

Report # 110
BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD
GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL
NEWS MONITORING REPORT
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Following news monitoring report is based on the important political, social, economic and Geo-strategic events occurred in Gulf Cooperation Council States along with a Comprehensive summary of the report.

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Economy Desk

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Social Desk

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International Desk

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- Civil society organisations under OIC to meet in Doha
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Economic Desk

- Toshiba Gulf, PC Dealnet join hands to get bigger share in Qatar market
- Qatar, Singapore back Prudential's £14bn cash call
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- **Tasweeq signs deal with LPG Global**

Health Desk

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- **Kidney donations in Arab world less, says expert**

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Social Desk

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- **BSM charity drive hopes to reach RO20,000 target**

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Economy Desk

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Health Desk

- **National Association for Cancer Awareness election on March 30**
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International Front

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- **Parliamentary bloc denies meeting British envoy**
- **Bahrain-Kuwait landmark deals signed**

Political Front

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- **Al Wefaq denies it sought British assistance to change constituencies**
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Social Front

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Human Rights Front

- **Bahrain ministry urges bloggers not to claim broadcasting rights**

SUMMARY

International Front

A Georgian has become the *first woman ambassador to Saudi Arabia* and it happens first time in the 80 years history of Saudi Arabia that a woman became ambassador to the kingdom. Yekaterina Mayering-Mikadze, who presented a copy of her credentials to Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal, is the current Georgian ambassador to Kuwait. She also represents her country in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain and the UAE.

Social Front

In *Saudi Arabia*, a huge fire broke out north of Jeddah's Safa district near the city's main fruit and vegetable market on Friday evening. No casualties were reported during the firefighting operation. Meanwhile the second Saudi Labor Market Exhibition will be held at the Jeddah Exhibitions and Conferences Center from Saturday and will continue for four days. More than 100,000 jobs for young Saudi men and women including the disabled are expected to be on offer during the exhibition. In the meantime border guards in Jazan foiled an attempt to smuggle quantities of hashish and ammunition, a local daily reported. The guards arrested the two men, who were trying to sneak through the border on foot from Yemen carrying the goods. They were transferred to the police station for questioning. Same week a daily reported that the new campus of the Princess Noura bint Abdul Rahman University is being built. It will be one of the *largest higher education institutions for women in the world*. It is really hard for anyone not to notice the scaffolding, cranes, loaded trucks and intense activity at the site. Important social news is that the Ministry of Finance has handed out 2,626 checks in compensation to people whose properties were lost or

damaged during the flash floods in Jeddah last November, local Arabic daily and sister newspaper Al-Eqtisadiah reported on Friday. A total of 3,519 checks are eventually expected to be distributed.

Kingdom's Central Department of Statistics at the Ministry of Planning started a massive field project on Friday in preparation for the Fourth National Census next month.

Human Rights Front

In *Saudi Arabia*, The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) is to seek the United Nations High Commissioner's intervention in resolving the case of a Sri Lankan maid who has been in prison since 2005 on allegations that she murdered a Saudi baby in her care.

Economic Front

Dubai World, the state-owned holding company seeking to renegotiate terms on \$26 billion of debt, made "some progress" in talks with creditors, UK Trade Minister Mervyn Davies said. The UAE's total volume of non-oil foreign trade reached about Dhs663 billion in terms of value in 2009.

DETAILED REPORT

SAUDI ARABIA

Social Front

Center for disabled children to open in Taif today

A center for disabled children personally funded by Crown Prince Sultan, deputy premier and minister of defense and aviation, will be opened here on Saturday, the local Arabic daily Al-Watan reported. The director of the General Administration for Medical Services to the Armed Forces, Maj. Gen. Kitab Al-Otaibi, will open the center on behalf of Prince Sultan. The center will provide special education to more than 3,000 disabled children. Al-Otaibi described the project as an "educational edifice" and said it would be handed over to the Ministry of Education. "Built on an area of 3,200 square meters, the center will train disabled children skills related to speech and hearing. It will benefit all young children suffering from learning, sight, hearing and physical disabilities and autism," he said.

Massive fire guts Jeddah warehouse

A huge fire broke out north of Jeddah's Safa district near the city's main fruit and vegetable market on Friday evening. No casualties were reported during the firefighting operation. The fire was extinguished before midnight. Massive, billowing clouds of black smoke could be seen from

the Haramain Expressway and traffic was snarled in the areas around the site of the fire. Officials said the fire started in a warehouse containing paper products. The cause of the fire was unknown. Jeddah Civil Defense spokesman Capt. Abdullah Al-Amri said 14 firefighting teams rushed to the location. The firefighters managed to stop the fire spreading to the nearby buildings, including a wedding hall. Several buildings around the fire had to be evacuated. Firefighting foam was used to prevent the flames from spreading.

UN intervention sought in Rizana case

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) is to seek the United Nations High Commissioner's intervention in resolving the case of a Sri Lankan maid who has been in prison since 2005 on allegations that she murdered a Saudi baby in her care. "The last hearing of Rizana Nafeek was held on Dec. 21 last year and was postponed until Jan. 19, but the case has still not come up for hearing," said AHRC Executive Director Basil Fernando, speaking from Hong Kong. Fernando said the commission is receiving enquiries from across the world as to why the maid is still in prison and why a verdict has not been issued. Fernando said it seems there is no case to answer since the police interpreter who translated the maid's statement and who is the prosecution's main witness has left the Kingdom on final exit. Fernando urged the Sri Lankan mission in Riyadh to take further action on the matter. The maid was initially convicted of murder at Dawadmi High Court. The AHRC then appealed the case through the Sri Lankan Embassy in Riyadh. The law firm of Khateb Al-Shammery was assigned to deal with the case for SR150,000. Fernando said that the commission has already paid Al-Shammery SR100,000 and that the remaining balance will be cleared when the final verdict is given in the maid's favor. In the last hearing in Dawadmi, Chief Justice Abdullah Al-Rosaimi ordered police to bring the interpreter who translated the maid's statement to the next hearing, which was supposed to be held in January. In the court's last hearing, Nafeek told judges that she confessed to the murder under duress, fearing for her life after being assaulted. Nafeek is appealing the death sentence and says the baby choked while being bottle-fed. However, the baby's parents maintain she killed the child. Nafeek was brought to the Kingdom to work as a housemaid on a passport that falsely stated her age was 23 when, according to her birth certificate, she was only 17, something that is a violation of the Kingdom's labor laws and international human trafficking laws. Nafeek came to the Kingdom on May 4, 2005, three months after her 17th birthday, to work for Naif Jiziyah Khalaf Al-Otaibi in Dawadmi, 390km west of Riyadh. Dr. Kifaya Iftikhar, a social worker who visits Nafeek in jail, told Arab News that the maid is desperate to return home.

Second labor market exhibition in Jeddah

The second Saudi Labor Market Exhibition will be held at the Jeddah Exhibitions and Conferences Center from Saturday and will continue for four days. More than 100,000 jobs for young Saudi men and women including the disabled are expected to be on offer during the exhibition. The event, the second of its kind in Jeddah, will be jointly organized by the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI), the Ministry of Labor, the Human Resources

Development Fund and Lamis Arab Company for Exhibitions and Conferences. On behalf of Makkah Gov. Prince Khaled Al-Faisal, Jeddah Gov. Prince Mishaal ibn Majed will open the exhibition. JCCI Deputy Chairman Mazen Batarji said all arrangements were completed to organize the exhibition, which will be attended by Labor Minister Ghazi Al-Gosaibi and his deputy Abdul Wahid Al-Humaid. Batarji said the exhibition would shed light on Saudization efforts. "The participating companies will offer a number of job opportunities to Saudis," he added. Batarji said the exhibition would group together the largest number of Saudi companies to employ Saudis, especially the disabled. Lamis Company CEO Eli Rizq said the exhibition represents a unique opportunity to Saudi job seekers to meet employers and human resources managers.

Consumer protection society under fire

"Know your rights as a consumer" was the theme of an event held by the Saudi Society for Consumer Protection (SSCP) on Monday evening in Jeddah. The occasion took place at the offices of the Saudi Standards, Specifications and Quality Organization. "The society gives utmost attention to all affairs concerning consumers, catering to their interests as well as protecting, preserving and defending their rights," said SSCP chairman Muhamamd Al-Hamad. He said the society was making a serious effort to protect consumers against fraud, forgery and cheating. Habibullah Turkistani, a professor of public administration and marketing, criticized the society for not doing its work properly. "The society claims to be fairly new but this is not an excuse. There are many ways in which it can carry out its activities, including providing advice to traders not to cheat or unjustifiably raise prices," he said. Turkistani said about 99 percent of specialized societies in Saudi Arabia were not functioning properly. He also criticized the society's publications and said they fell short of satisfying consumers. "I did not find a single word that could attract the consumer," he said. A number of speakers asked the society to introduce TV programs that would increase consumer awareness and also called for lessons on the subject in schools.

