

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

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**24<sup>th</sup> April- 30<sup>th</sup> April 2010**

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

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## **SUMMARY**

Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Abdul Rahman al-Attiyah expressed on Saturday his happiness for the convening of the 12th Consultative Meeting of the leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council which will be hosted by the Saudi capital Riyadh on Tuesday, May 11. Al-Attiyah said in a press statement issued here today that the one-day meeting with no agenda is an opportunity for reviewing the march of mutual cooperation and enhancing communication between the GCC leaders. He explained that the meeting will enable the GCC leaders to review and follow-up joint action in political, economic, security, military, social and cultural domains in order to establish greater coherence and achieve the aspirations of the GCC peoples. Member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) advocate peace and stability for sake of serving objectives of the national development schemes, the Kuwaiti ambassador her said. Sheikh Azzam Mubarak Al-Sabah, speaking during a meeting with General Sheikh Khalifa Bin Ahmad Al-Khalifa, the General Commander of the Defense Forces of the Kingdom of Bahrain, at the latter's bureau, said, "our joint history and destiny constitute the basis of our unity." He was alluding to the six member states of the GCC; Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman. These states joined hands in the early 80s, setting up the GCC, an entity for enhancing cooperation in various sectors among these countries. For his part, Gen. Sheikh Khalifa affirmed that the solidarity among the GCC tates constitute a solid shield in the face of external challenges and "critical and sensitive" developments. Wise leaders of Kuwait and Bahrain dedicate special concern to achieving sustainable development for it is quite fruitful for the future of the two brotherly peoples, the Bahraini official noted. The GCC Secretary General Abdulrahman Atiyya lauded the growing relation between the GCC states and Russia. He described the talks he had with the Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov and the Russian President's Special Envoy for the Middle East Alexander Sultanov as "important, constructive and comprehensive." The visit comes within the framework of the GCC- Russian Foreign Ministry's first political dialogue aiming to develop political, economic, cultural and security relations between the two sides, he said. The Russian efforts to urge Tehran to solve the problem of the three UAE islands currently occupied by Iran either through direct negotiations or international arbitration, he added. "This conflict has taken too long and it's high time it was solved," he also said, noting that "the neighbourly relations and Islamic fraternity binding GCC and its neighbouring countries requires Iran to react positively to the UAE's honest calls to put an end to this crisis, either through negotiations or international arbitration." Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud received here yesterday Secretary General of the Arab League Mr. Amr Mousa and the accompanying delegation. During the audience, they discussed a number of issues concerning the joint Arab work. The audience was attended by a number of princes. The foreign minister of the United Arab Emirates refused to back down in the face of Iranian anger and repeated on Sunday his call for Tehran to end its "occupation" of three islands in the Gulf. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahayan, on a visit to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, again called Iran's hold on Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs an occupation that was hindering the non-Arab, Muslim power's relations with all its Arab neighbors. Kuwait and the other member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have been closely

coordinating in face of terrorism, possible nuclear threats and external aggression, the Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister has affirmed. Sheikh Dr. Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, also the Foreign Minister of Gulf State, shed light on the challenges and opportunities of the GCC in the next half century in a seminar he gave at the Middle East Institute here Thursday evening, entitled "The GCC in a Turbulent World." Sheikh Dr. Mohammed indicated that since its inception, the "first direct existential threat to the GCC" came as a result of the 1990 Iraqi aggression against Kuwait. "I am truly proud of the way the GCC exercised its collective security measures, in conjunction with its allies, principally the U.S., to restore and preserve its member states sovereignty and territorial integrity," he said. Sayyid Ali bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court received here yesterday Dr Hussein Abdel Razzak Al Gezairy, Regional Director of the World Health Organization (WHO) for the Eastern Mediterranean. Al Gezairy was received by Ahmed bin Abdalnabi Macki, National Economy Minister and Deputy Chairman of the Financial Affairs and Energy Resources Council. The President, His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, affirmed on Sunday the UAE's keenness to cooperate with the UN High Commission for Human Rights out of its respect for international laws and legislations and its firm belief in principles of Islamic Shariah, as well as Arab values and traditions which exhort respect and esteem of human being and equality among members of the community. Shaikh Khalifa said the UAE is cooperating with the UN organisations to attain stability, prosperity and welfare to all countries and peoples of the world. The President made his remarks as he received on Sunday, at Al Bateen Palace, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, who is on a two-day trip to the UAE as part of a 10-day visit to all six GCC member states. HH the Deputy Emir and Heir Apparent Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, who is also the deputy commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces, yesterday received US Central Command chief Gen David Petraeus and the accompanying delegation on the occasion of their current visit to Qatar. Talks dealt with bilateral co-operation as well as a host of regional and international issues of mutual concern.

