American push for closer cooperation in Yemen against Al Qaida, a move toward bolstering diplomatic relations with Syria and efforts to get Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations back on track. After an overnight flight from Washington, Clinton went directly into a series of high-level meetings in the Qatari capital and delivered an evening speech at the US-Islamic World Forum.

Agreement to end Darfur conflict hailed

Cementing the end of war in Darfur, a final framework and ceasefire agreement between the Sudanese government and armed rebel group Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) was signed late on Tuesday in Doha, despite other rebel groups having refused to enter talks and join negotiations. The agreement was signed in the presence of the Emir of Qatar Shaikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, Sudanese President Omar Al Bashir and the Chadian President Idris Deby and President Isaias Afwerki of Eritrea, among other officials. During the ceremony, Khalil Ebrahim, leader of the JEM, announced an immediate ceasefire. The Emir of Qatar, Shaikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, announced his support to Sudan to help reach a permanent and comprehensive solution to the conflict and to rebuild and develop the country and its economy, by establishing a development bank in Sudan. "For years Darfur has been a source of worry between Africans and the Arabs, this agreement comes today along with the announcing the integration of all the rebel parties together under one body, under the name of Liberation Movement and Justice in preparation to enter the current negotiating process. We call on parties who have not yet joined to join this unified party and this agreement," said Shaikh Hamad.

Khartoum and rebel group sign historic truce agreement

A final framework and ceasefire agreement between the Sudanese government and the heavily armed rebel group, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), cementing the end of the war in Darfur, was signed late on Tuesday in Doha, despite other rebel groups having refused to enter talks and join the negotiations. The pact was signed in the

presence of the Emir of Qatar Shaikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, Sudanese President Omar Al Bashir, Chadian President Idris Deby and President Isaias Afwerki of Eritrea, among others. During the ceremony Khalil Ebrahim, leader of the JEM announced an immediate ceasefire. Shaikh Hamad announced his support to Sudan to help reach a permanent and comprehensive solution to the conflict and to rebuild and develop the country and its economy, by establishing a development bank in Sudan with \$1 billion (Dh3.67 billion) of capital to invest. "For years Darfur has been a source of worry between Africans and the Arabs. This agreement comes along with the announcing the integration of all the rebel parties together under one body. We call on parties who have not yet joined to join this unified party and this agreement," said Shaikh Hamad.

OMAN

U.S. Partners to Promote Entrepreneurship in Oman, Bahrain

The State Department's Office of the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) is pleased to announce the signing of two new Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with the governments of Bahrain and Oman to promote entrepreneurship in the Middle East and expand trade opportunities for America's small businesses. The MOUs are the result of a shared vision between the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and MEPI to support economic development, with a special focus on the unique needs of women small business owners, and to provide technical assistance in the Middle East and North Africa. Both agreements lay out broad frameworks of mutual engagement and support between the SBA and the governments of Oman and Bahrain, and will be followed by detailed plans of action that will result in direct and impactful change for small and medium-sized enterprises in these countries.

Social Front

Increase in Omani labour in private sector

MUSCAT The total number of Omanis working in the private sector and registered with the General Authority for Social Insurance increased to 158,315 by the end of 2009 from 156,135 by the end of November in the same year. According to the statistical bulletin of the Ministry of National Economy, the total number of expatriate workers in the private sector in the Sultanate rose to 876,245 by the end of December 2009 from 873,737 at the end of November in the same year. The number of expatriate labourers in the construction sector stood at 341,357 with an increase of 14.4 per cent, while their number in wholesale and retail trade and car repairing rose to 124,268 with an increase of 0.9 per cent. The number of expatriates declined by 3.5 per cent in the domestic service sector, 65 per cent in health and social work sectors and 12.5 per cent in the mining and quarrying sector, while their number has increased by 11.2 per cent in the manufacturing sector, 3.6 per cent in agriculture and fishing and 13.2 per cent in the hotel and restaurant sector.

Sultanate to host global responsible tourism forum

MUSCAT The Sultanate will host the Fourth International Conference on Responsible Tourism Destination in Muscat from October 10 to 12. Her Excellency Dr Rajha Bint

Abdulameer Bin Ali, Minister of Tourism, said with the Sultanate hosting this conference, aimed at contributing towards preparing the general framework and policies for responsible tourism in cooperation with international experts in the field.

Oman, Malaysia ink MoU on social sector

KUALA LUMPUR A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on enhancing cooperation in various social activities was signed here on Monday between the Sultanate and Malaysia. The MoU was signed by Her Excellency Dr Sharifa Bint Khalfan Al Yahyaeyah, Minister of Social Development, on behalf of the Sultanate, and Dr Shahrazad Abdul Jalil, Women and Family Affairs and Community Development Minister, on behalf of the Malaysian Government. The MoU highlights the means of understanding and joint cooperation by mutual exchange expertise, programmes and policies, establishing channels to coordinate the government efforts with the non-government organisation and private sector to create social development partnerships, implement research studies to achieve the prospective sustainable development, as well as promoting the awareness and cultural aspects to secure the intellectual property rights of both parties.