Khoja announces annual prize for Riyadh Book Fair

The Riyadh International Book Fair will have its own annual prize for the best publisher and best book beginning next year, according to Minister of Culture and Information Abdul Aziz Khoja. The minister also said the Jeddah International Book Fair would take place next year. The announcement came during an open dialogue at the book fair Wednesday night between the minister and leading Saudi intellectuals regarding the ministry's role. Over 500 intellectuals, including literary people, poets, writers, book authors and journalists, attended the event. The forum was open to both men and women. The minister stressed that the state's role in maintaining Arab and Islamic heritages would not heed to the expectations of just one category of Saudi society. "We will not leave this as a function of a sole elite category," the minister said. He also addressed the ministry's role in regulating electronic media, saying that the government has an interest in ensuring these sites do not pose some kind of threat to society by posting

irresponsible content. “The threat comes from publishing unreliable and misleading materials by unknown people,” the minister said. “We want to regulate these sites not to exercise censorship but because we want to deal with real people. We don’t want to deal with (online) ghosts,” the minister said. Khoja revealed that his ministry is also working to “improve the status of public libraries in the Kingdom.” “We are considering assigning them to an independent deputy ministry so we can draw more focus on them,” he added. The minister, responding to a question about women’s role in the media and the ministry, said women are already represented on the country’s networks.

Indian expat seeks 10 months unpaid salary

Indian expatriate Muhammad Abdul Waheed has appealed to authorities to ensure his sponsor pays him 10 months worth of salary before he is ready to leave the country. “I only want my salary for the last 10 months, at a rate of SR3,000 a month, and after that I will go home on a final-exit visa. I also hope that philanthropists will help me financially to overcome my predicament,” he told Arab News. Waheed said he was working as a computer engineer on the sponsorship of a Saudi citizen in Riyadh, but 30 months ago he transferred to a hotel operating company. “The owner of the company agreed to pay a monthly salary of SR3,000 but did not document the agreement in writing. I trusted him and took his word for it, but he only paid me SR2,100 a month for a whole year,” he said. He said that when he brought the matter to the attention of his new sponsor, he was promised his agreed salary when the financial conditions of the company improved. “He did not keep his promise and at the end of it all he asked me to look for another job and sponsor,” he added. Waheed said each month he paid SR666 rent to accommodate his wife and two children and SR150 on transport. “This eroded my income and led me into a whirlpool of debts which have now reached SR30,000,” he said. Waheed said as a result of his bad financial position, his wife became psychologically ill and her general health condition was deteriorating every day. “We have nothing to eat as I am without a job now. All I ask for is to be given my accumulated salaries of SR30,000 and after that be deported home,” he said.

Drugs seized in Jazan

Border guards in Jazan foiled an attempt to smuggle quantities of hashish and ammunition, a local daily reported. The guards arrested the two men, who were trying to sneak through the border on foot from Yemen carrying the goods. They were transferred to the police station for questioning.

Riyadh gets first woman envoy

A Georgian has become the first woman ambassador to Saudi Arabia. Yekaterina Mayering-Mikadze, who presented a copy of her credentials to Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal, is the current Georgian ambassador to Kuwait. She also represents her country in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain and the UAE. Ambassador Yekaterina said that cooperation with the Gulf

states was a “paramount task” for Georgia, especially in agriculture, real estate, tourism and finance. Georgia, a former Soviet republic nation that became independent in 1991 and admitted to the UN as its 179th member after a year, now has the distinction of sending the first female ambassador to Riyadh. “She is waiting for an audience with Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah to present her credentials after presenting a copy to Prince Saud,” a report said. Arab News tried to reach Yekaterina in Kuwait, but she was unavailable. “Only a few diplomats in the Saudi capital are female,” said Ulla-Maija Nevalainen, deputy chief of the mission at the Finnish Embassy in Riyadh. Nevalainen said that she herself had no problems in handling her job as a diplomat in the capital. The number of women diplomats in Riyadh will not exceed six or seven, claimed another diplomat, while expressing his happiness over Mayering-Mikadze’s appointment. “Worldwide efforts to bring more women into diplomacy are having a limited effect,” he said, claiming that developing countries have the fewest number of women diplomats.

Ministry of Justice accepts resignation of four notaries

The Ministry of Justice has accepted the resignation of four notaries, including a former chief of the notary office in Jeddah, Al-Madinah daily reported on Friday. The quartet was under orders to transfer to other offices or lower courts. Instead of accepting their new posts, they requested early retirement and then resigned when the ministry rejected their applications. Their transfer orders coincided with the ongoing investigations of the committee headed by Makkah Gov. Prince Khaled Al-Faisal, set up following the Nov. 25 floods in Jeddah. However, no criminal charges were brought against the four notaries. "The ministry rejected their requests for early retirement because of two reasons. Firstly, their lack of long service that would normally entitle them to early retirement. The second reason was that if they retired from their new posts, it would be of lesser financial benefit to them than if they resigned," according to one source. The source added that their resignations were accepted because they did not take up their new jobs even after their superiors asked them to do so. Justice Minister Muhammad Al-Eissa said the notaries were not forced to resign and denied the resignations had anything to do with the flood investigations. The minister added that any official found to have been negligent in their role in connection with the floods could be punished even after resigning. A source at the Justice Ministry said earlier that 19 officials would be transferred from their present positions in Jeddah notary offices to other offices within the ministry.

Noura University, a landmark dedicated to a beloved aunt

Round-the-clock construction work has been taking place near King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh for the last few months. On a 94-square kilometer-site, the new campus of the Princess Noura bint Abdul Rahman University is being built. It will be one of the largest higher education institutions for women in the world. It is really hard for anyone not to notice the scaffolding, cranes, loaded trucks and intense activity at the site. The workers were meant to have met a 2010 deadline, but this has now been pushed back to sometime next year. A source told Arab News that more than half of the construction work has been completed already. The university council

suggested naming the university after Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah at the foundation-laying ceremony in October. He politely declined and suggested naming it after Princess Noura bint Abdul Rahman instead. Princess Noura was the king's aunt and the older and very much beloved sister of his father, the Kingdom's founder, King Abdul Aziz. Some historical sources say the princess, who enjoyed great respect and superior status in the founder's heart, was the one who urged him to leave Kuwait, where he and his family were in exile, to try to regain control of Riyadh, the traditional home of his ancestors. This ultimately led to the creation of the Kingdom. It was customary of King Abdul Aziz to proudly say: "I'm the brother of Noura." The same sources say that she was a poet and known to be broad minded, citing her for being behind the introduction of the telephone in the country, despite some religious fanatics calling it a tool of the devil. Princess Noura passed away in 1950.

75% of Jeddah floods compensation paid out

The Ministry of Finance has handed out 2,626 checks in compensation to people whose properties were lost or damaged during the flash floods in Jeddah last November, local Arabic daily and sister newspaper Al-Eqtisadiyah reported on Friday. A total of 3,519 checks are eventually expected to be distributed. The newspaper did not disclose the amount of money disbursed but quoted Maj. Ahmad Al-Harbi, Civil Defense media director for the flooding crisis, as saying that the checks represented 75 percent of the total compensation. He said the compensation was for damaged homes, shops, warehouses, hospitals and other properties. Al-Harbi said the search and rescue teams have searched in vain for 30 missing people for 117 days and will continue their operations in the most affected areas. He added that a total of 2,071 out of about 10,000 damaged vehicles have been valued by special estimating committees so far. He did not say when the owners would be compensated. The compensation checks were distributed at the main Civil Defense building in Al-Sharafiyah district after the ID numbers of eligible individuals were published in local newspapers. Many of those who received checks protested at the amount of compensation, saying it was not enough, while calling for a reassessment of their damaged properties. However, officials at the Civil Defense and Finance Ministry believed that the amounts were enough and rejected their demands.

Relocation of medical waste facility demanded

The Jeddah municipality has been urged to shift a medical waste-recycling facility east of the Haramain Expressway to a different location. Chairman of the Jeddah Municipal Council Hussein Baaqeel said the facility, located close to residential districts, was currently causing environmental and health problems for people living in surrounding neighborhoods. He addressed council members representing Samir District at a meeting on Thursday, with municipality officials also in attendance. He said the committee set up specifically to relocate the factory should work hard in order to fulfill the objective. "We have already discussed alternative plans for recycling the medical waste after closing down the current factory."

Preparations for Fourth National Census under way

The Central Department of Statistics at the Ministry of Planning started a massive field project on Friday in preparation for the Fourth National Census next month. "Some 40,000 field inspectors underwent a weeklong training program on the procedures that will help facilitate easy data collection," said Abdullatif I. Al-Khamees, head of the media center for the project. Under the project, houses will be numbered and grouped into blocks and districts. The initiative was launched Feb. 9 at a ceremony attended by the Minister of Economy and Planning Khaled Al-Gosaibi and other top officials from the Kingdom and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The Kingdom is conducting the project with the other five GCC countries for the first time to come up with a unified census. This was decided during the 22nd GCC Supreme Council meeting in Oman. "We urge residents, both Saudis and expatriates, to cooperate with visiting field inspectors. As a precursor to the national census operation, the inspectors will ask only the number of occupants in the house and their nationalities," Al-Khamees said. The project is designed to collect, conduct, compile and disseminate demographic, social and economic information about the Kingdom's population. Abdullah Al-Batil, in charge of the data processing unit, said an unspecified number of women would be recruited to work as data collectors. "But this will depend on the feedback from the field inspectors, which will determine how many areas they are deployed in," he said.

The National Census runs from April 28-May 12.

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schools, and banks. The recruitment process for women will be for a period of one month and start by the end of March.

The National Census runs from April 28-May 12.

US Defense Secretary Robert Gates said on Thursday that leading Gulf States appeared ready to use their clout to lobby China to support sanctions against Iran over its disputed nuclear program. A day after meeting Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah in Riyadh, Gates traveled to the United Arab Emirates to discuss a Western push for new punitive measures against Iran with Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahayan. Asked after the talks whether his hosts were ready to help the US overcome Chinese and Russian doubts on sanctions, Gates said: "I have a sense that there is a willingness to do that. Although there is less need with respect to Russia, because I think Russia is pretty much already there. It's mainly China." Tension between Iran and the West has risen as Washington steps up a drive to secure a fourth round of UN sanctions over Tehran's refusal to halt uranium enrichment. As Gates toured the Gulf, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad condemned the US presence in the region, warning that Washington was seeking to dominate the region's energy resources in the name of fighting terrorism. "We warn the countries in the region over the presence of bullying powers ... they have not come here to restore security or to counter drug trafficking," Ahmadinejad said in a speech during a visit to the southern Iranian province of Hormuzgan. In Geneva, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said the UN Security Council was working to draft economic sanctions that would restrict Iranian banks abroad and insurance of shipments to and from Iran. While he expressed confidence that world powers would reach an agreement, he signalled that China was still holding out.

PPP financial agenda can boost green economy'

The interconnected global economic and energy and climate crises are related to their underlying causes and, more importantly, in their solutions, Louis Hakim, vice president of Royal Philips Electronics and CEO of Philips Electronics Middle East, has said. Tackling these challenges requires public private partnership (PPP) as neither of the two sectors can do it alone with a new or open mindset. "We specifically need two types of PPP for development - one relating to communication and awareness building and the second for the implementation for us to reap the economic benefits of the broader energy technology agenda," Hakim told Arab News on the sidelines of the Gulf Environment Forum, which ended earlier this week after a three-day run. "We not only need the economic and ecological benefits of an action plan, but also owe it to people given the responsibility and accountability that come with the public and private leadership positions we all occupy," he said. In today's economic and ecological climate, lighting can help save money as well as energy and carbon emissions, Hakim said. If all the lighting in the world were switched to energy efficient lighting (EEL) solutions, we can save over \$180 billion on electricity and 630 million tons of CO₂, the equivalent output of 600 power plants or 1,800 million barrels of oil in a year. And if we switch all residential lighting in Saudi Arabia to

EEL solutions, we can save up to 15 million barrels of oil spent on electricity per year, the equivalent of five medium-sized power stations, he added.

Kingdom's inflation rate surges to 4.6%

Saudi Arabia's annual inflation rate surged to 4.6 percent in February, its highest level since June and up from 4.1 percent in January, official data showed on Wednesday. The cost of living index rose by 4.6 percent in February as a result of a rise in prices in six major categories, the General Statistics Department at the Ministry of Economy and Planning said. It said the prices of rent, fuel and water rose by 10.6 percent; services 5.8 percent; food and beverages 4.0 percent; house furniture 3.0 percent; education and recreation 1.1 percent and health care 0.1 percent. The department also noted that prices of clothing, textiles and shoes went down by 0.3 percent and transport and communications 0.2 percent. The quarterly inflation rate in the Saudi economy continued its upward trend over the last two quarters of 2009. The quarterly inflation rate went up from 0.5 percent in the second quarter of 2009 to 1.2 percent in the third quarter of 2009, and then to 1.5 percent in the fourth quarter of 2009, the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA) said in its fourth quarter 2009 inflation report. The main driver for inflation in February was principally food and not so much rents. Rents did increase on a month-on-month basis but food prices rose more between January and February. Rents have been coming down on a year-on-year basis, however, just as predicted by SAMA, said John Sfakianakis, group general manager and chief economist at Banque Saudi Fransi. He said food prices globally have been rising and as a result food inflation in Saudi Arabia has witnessed a rise. This is an expected trend as Saudi Arabia imports around 65-70 percent of its food needs. Inflation would be volatile, especially on food as prices globally continue to fluctuate. Food comprises 26 percent of the inflation basket compared to rents (18 percent), resulting in inflationary pressures when food prices move up or down. "Overall inflation in Saudi Arabia should be lower in 2010 than 2009 at an average rate of 4.3 percent," Sfakianakis added.

Economic Front

Opportunities abound in SMEs: Mardam-Bey

Saudi Arabia is one of the world's most exciting and emerging markets, according to Siraj Capital's CEO Ibrahim Mardam-Bey. "I see exciting opportunities supported by strong emerging market fundamentals, specifically in the telecom, media, technology, consumer goods, food and beverage, real estate, and health care sectors," he said in an exclusive interview with Arab News. Mardam-Bey said Siraj aims to be recognized as a leading regulated boutique merchant investment and finance company, focusing on delivering and managing greenfield projects in partnership with leading international groups, early stage growth capital investments. The company also aims to manage and opportunistic Islamic finance transactions for partners, clients and shareholders. "We specialize in working with small and medium size operating companies who have tangible customers, differentiated business models and the operational platform to

grow, organically, and through mergers and acquisitions into exceptional regional enterprises," he added. Siraj Capital is a leading Saudi-based private equity group that is focused on opportunities in the Middle East-Gulf region. The company operates out of offices in Riyadh, Jeddah, Dubai (Dubai International Financial Centre) and Beirut. Being a financial solutions provider, Siraj Capital provides Shariah-compliant and conventional debt and equity financial services to its international clients.

Global stocks, euro gain; oil falls

Global stocks edged higher on Friday, despite mixed signals on the US economy, as strong euro zone economic data dragged the US dollar to a one-month low against the euro and risk aversion eased a bit. European shares ended at their highest level in almost two months as data showing a rise in US retail sales in February surprised investors who had expected a decline because of inclement weather during the month. Earlier news that euro-zone industrial output in January recorded its biggest monthly gain on record, while figures for December were revised sharply upward, gave European equity markets an initial boost and at first lifted US stocks. But US stocks trimmed those gains to trade little changed after a weak reading of US consumer sentiment in early March showed Americans were less positive about the job outlook. "There are some encouraging signs," said Luc Van Hecke, chief economist at KBC Securities. "But there is some legitimate caution," he said. "Governments have done well in avoiding a depression, but they are left with quite severe budget deficits. Clearly it's not going to be an easy way so there are limits and doubts." MSCI's all-country index gained almost 0.4 percent and the FTSEurofirst 300 index of top European shares ended 0.3 percent higher at 1,058.97 points, its highest close since Jan. 19. US stocks traded near break-even. The Dow Jones Industrial Average was down 4.15 points, or 0.04 percent, at 10,607.69. The Standard & Poor's 500 Index was down 0.74 of a point, or 0.06 percent, at 1,149.50. The Nasdaq Composite Index was down 2.65 points, or 0.11 percent, at 2,365.81.

UAE

Social Desk

First integrated platform for social media launched

MEDIASTOW, the leading media intelligence agency in the MENA region, launched the region's first-of-its-kind integrated platform for social media, print and broadcast monitoring, analysis and measurement. Mohamed Elzubeir, head of Mediastow, said the move was aimed at enabling businesses to monitor print, broadcast and social media with a full fledged and integrated approach. The new system's capabilities are backed up by high-quality operational and maintenance support available worldwide.

Ensure women's safety: UAE

The United Arab Emirates urged the United Nations on Friday to work to protect women and children during armed conflicts, and to get those who are detained among them as hostages or prisoners released. It also called on the UN bodies to follow up on their conditions and provide them with necessary assistance. UAE's call was issued in a statement made by its Permanent Representative to the United Nations Ambassador Ahmad Al Jarman. The statement was presented at the 53rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women on item 3 entitled 'Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on women'.

Sultan commends college's progress

The acquisition of technical skills and education by the UAE nationals in the Emirate is one of our main objectives, said His Highness Dr Sheikh Sultan Bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, UAE Supreme Council Member, Ruler of Sharjah and President of University of Sharjah (UoS). Addressing the third graduation ceremony of the Community College at UoS on Saturday, Sheikh Sultan added, "We have ordered expansion of the college branches in Khor Fakkan, Kalbaa, Maliha, Dibba Al Hisn and Sharjah to match the changing requirements of the labour market."

Dubai enjoys federal support: Hamdan

The federal government will support Dubai as it grapples with a \$26 billion debt restructuring and expects the matter to be resolved soon, the United Arab Emirates' finance minister Sheikh Hamdan Bin Rashid Al-Maktoum said on Tuesday. Asked whether the government would support Dubai, Sheikh Hamdan said: "Of course. Dubai is part of the federation." Sheikh Hamdan, who is also deputy ruler of Dubai, said the emirate had not yet approached the federal government for aid. "The federation hasn't reached that far but the Emirates are one entity and things will be resolved soon, God willing," he told reporters on the sidelines of a conference.

UAE eyes foreign ownership law by year-end: Mansouri

The United Arab Emirates will review rules governing foreign ownership of companies in the next month and implement a new law by the end of this year, economy minister Sultan Bin Saeed Al-Mansouri said on Tuesday. "The law should be submitted to the cabinet within a month," he said on the sidelines of a conference. "Our expectation is that the law would come out by 2010."

Sharjah to have new research facility

Dr Sheikh Sultan Bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Sharjah, has issued an Emiri decree creating the Sharjah Centre for Documentation and Research. Decree No.10 of 2010 stipulates that the new facility will have a legal personality and an independent budget.

SEC issues draft MoU on handling food crises

Sheikh Sultan Bin Mohammed Bin Sultan Al Qassimi, Deputy Ruler, Crown Prince of Sharjah, Chairman of the Executive Council, chaired the weekly regulatory meeting of the council on Tuesday. The Council issued a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Department of Information, e-government and the Ministry of Economy, dealing with an early warning system to handle crises pertaining to basic food commodities. Based on the draft MoU, the department, in tandem with the ministry will ensure success of the system to provide a database and detailed information on food items in Sharjah.

Local businesses urged to reduce risk management gap

Businesses and institutions in the Middle East are being urged to incorporate strategy into organisational behaviour and learn from the risk response strategies that enabled various regional entities to absorb the shock of the global economic downturn. The response to the downturn was no different in the Middle East as organisations that opted for long-term sustainability over short-term profits showed remarkable agility to manage risk, according to renowned management scholars Dr. Robert Kaplan and Dr David Norton.

Sultan briefed on portal project

His Highness Dr Sheikh Sultan Bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, UAE Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Sharjah, was briefed on Wednesday about the first phase of the Sharjah Portal project. Sheikh Sultan cleared the construction works of the portal project expected to make Sharjah an exemplary city with job opportunities, accommodation, entertainment, education in line with Islamic identity.

International Desk

Dubai makes progress in debt talks: Britain

Dubai World, the state-owned holding company seeking to renegotiate terms on \$26 billion of debt, made "some progress" in talks with creditors, UK Trade Minister Mervyn Davies said. "There are signs of some progress being made from what I hear from the banks and therefore I am hopeful that this progress can continue," Davies said in Dubai on Wednesday. He was speaking before meeting with the emirate's officials, including Sheikh Ahmed Bin Saeed al-Maktoum, chairman of Dubai Supreme Fiscal Committee.

RAK to host Global Arab Business Meeting in September

RAK Investment Authority (RAKIA) the government body responsible for attracting foreign direct investment for the Government of Ras Al Khaimah and Horasis, an International Swiss Organisation from Geneva, will jointly host the inaugural Global Arab Business Meeting in Ras Al Khaimah from Sept.26-27. The Global Arab Business Meeting aims to be the foremost annual gathering of Arab business leaders and their global counterparts. The meeting shall help to

conceptualise Arab firm's rise to global eminence. The event is open to CEOs of the world's leading companies.

'Henna' marks UAE's debut at US film fest

The Emirati film "Henna" is the first Emirati film to take part in the Twin Cities 6th Arab Film Festival which kicks off on Thursday in St. Paul, Minnesota, USA. Henna, directed by Saleh Karama, sheds light on the UAE in the 1970's and the then dominant social relations. It is also the first long-running film from the Gulf. Director of the festival Mohammed Ghunaima said Henna is a value addition to the event.

GCC ministerial council backs UAE over the islands

The GCC Ministerial Council has renewed its support for the sovereign right of UAE over its three Islands occupied by Iran, besides UAE sovereignty rights over its territorial waters, airspace, continental shelf and exclusive economic zone of the three islands. The GCC Foreign Ministers concluded the 114th session of the GCC Ministerial Council on Tuesday night held at the GCC Secretariat in Riyadh.

UAE offers \$10m development grant for Comoro Islands

The UAE has announced a \$10million grant funding to the Comoro Islands as a contribution to the development and reconstruction efforts in the Arab country. The grant is upon the directives from President His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan. The announcement came during the "Conference in Support of Development and Investment in Comoros" held in the Qatari capital between March 9 and 10.

Economy Desk

UAE's non-oil trade reaches Dhs663b in 2009

The UAE's total volume of non-oil foreign trade reached about Dhs663 billion in terms of value in 2009. Khalid Ali Al Bostani, the acting Director General of the Federal Customs Authority (FCA) said that customs data showed 16 per cent decline in value of the state's foreign trade over 2009 compared to 2008 value, where the total value of foreign trade was Dhs663 billion in 2009 against Dhs788.7 billion in the previous year, due to consequences of the global financial crisis that hit the world late in 2008, and continued throughout the following year. He confirmed that the decline rate is considered small compared to many of other countries in the world and to expectations of many analysts of economic growth at levels of the state and the region.

Abu Dhabi foreign trade up 9% at Dhs112 billion

Abu Dhabi's foreign trade rose to Dhs112.071 billion in 2009, an increase of 9 per cent as compared to 2008 as per annual statistics of foreign trade operations announced by Saeed Ahmed Abdullah Al Muhairi, Director General of Abu Dhabi Customs on Tuesday. Al Muhairi pointed

out that Abu Dhabi's volume of foreign trade grew despite global economic challenges and said, "One of the key figures of 2009 customs statistics is the growth in non-oil exports that climbed to Dhs9,505 million, an increase of 52 per cent compared to Dhs6,253 million in 2008. Imports also grew to Dhs93.872 million compared to Dhs90,284 million in 2008, an increase of 4 per cent."

UAE, UK to increase bilateral trade to £12b

Lord Davies of Abersoch, the British Minister for Trade, Investment and Small Business, visited the DP World head office recently, meet with Mohammed Sharaf, DP World Chief Executive Officer and Mohammed Al Muallem, Senior Vice President and Managing Director of DP World, UAE Region. "At the end of last year, the UK and UAE Governments made a commitment to increasing our bilateral trade to £12 billion by 2015, a 60 per cent increase from current levels. I hope this visit moves us a step closer to achieving our new trade targets," Lord Davies, the British Minister for Trade, Investment and Small Business, said.

Etihad Airways expands codeshare deal with Qantas

Etihad Airways, the national airline of the United Arab Emirates, has increased the destinations available for passengers travelling to Australia by expanding its codeshare agreement with Qantas. As part of the agreement, the Etihad two-letter 'EY' code is now placed on flights from Sydney to Ayers Rock (Uluru), Alice Springs, Canberra, Hobart and Melbourne and flights from Brisbane to Cairns.

Dubai students to attend global conference in UK

STUDENTS from Omar Bin Al Khattab Model School, Dubai, will join students from across the Middle East and the UK in London on March 14 to debate global issues and build greater understanding between the two regions. In London, they will meet pupils from their UK partner school, Long Eaton School, Derbyshire, at a one-day Global Citizenship conference, organised by the British Council's Connecting Classrooms Programme.

Health Desk

Tele-medical care adds value to health sector

FROM a minor leg fracture or osteochondral defect to malignant liver cancer or a rare retinal disease, the diagnosis is depicted in seconds from the world's super-speciality facilities, but without the patient's physical presence. The latest tele-radiology technology makes patients' medical data available anytime and anywhere in the world. Immediate online access to the patient's radiological images and reports will make the service efficient and reduce delays in results.

Training must to renew healthcare work licences

THE medical professionals in the UAE will have to compulsorily attend specialist training programmes and accredited continuing medical education (CME) programmes to get their working licences renewed. All categories of medical professionals including doctors, pharmaceutical and technicians, who try to obtain or renew their professional permit to work in the country, should pass the technical and professional programmes and spend specific hours in the accredited CME sessions, according to the Ministry of Health (MoH).

KUWAIT

Social Desk

Ministry blamed for price increases

A senior Kuwait Union of Cooperative Societies (KUCCS) official has rejected Chamber of Commerce claims that the union is responsible for recent price rises, blaming what he called the "chaos" at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MCI) for the problem. KUCCS spokesman and chairman of the Nuzha Co-op Riyadh Al-Adsani pointed out that in a statement recently issued by the ministry, it had confirmed that price levels in Kuwait are stable and within the acceptable price index for GCC countries, while also stating that the failure of some co-ops' management boards had contributed to the price increase problems.

Call for civilian management of Kuwait housemaids' issues

The Kuwaiti government is currently drafting a bill to protect the rights of the 600,000 domestic workers employed in the country, with Minister of Social Affairs and Labor Mohammad Al-Afassi revealing recently that a law protecting the domestic workers' rights will be issued in May of this year. This comes just after the new private sector labor law came into effect in Kuwait following tumultuous discussion and deliberation of it in the Kuwaiti parliament over the last few months. The new law grants more rights to all other foreign private sector workers, but does not cover employees in the domestic labor sector, which has been called the most vulnerable expatriate workforce in the country.

'Educare 2010' opens in Mishref Fair Grounds

Twenty four colleges and universities from different parts of the world will display their prospectus and list of diploma/degree programs to lure Kuwaiti and expatriate students. 'Educare Exhibition' which will last until March 11, will be inaugurated today at the Kuwait International Fair Ground (Hall 8) in Mishref. The exhibition is held annually to help students decide on what universities/colleges can better help pursue their higher studies. Basma Al-Dehaiem, Marketing and Public Relations said that the exhibition hall is ready to accept visitors, especially high-school students.

Kuwait holds chemical conference

Kuwaiti Minister of Oil Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah inaugurated here yesterday Kuwait's first conference on chemistry and industry. Being organized by the Kuwait Chemical Society, the three-day conference is being held under the auspices of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah. The conferees are scheduled to explore weighty aspects pertinent to environment, petrochemical industry, use of green chemistry as a modern technology in the domains of diverse chemical researches, Sheikh Ahmad, who also doubles as Minister of Information, addressed the gathering.

Environmental center to boost awareness

By establishing Kuwait's "Environmental Monitoring Information System", the state is taking a major step towards increasing awareness and helping decision makers reach well-informed decisions regarding the environment, a specialist said here, yesterday.

Chairman of the new project said the center would provide crucial data that would help efforts at preserving and rehabilitating the environment as well as improve national staff's capabilities in the area of environmental data systems and monitoring the environmental situation.

Kuwait 'a pioneer' in field of charity

Kuwait is a pioneer in the domain of charity and in supporting ailing societies, Secretary General of Fahad Al-Ahmad International Award for Charity Dr Shibib Al-Zaabi said yesterday. The fact that Kuwaiti humanitarian aid covers various countries worldwide showcases the giving nature of Kuwaiti people, Al-Zaabi said on the sidelines of participating in the third conference for charitable organizations affiliated with the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

Kuwait conference and exhibition on schools in June

With the aim of introducing new trends in decoration and construction of schools, the first exhibition on schools and its faculties will be held in Kuwait on 22 and 23 June. The event will be held under the patronage of the Minister of Education Moudhi Al-Homoud. Naser Al-Anzi, Head of the preparatory committee for the conference said that it aims to introduce the new trends and benefit from international experiences on this regard.

Praise for positive role of media in Kuwait

The Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) held its ninth annual media night at the Palm Hotel in Salwa on Tuesday evening. The yearly event is held to honor the local media outlets and journalists who helped deliver the PAAET's message to the public, explained authority chairman Yacoub Al-Rifae, stressing that the media's role is pivotal in delivering the educational body's message. Ever since the establishment of the authority in 1982, the media has

played a great role in transforming the public concept of applied education and training, and helped to increase the number of PAAET graduates to almost 45,000 in all specialties," he said.

International Desk

Al-Khorafi urges bridge-building between Palestinian factions

Kuwaiti National Assembly Speaker Jassem Al-Khorafi called here on Thursday for ending the inter-Palestinian political divisions as soon as possible. Speaking after leading Kuwait's delegation to the 16th session of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union (AIPU), Al-Khorafi said: "All Arab countries are unanimous in pushing towards Palestinian national reconciliation.

Hariri visit to Kuwait 'chance to boost economic relations'

The forthcoming visit of Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri to Kuwait will be an opportunity to boost economic and commercial relations between the two countries, said a Kuwaiti Ministry of Commerce and Industry official yesterday. Dr. Abdullah Al-Owaisi, the director of the ministry's Department of Gulf and Arab Affairs, told KUNA that several agreements would be signed on the sidelines of the visit, adding that these would further strengthen the historic relations between the two closely allied countries in the area of economic cooperation.

Kuwait offers support to reform UN Secretariat

Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi presented his credentials on Thursday evening to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, as Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the United Nations. The Kuwaiti representative also submitted a letter to the UN Security Council president asking that "the situation between Kuwait and Iraq" be maintained on the council's agenda, to prevent it from being automatically and permanently omitted from discussions.

Argentina hails KRCS on aid, relief operations

A visiting Argentina delegation hailed here yesterday the role played by the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) regarding the aid and relief operations and offering support to the afflicted areas all over the world. This remark was made following a visit paid by the Argentina delegation led by Prof. Pidro Burger from the Buenos Aires university to the KRCS headquarters in order to get acquainted with the society's efforts in the humanitarian and relief fields. Burger said that they were briefed on the Kuwait's efforts in the field of assistance provided to the afflicted countries like Indonesia, Haiti, Lebanon, Pakistan and Bangladesh and many others which were previously hit by natural disasters, hailing the humanitarian role of the KRCS.

Lebanese PM lauds Kuwait for 'support in all hard times'

Visiting Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri praised yesterday the State of Kuwait for the assistances it offered to his country in all hard times especially after the Israeli aggression in July, 2006. Speaking to reporters after his meeting with Kuwaiti National Assembly (parliament)

Speaker Jassem Al-Khorafi here, the Lebanese premier said his current visit to Kuwait aimed to coordinate the stances of the two sisterly nations on all issues of common concern and improve the bilateral economic, commercial and business ties. "Every time we come to Kuwait we renew gratitude to the Kuwaitis for their great assistances, firm support and historical stances on Lebanon issues," he affirmed.

Kuwait cultural week in Syria displays deep Arabic culture

Kuwaiti Cultural Week with the variety of activities it offers showcased deep Arabic culture, Syrian Deputy Minister of Culture Ali Al-Qayyim said yesterday. In a statement on the sidelines of the event which kicked off here yesterday, Al-Qayyim applauded Kuwaiti orchestra for displaying authentic Kuwaiti folklore symphonies. Kuwaiti youth proved their creativity in cultural, intellectual and artistic domains, he said, pointing out to the time-honored theatrical, intellectual and cultural movement of Kuwait inspired by the Arabic culture.

Kuwait hosts GCC Consultative meeting

The first meeting of the 13th session of the Consultative Commission of the GCC Supreme Council started here yesterday. Head of the 12-session Sheikh Hilal bin Salim Al-Siyabi, in a speech opening the meeting, addressed His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, as Kuwait hosts the meeting. Al-Siyabi also thanked the Kuwaiti government and people for the warm reception and hospitality; he also welcomed the participation of the Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Abdulrahman bin Hamad Al-Attiyah.

Kuwaiti women delegation meets Alveda King

President of the Media Committee of the Union of Kuwaiti Women Associations delegation Fatma Al-Bakir met with Dr Alveda C. King, Director of the African-American humanitarian aid institute, on the sidelines of the 54th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, held March 1-12. A "coincidence, the most beautiful of all coincidences," Al-Bakir stressed after meeting Dr Alveda King, the niece of American revolutionary leader Martin Luther King who fought against racism and for rights of black America in the sixties. The meeting took place last night after Dr Alveda presented a lecture on motherhood and childhood.

Economy Desk

Kuwait, Turkey discuss ways to boost investment opportunities

National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) hosted yesterday a Turkish trade delegation meeting with local business owners to encourage investment and cooperation between the two countries. The meeting was held in Sheraton Hotel in Kuwait City and was attended by the CEO of NBK group Ibrahim Dabdoub and the head of Investment Support and Promotion Agency of Turkey (ISPAT) Alpaslan Korkomaz. During the meeting, , Shaikha Al-Bahar, Deputy CEO of NBK Kuwait, said in her opening speech that the initiative and decision for the gathering was taken by

HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Turkish President Abdullah Gul during his visit to Kuwait in December 2009.

Kuwait Energy finds new oil in western Egyptian desert

Kuwait Energy Company, one of the fastest growing independent oil and gas exploration and production companies in the Middle East, yesterday announced the discovery of a new oil well in the northern area of Burg El-Arab (BEA) field in the Egyptian western desert, one of its producing assets in Egypt's Western Desert. The newly discovered well BEA N-1X is located in a separate fault block in the northern part of the field. The well was production tested on December 22, 2009 and produced at an initial rate of 280 barrels of 33 API oil per day with no water. KEC believes that there is excellent exploration potential within the Burg El-Arab block, both in the current producing horizons as well as in the deeper Jurassic formation.

Qatar

Social Desk

Municipality demolishes four 'unstable' buildings

Doha Municipality started the demolition of four old unstable properties on the B-Ring road (between Jaidah Flyover and Mannai Underpass). The Committee of Building Maintenance and Demolition, under the Ministry of Municipality and Urban Planning had earlier asked the owner to demolish the building, considering the safety and structure of the building. The demolition is being carried out according to regulations of Law No 29 of 2009 on Building Control.

MEED to host conference on Qatar projects

MEED, Middle East's leading business intelligence journal, is set to host a two-day meet to discuss the status of Qatar's prestigious ongoing development projects. The meet, scheduled to be held on June 16-16, 2010 will give an update on the progress and development of Qatar's integrated rail network. Focusing on a break down of the project, the opening day would discuss the specific opportunities connected with Education City tram, West Bay tram, Lussail metro and freight. There would also be a presentation of the progress report on the development of New Doha International Airport.

Green drive: Qatari on Antarctica mission

A Qatari professional will travel to Antarctica on a mission to help raise awareness in Qatar about climate change and the importance of protecting the environment. Ahead of his expedition to the end of the Earth, he visited schoolchildren in Doha to get them to think Green. Abdulla AlMisnad, a Shell employee, spoke to students of Omar bin AlKhattab Secondary and Preparatory schools about his journey, which is part of the 2041 Inspire Antarctic Expedition.

PM to open Comoros investment conference

The Prime Minister and Foreign Minister H E Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabor Al Thani will open on Wednesday a conference to support investment and development in the Republic of the Comoros to be hosted by Qatar in collaboration with the Arab League, the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) and the United Nations Fund for Development. The conference will be part of efforts by Arab States , Islamic countries, organisations and charities and the business sector to support development in the least developed countries and third world states.

Emir's role in women empowerment hailed

The Emir H H Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani's visionary leadership and initiatives for empowering women in Qatar were hailed by a top official on the occasion of International Women's Day (IWD), observed globally yesterday. The Goodwill Ambassador and Director of Middle East office for the Intergovernmental Institution for the use of Micro-algae Spirulina against Malnutrition (IIMSAM), the Permanent Observer to the United Nations Economic and Social Council, Dr Naseer Homoud, while addressing the media urged people to support the cause of women globally without any discrimination.

International Desk

Qatar welcomes report on UN Millennium Goals

Qatar has welcomed the report on UN General Assembly's assessment on the progress made in achieving the Millennium Development Goals — September 2010. In a statement Ambassador Nasser Abdulaziz Al Nasser, Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations, thanked the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, for his report on the achievement of these objectives. The report has given a clear picture of all the success achieved so far, good practices, lessons learned, challenges and obstacles that prevent large number of countries from achieving all the Millennium Development Goals

New Zealand firms eye Qatar for expansion

As part of expanding its global strategy, private companies in New Zealand are eyeing on Qatar as a fertile market for growth, according to experts. New Zealand Trade and Enterprise (NZTE), the New Zealand Government's economic development agency, held an advisory board meeting under its Beachheads programme in Qatar recently. "The focus of companies in New Zealand has shifted from Western countries to the region. With Qatar becoming a major hub of industrial activities and development, a number of companies are keen on knowing about the market here," Wayne Mikkelsen, Counsul General and Trade Commissioner, NZTE-Dubai told The Peninsula.

Qatari, German firms in green initiative

Petro Qatar, a local company, has teamed up with environmental and Green engineering specialist BN Engineers, Germany, to launch green initiatives in Qatar. The partnership is intended to offer practical solutions that integrate sound practices in the green projects in Qatar.

Petro Qatar's internationally experienced engineers will work alongside BN Engineers diversified environmental engineering expertise. "Our partner's half a century of European expertise allows Petro Qatar to tap into an experience in environmental engineering and green technologies that has evolved through the different phases of industrialisation.

QFC President visits Bahrain to study setting up of legal centre

Lord Woolf of Barnes and President of the Qatar Financial Centre (QFC) Civil and Commercial Court has conducted a two-day visit to the Kingdom of Bahrain that aims to highlighting the role that the Kingdom can play along with Qatar in establishing the GCC as a leading Alternative Dispute Resolution centre to deal with legal suits by companies. During the visit Lord Woolf met with the Bahraini Minister of Justice H H Sheikh Khaled bin Ali Al Khalifa and members of the Bahrain Chamber for Dispute Resolution (BCDR-AAA) management team, and briefed them on legal developments in Qatar.

Civil society organisations under OIC to meet in Doha

The third annual conference of Civil Society Organisations in the member states of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) is kicking off tomorrow at the Grand Regency. The two-day event, due to open under the slogan, "" together for effective solidarity,"" is co-organised by the OIC humanitarian affairs department and Qatar Charity Society (QCS). Some 70 humanitarian organisations from the OIC member states are taking part in the function.

Moroccan culture minister arrives in Doha

Moroccan Culture Minister Bensalem Hamesh arrived in Doha yesterday to attend the opening ceremony of the Moroccan cultural week due to kick off here on Monday and runs for five days. H E Minister of Culture, Arts and Heritage Dr Hamad bin Abdulaziz Al Kuwari led the well-wishers who welcomed the Moroccan Culture Minister upon arrival together with the Moroccan Ambassador to Qatar Mr Abdulazeem Altaber. Such a Moroccan cultural week is an extension to the cultural communication between the State Of Qatar and Morocco in particular and between Qatar and the greater Arab world in general in embodiment to the slogan of the Doha , Capital of Arab Culture 2010 Festival/the Arab Culture a Homeland, said Al Kuwari.

Qatar-Russia trade doubles: Envoy

The volume of trade between Russia and Qatar has doubled in 2009, which is around \$30m, compared with around \$15m the previous year. "Our trade relations with Qatar may not be that high, but the economic cooperation between two countries is strong... in the future, we may be able to increase our trade relations where we can maybe export here food stuff, like poultry," said Russian Ambassador to Qatar Dr Vladimir Titorenko.

Health Minister to lead delegation to Arab ministers' meeting in Cairo

The Minister of Public Health and Secretary General of the Supreme Health Council H E Abdullah bin Khaled Al Qahtani will lead the Qatari delegation to the meeting of the 34 session of the Council of Arab Ministers of Health to be held in Cairo on Wednesday and Thursday. The meeting will discuss topics on the agenda including upgrading the work of the Council of Arab Ministers of Health and alternatives to the financing of health services, in addition to setting a date and venue for the next regular session of the 35 in 2011.

Deputy Emir ratifies agreement with Brazil

The Deputy Emir and Heir Apparent Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani yesterday issued the ratification instrument approving the draft agreement between Qatar and Brazil on exempting visa related requirements for the holders of the diplomatic and special passports, which was signed in Brasilia on February 20. The Deputy Emir also issued a ratification instrument approving the bilateral draft agreement on air transportation between the two countries.

OIC hails Qatar humanitarian initiatives

Assistant Secretary-General of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Atta Al Mannan Bakhit has hailed Qatar's humanitarian initiatives and effective role on Islamic and global levels. The State of Qatar is the main financier of basic development projects held by the OIC in a number of Islamic countries such as Afghanistan, Bosnia, Sierra Leone, Niger, and others, Bakhit said on the sidelines of the Third Conference of the Humanitarian Organisations to the member states of the OIC in Doha. The OIC official praised the Emir H H Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani's decision to establish a development bank in Darfur, stressing the great importance of the initiative which will reflect positively on the peace process in Darfur.

QU delegates attend British Council workshop

Five representatives from the Qatar University attended a workshop organised by the British Council where they gained new skills in self-assessment from top UK education experts. Leading UK education experts Helen Marshall, Pro-Vice-Chancellor at the University of Cumbria and Robert Munn from Consultant Finchwood Academic UK guided delegates through the principles of self assessment as an integral part of the process of quality assurance and improvement in universities

Economic Desk

Toshiba Gulf, PC Dealnet join hands to get bigger share in Qatar market

Toshiba Gulf in partnership with its local dealer PC Dealnet are poised to get a bigger share in the Qatari market as they highlighted their achievements and goals for 2010 on Wednesday night during its first Channel Event at W Hotel. "We would go for 25 to 30 percent market share this year for the range of Toshiba products and services in Qatar," Fady Azar, general manager of PC Dealnet told reporters in an interview at the sidelines of the event.

Qatar, Singapore back Prudential's £14bn cash call

Singapore's biggest sovereign wealth fund GIC and Qatar Holding have committed to underwrite a significant portion of Prudential Plc's £14bn rights issue. GIC is an existing shareholder, with a 0.5 percent stake in Prudential, but Qatar does not appear to rank as an existing investor, signalling that the British insurer is inviting new investors to make the deal a success. The fundraising will be used to part-fund the Pru's £23bn purchase of the far eastern businesses of AIG.

Qatari stocks take a beating on foreign selling

Selling pressure mainly from foreign investors, both retail and institutional, pushed Qatari stocks down last week. A highlight of the week was the announcement of 2009 financials by large cap holding entity, Industries Qatar (IQ), which failed to throw any surprises from the viewpoint of its shareholders. "The results were not unexpected and the cash dividend declared by the company was just 50 percent," noted stock analyst Bashir Al Kahloot, said in his weekly stock market analysis.

Tasweeq signs deal with LPG Global

The Qatar International Petroleum Marketing Company (Tasweeq) has entered into a one-year contract with LPG Global Transport Management to deliver LPG from Qatar to Tasweeq's customers across the globe. With this contract, Tasweeq aims to reinforce its mission of reliable and efficient off-take of 'Regulated Products' to maximise value for customers and stakeholders.

Health Desk

New kidney dialysis centre to open today

Qatar will open a dialysis centre today, a few days ahead of the World Kidney Day celebrations on March 11. Officials are also set to intensify organ donation awareness campaign with studies showing that the people from this region are a minority among the organ donors world wide. "Civilised people do good deeds, and once for centauries, the Arab region was famous for its generosity and humanity," said Dr Yousuf Al Muslamani, vice chairman of the Organ Transplant Committee at Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC).

HMC to launch awareness campaign

With almost 10,000 patients received at the Hamad Medical Corporation's (HMC) renal out-patient department in 2009, the officials expect the opening of Fahad Bin Jassim Kidney Centre, to herald a new awakening of awareness about kidney related issues. "The Fahad Bin Jassim Kidney Centre will cater to the dialysis out-patients. However, each day at the Hamad General Hospital (HGH) 30 to 40 in-patient dialysis is done," Dr Awad Rashid, Head of Nephrology and

Dialysis, HMC told The Peninsula. “Added to this, we had almost 10,000 out patients last year and this is apart from the dialysis centers in Al Shamal, Al Khor, Al Wakra.”

Kidney donations in Arab world less, says expert

Live kidney donation, the most recommended form of donations is regrettably less in the Arab world according to an expert. Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC), recently, invited Dr Ahmed Adel, Professor of Medicine and Nephrology at Zagazig University and Secretary of the Arab Society of Nephrology, to lecture on the long-term health consequences of kidney ailments and the challenges faced in the Arab world regarding organ donation. There are currently few live kidney donors, the most recommended form of organ donation, in the Arab world. The living donor can be a family member, which is preferred, but also unrelated donors are becoming increasingly sought after,” said Dr Adel.

OMAN

Social Desk

Arab ministers of education to meet today

A two-day conference of Arab ministers of education starts today at Al Bustan Palace Hotel to discuss and approve the overall report of the experts’ meeting that concluded two days ago. Being organised by the Arab League of Education, Sciences and Cultures Organisation (Alesco), and the Oman Commission of Education, Cultures and Sciences, the ministerial conference will highlight in its agenda many educational issues related to promoting post-basic education in the Arab world.

BSM charity drive hopes to reach RO20,000 target

If we said a 100 times that the young can change the world, it still wouldn’t be enough. The British School Muscat (BSM) charity initiatives are a great example. In partnership with the Oman Oasis, a Zubair Corporation group company, BSM is conducting two charity events the coming week. Organised entirely by the student committee, who have managed to raise RO17,000 till date, the two events are the walkathon and a fashion show. “We hope to go above the RO20,000-mark by the time the events are done,” said head of sixth form, Nadia Megnin at a press meeting held at the school to announce the events.

International Desk

HM congratulates Hosni Mubarak

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has congratulated President Mohammed Hosni Mubarak of Egypt after a surgery which he underwent successfully.

Oman, Turkey urged to form joint ventures

The eighth session of the Omani-Turkish Joint Committee meeting began at Al Bustan Palace Hotel yesterday. The Omani side was chaired by Mohammed bin Nasser Al Khusaibi, secretary-general of the National Economy Ministry, whereas the Turkish side was chaired by Bashir Atalay, Turkish interior minister. Al Khusaibi in his speech said that the committee had strived to establish cooperation between the Sultanate and Turkey in the previous years by signing bilateral agreements. He called on the private sector in the Sultanate and Turkey, through the Joint Businessmen Council, to set up joint ventures.

Sultanate, Turkey for improved trade ties

Oman and Turkey will seek to further enhance trade and cooperation and boost tourism prospects between the two countries during the two-day Turkish-Omani Joint Committee meet, which gets underway today. A nine-member delegation, led by Beşir Atalay, minister of interior of the Republic of Turkey, arrived here yesterday to participate in the eighth session of the meet, which will be held under the co-chairmanship of Turkish Interior Minister Beşir Atalay and Mohammed bin Nasser Al Khusaibi, Secretary-General of Ministry of National Economy.

Omani team to take part in Arab Labour Conference

The Sultanate is participating in the 37th session of the Arab Labour Conference, which will be held in Bahrain from March 6 to March 11. The Sultanate delegation is led by Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser Al Bakri, minister of manpower and a delegation representing the entrepreneurs under the chairmanship of Khalil bin Abdullah Al Khonji, chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The meeting will discuss resolutions and recommendations of the board of directors, and also the outcome of the sessions of the Governing Council of the Arab Labour Organisation, discussed during the previous Arab Labour Conference.

Gilani for enhancing Oman-Pak trade ties

Pakistan's Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani yesterday said Pakistan and the Sultanate have always stood by each other at all times, in a manifestation of "our close brotherly and friendly relations". "Being neighbours, both the countries have rights over each other giving rise to expectations of the people," Gilani said, while meeting a three-member delegation from Oman, led by Mohammed bin Nasir Al Khusaibi, secretary-general of the Ministry of Economy.

HM receives Belarus president's message

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has received a written message from President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus. The message was received by His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud Al Said, deputy prime minister for the Council of Ministers, when he received Boris Batura, chairman of the Council of the Republic at the Belarusian National Assembly here yesterday.

HM receives credentials of Brunei, Iran envoys

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said received separately at Hisn Al Shomoukh in the wilayat of Manah yesterday the credentials of the ambassador of Brunei Darussalam and the ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran accredited to the Sultanate. His Majesty the Sultan welcomed the ambassadors and thanked the leaders of their countries for their greetings and best wishes. His Majesty the Sultan also affirmed that they will receive his support, as well as, the government and the Omani people to carry out their duty.

Sultanate, UAE seek to increase trade ties

Deliberations of the Oman-UAE Supreme Joint Committee meetings concluded at the Al Bustan Palace Hotel yesterday, under the chair of Sayyid Ali bin Hamoud bin Ali Al Busaidi, minister of the Diwan of Royal Court from the Omani side and Sheikh Mansoor bin Zayed Al Nahyan, deputy prime minister and presidential affairs minister from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) side. Minutes of the committee meetings included scope of cooperation between the two countries in economic, investment and educational.

Economy Desk

Oman, Belarus ink pact to form business council

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and Belarus Trade and Industry Chamber yesterday signed an agreement establishing an Omani-Belarusian Businessmen Council on the sidelines of the Omani-Belarusian Forum. The forum on the OCCI premises, was attended by a delegation led by Boris Batura, chairman of Belarus National Assembly Council.

Belarus invites investment from Oman in major projects

Ahmed bin Abdalnabi Macki, minister of national economy and deputy chairman of the Financial Affairs and Energy Resources Council, received in his office here yesterday a delegation led by Boris Batura, chairman of the Council of the Republic at the national assembly of Belarus. They discussed topics related to economic and investment cooperation. Macki affirmed keenness of the Sultanate's government to develop its economic and investment relations with Belarus.

Health Desk

National Association for Cancer Awareness election on March 30

The National Association for Cancer Awareness (Naca) election will be held at the Naca headquarters on March 30. At this time, the present executive board will officially 'stand down' and the members, have the opportunity to elect a new board that will lead the association and plan the programme for the following two years. A number of the present committee members are prepared to stand for re-election which will ensure the continued smooth running of the association. To be eligible for election, one has to be a member of Naca for at least six months.

13% of population affected by diabetes, 40% cases undiagnosed

Diabetes cases in the Sultanate have almost touched 13 per cent of the population, whereas another 40 per cent cases are still undiagnosed, informed Dr Mohammed Al Lamki, head of Oman Diabetic Society. The reason for undiagnosed cases in Oman, Al Lamki said, could be due to the fact that the people do not have any apparent symptoms. However, they might get diagnosed by chance when they have medical check-up for other ailments.

H1N1 cases in Sultanate touch 6,347

The National H1N1 Follow-up and Management Committee said that the number of the patients infected by H1N1 virus stood at 6,347, while the number of vaccine doses given to citizens and residents in different government and private health institutes stood at 33,830. No new death case was recorded. Therefore, the death toll remains 32. The Health Ministry has advised residents to get themselves vaccinated at health institutes, especially pregnant women and people with cancer, immunodeficiency syndrome, (genetic, acquired or therapeutic), TBs and other respiratory diseases.

BAHRAIN

International Front

British ambassador Bowden stresses respect for Bahrain

Britain's ambassador, under fire from several lawmakers for a controversial meeting with Al Wefaq, Bahrain's largest parliamentary bloc, has stressed the non-interference of his embassy in Bahrain's domestic affairs and its respect for the country's constitution and laws. Jamie Bowden said at a meeting with Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmad Al Khalifa, Bahrain's foreign minister, that Britain was keen to reinforce bilateral relations. According to Bahrain News Agency, Shaikh Khalid said at the meeting with Bowden that attempts by any side in Bahrain to involve embassies in internal affairs contradicted international customs and laws and caused harm to ties with all countries. The meeting was the first public appearance of the British envoy with a Bahraini senior official since he was harshly criticised by several MPs and newspaper columnists for meeting members from Al Wefaq shortly after the society waded into controversy at its general conference for calling for changes in the executive branch. The call was denounced as "a constitutional coup" and the meeting between Al Wefaq and Bowden was condemned as "an invitation to interfere in Bahrain's domestic affairs." Several MPs, alongside mosque imams and columnists, called for either an official apology from the ambassador or his expulsion for his perceived role in the allegedly secret meeting. However, the British embassy on Saturday dismissed as "incorrect" the allegations that the meeting with Al Wefaq was held in secret.

Parliamentary bloc denies meeting British envoy

Al Menbar Islamic Society on Monday denied a claim that it held meetings with the British ambassador currently at the centre of a controversy in Bahrain and challenged him to publish

their dates. "We deny categorically the claim made in the statement issued by the British embassy about members from Al Menbar meeting the British ambassador," Abdul Lateef Al Shaikh, the head of the society, said. "We have never met the ambassador and the statement claim lacks credibility." On Saturday, the British embassy responded to allegations that it held a secret meeting with Al Wefaq shortly after the society waded into controversy for calling for changes in the executive branch. "There have been a number of allegations that the ambassador's recent meeting with MPs from Al Wefaq society was secret. This is incorrect. The meeting was a routine one held in the British embassy with full knowledge of numerous staff," the British embassy said. "As is usual, it was notified in advance to the Ministry of Interior police who guard the embassy compound. We regularly meet MPs from Al Asala, Al Menbar, Al Wefaq and independents. This does not imply, of course, that we agree with them on every issue," the embassy said.

Bahrain-Kuwait landmark deals signed

Bahrain and Kuwait have signed five landmark deals to boost political and economic fields, the Gulf Daily News reported. Five agreements were signed in the fields of consumer protection, industrial ownership protection, tourism, youth and sport and cultural and technical programmes. Bahraini Prime Minister Prince Khalifa Bin Salman Al Khalifa praised Kuwait's support for Bahrain and said "what affects Kuwait affects Bahrain". Al Khalifa also called for stronger cooperation and interaction between Kuwaitis and Bahrainis.

Political Front

Waad to announce candidates in Bahrain polls

Bahrain's leading leftist group, the National Action Democratic Society (Waad), said that it would announce "within a few weeks" the list of its candidates for the parliamentary elections slated for October or November. "We are still working on the list, but we hope that it will be out either this month or in April," Ebrahim Shareef, Waad secretary general, said on Saturday. The society boycotted the 2002 elections, the first to be held in Bahrain following a three-decade hiatus, to demand for more reforms. However, it took part in the 2006 elections, alongside two other societies that shunned the inaugural polls, but did not win any seat despite a highly spirited campaign that had to put up with a ferocious anti-Waad movement spearheaded by conservative opponents. In January, the society's general assembly voted to take part in the forthcoming elections, following heated debates on the merits of the boycott and the participation. The society is currently looking at its options in 2010, but these most likely will not include an alliance with Al Wefaq, Bahrain's largest political-religious society and parliamentary bloc. "An alliance with Al Wefaq is very difficult, so we will be just coordinating with them. AL Wefaq wants to keep the 17 seats it won in 2006 and compete in 18 constituencies, and this makes an alliance highly difficult," Ebrahim said. Al Wefaq drew on its large base to carry 17 of the 40 seats in the

elections. Smaller societies long sought to forge some form of partnership with the society or requested it to withdraw from some constituencies so that they could win, but Al Wefaq remained adamant on fielding candidates in all the constituencies that it could win. Some societies later expressed their frustration with Al Wefaq and the society became the only force to represent the opposition in the parliament. New attempts by societies to forge a partnership with Al Wefaq for the 2010 elections were blocked after it told them that it was not interested.

Al Wefaq denies it sought British assistance to change constituencies

Al Wefaq, Bahrain's largest parliamentary bloc, has denied claims that it had sought British assistance to help alter the boundaries of the constituencies and ensure a greater number of votes in the forthcoming elections. The society is currently at the centre of a political storm after it was accused of breaching the constitution for calling for changes in Bahrain's political regime and for holding an alleged secret meeting with the British ambassador soon after it waded into controversy. Al Wefaq denied both charges, claiming they were part of a malicious drive against it ahead of the national polls. Several MPs and columnists have condemned the British envoy for his alleged interference in Bahrain's domestic affairs, a charge that he has rejected in a meeting with Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmad Al Khalifa. On Wednesday, a columnist wrote that Al Wefaq discussed with the British ambassador how his embassy could assist in changing the constituencies. "The claim is baseless and full of lies. Al Wefaq has nothing to hide and does not have to explain its attitude," a spokesman for the society said. "Unfortunately, there are people who are not keen on national unity and social cohesion." Bahrain is divided in 40 single-seat constituencies where candidates with the highest votes are elected for a four-year term. Several opposition groups have called for setting one common constituency for the country, but the suggestion has been regularly rejected as "impractical and unworkable." Al Wefaq has 17 of the 40 seats in the lower chamber of the bicameral parliament. The society boycotted the 2002 elections, the first to be held after a three-decade hiatus.

Bahrain business community eyes formation of political society

Bahrain's business community is mulling the formation of a political society that will allow it to enter the parliament and help promote its views and interests. The formation of the society is one of several options being considered by Bahrain Chamber for Commerce and Industry (BCCI) to have a greater say in the debate of the parliament's lower chamber, said Othman Shareef, the chamber's treasurer. "There are several ideas being debated right now, and we hope that we will have a final decision within two weeks in order to select our candidates and announce the programme way ahead of the elections date," he said. An ad-hoc committee has been set up to coordinate ideas and action for the elections. The candidates will not be BCCI members and Othman Shareef said that he would not run even if he is pressured by the chamber. "The committee is tasked with presenting views on the elections and on the selection of the candidates and constituencies. The BCCI will not be involved," he said. The BCCI had said that it intended to field candidates in six or seven constituencies and that it would support them in various ways. It attributed its decision to the need for a greater representation of the business community in the

lower chamber, perceived as not being business friendly. "We will have no objection sitting with parliamentary blocs and political societies to discuss issues to be debated by the parliament. The objective is to boost the national economy and to enhance the income and living conditions of all Bahraini citizens," he said. Unlike the upper chamber, the lower chamber has few businessmen and economists and many of its politically-motivated decisions were seen by businessmen as not helping the national economy. Bahrain has 18 registered political societies, but only Al Wefaq, Al Asala and the Islamic Menbar, all religion-based formation, have won seats in the 2006 elections.

Social Front

Bahrain's lower chamber seeks complete ban on alcohol

Bahrain could become a dry country if a Bill backed by the parliament's lower chamber to ban the import and sale of alcohol goes through the upper chamber. The Islamists-dominated chamber proposed the Bill after MPs overcame their usual differences and agreed that the government would have to ban the import, production, possession and sale of alcohol in the country's territory "on land, sea and in the air." However, the bill is not likely to get the same support in the much more liberal upper chamber. In their drive for imposing the ban, the lawmakers said that it should be total and should cover ground outlets as well as Bahraini airlines. Bahrain International Airport would also be covered by the ban, said parliament's foreign affairs, defence and national security committee chairman Adel Al Mouawda, a leading Salafi. People who break the law and produce or sell alcohol would be put in prison for up to three years or made to pay a 500 Bahraini dinars fine, or both. The legal measures would be doubled in case of a repeat offence. Shaikh Khalid Bin Ali Al Khalifa, the minister of justice and Islamic Affairs, said that the government supported the Bill, but stressed that it might not cancel out the Alcohol Law adopted in Bahrain in 1956. However, the lawmakers said that they did not mind the use of alcohol for medical purposes, but insisted on the permission of the health ministry. It could also be used for scientific experiments and research, the MPs said. The MPs spoke for almost three hours for the imposition of the ban and an attempt by MP Abdullah Al Dossari to limit the consumption on non-Muslims was promptly rejected. Abdul Aziz Al Fadhel, the parliament's affairs minister, had to intervene several times, to defend the government from the lawmakers' vitriolic onslaughts. "The government has endorsed the Bill, so there is no need to include it every time an MP wanted to say something," he said. Justice and Islamic Affairs Shaikh Khalid Bin Ali Al Khalifa said that "the people and the government had similar attitudes."

Bahrain denies closure of Doha employment office

A Bahraini labour official has denied claims that the employment office it had set up in Qatar has been closed. The office was established in 2007 in cooperation with the Qatari authorities to help Bahrainis willing to work in Qatar. Office activities reportedly came to a standstill, except for transactions with a few people signing up for positions in neighbouring countries. "The labour ministry has not cancelled the office, even though it is still assessing the merit of the Qatar employment project," Sabah Al Dossari, the labour assistant undersecretary for labour affairs, said in a statement. "Our focus right now is on local strategic projects to help further reduce unemployment figures, mainly among university graduates, and to improve wages," he said. Al Dossari said that the labour ministry has not received requests from Bahraini graduates to take up positions in Qatar. "We are confident that the office work will be reinvigorated when the causeway linking Bahrain and Qatar is ready as it will greatly facilitate movement between the two countries and vastly reduce living costs for Bahrainis," Al Dossari said. Around 2,500 Bahrainis currently work in Qatar, according to figures from the labour ministry. "We are pleased that they are working without encountering any problem," the ministry said. Al Dossari said that Bahrain was not negotiating deals with other Gulf Cooperation Council countries to open employment offices in their capitals.

Bahrain MP calls for support of alcohol ban

A Bahraini lawmaker has urged the country's civil society, political societies, media, and upper chamber to support a drive by the lower chamber to ban alcohol in Bahrain. "There is a pressing need to enact a law that protects the Bahraini society from the dangers and damages associated with alcohol," Abdul Halim Murad said. "The arguments that the ban would harm the local economy and deter investors are totally fallacious. Countries progress and prosper thanks to their investments in knowledge, industry, financial services and technology, not through alcohol," said the MP representing Al Asala, Bahrain's largest Salafi group. The lower chamber last week voted unanimously for a total ban on the import, sale, production and consumption of alcohol in Bahrain's territory "on land, sea and in the air". However, the bill will have to be approved by the more liberal upper chamber amid expectations that it would be blocked.

Under the proposed legislation, violators would face up to three years in jail and a fine of up to 500 Bahraini dinars, or both, and the punishments would be doubled for repeat offenders. Several people have said that the bill to ban alcohol was introduced by the lower chamber for electoral purposes with the next legislative elections due in October or November. However, Abdul Halim denied the claims, saying that the bill was first submitted five years ago and did not seek to take advantage of people's strong emotions and gain political mileage. "The drive to have alcohol banned in Bahrain started in 2005, but it was regrettably stalled. We tried again in 2007, and the bill was submitted to the government to re-draft it as a potential law. The government

returned it to the lower chamber in February 2010 and we debated it on March 9, so it is not a move for electoral purposes as has been alleged," he said. The MP said that only a limited number of people benefited financially from the sale of alcohol.

Human Rights Front

Bahrain ministry urges bloggers not to claim broadcasting rights

A Bahrain culture and information ministry official has cautioned bloggers and website owners against referring to their sites as radios or TV broadcasts. "Some bloggers or owners of websites freely and nonchalantly use terms like radio or TV broadcasts when they refer to their dissemination of views or opinions or activities," Abdullah Yateem, the assistant undersecretary for publication, said on Friday. "I urge them to exercise caution in their statements or announcements because there is a difference between electronic multi-media operations and press, radio and TV activities which require licencing from the ministry." While print media is deregulated in Bahrain, broadcast media is limited to the state. Sawt Al Ghad, a private radio station with alleged Lebanese connection, launched in 2005 was shut down in 2006 over "irregularities". Several political societies and media groups have said that they would apply for licences to operate radio or TV stations, but their requests have been turned down. Several people and businesses publish print media and Bahrain today has seven dailies in Arabic and two in English.