Prince Khaled Bin Sultan Bin Abdul Aziz, Assistant Minister of Defense and Aviation for Military Affairs says the Kingdom's armed forces are ready to deal with any aggression. He said the armed forces, with the support of King Abdullah, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces and the Crown Prince, are undergoing continuous development. His Highness Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, reiterated the resolve to make the UAE one of the best countries in the world by 2021. "We are determined to fulfil that obligation," he said while presiding over a meeting at the Centre of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Community Welfare in Umm Al Quwain. Kuwaiti women have called on the parliament and government to treat them equally to their male compatriots in accordance with the country's constitution. Interviewed by the Kuwait Times, the women insisted that there should be more equality between male and female Kuwaiti citizens. A human rights campaigner yesterday slammed the government's decision to rule out the introduction of a minimum wage for foreign workers. Migrant Workers Protection Society chairwoman Mona Almoayyed rejected the government's claims that a minimum wage would undermine the country's economy, saying it is stealing the rights of the labourers. She said improving the salaries

of migrant workers was crucial to the society because without it expats are being exploited into giving up their basic human rights. The Ministry of Labour will soon launch a massive crackdown on companies violating the provisions of the Labour Law, according to Al Sharq. Inspectors from the Ministry will conduct raids at the company premises as well as labour accommodations to check whether they comply with the provisions of the labour law. Qatar is committed to combating high incidence of obesity, with at least 43 percent of children weighing above the normal range, according to H E Abdullah bin Khalid Al Qahtani, Minister of Public Health and General Secretary of the Supreme Council of Health.

Gulf oil producers and other countries in the Middle East should take advantage of lower inflation rates and maintain counter-crisis fiscal stimulus measures to boost growth in their economies, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has said. The Washington-based Fund said fiscal policy in the six-nation Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) and other regional nations has played a critical role in cushioning the impact of the global economic crisis and in supporting domestic recovery. "Government investment programmes, especially in infrastructure, will continue to boost domestic demand in the near term in many economies in the Middle East and North Africa. These measures should remain in place to help cement the recovery. The report said stimulus measures should also remain in place to offset a sharp slowdown in bank credit in the region because of debt default problems and a downturn in the real estate sector, mainly in the GCC. "In spite of such support, banks in the region have become more cautious, following recent episodes of financial sector distress that occurred amid sharp corrections in property markets. This will likely curb the availability of bank loans and, ultimately, credit growth," the IMF said. Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Commerce & Industry and General Electric Company (GE), announced on Wednesday a strategic partnership aimed at building a sustainable economy through a focus on industrialization, research and education, and creating new jobs for Saudi nationals. The partnership marks GE's 'company to country' approach in Saudi Arabia to become a trusted partner in the Kingdom's developmental goals, the company said in a statement. Further strengthening its 70-year relationship with the Kingdom, GE signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Commerce & Industry at the US-Saudi Business Opportunities Forum, held in Chicago to highlight the economic collaboration between Saudi Arabia and the United States. The government of the Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) will sign today in Abu Dhabi an agreement for electrical as part of the GCC power grid. The two sides will also sign technical agreements for the exchange of energy between the respective companies and authorities in both countries to benefit from the linkage project. The first stage of the project was launched during the last GCC Summit, with Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Saudi Arabia as signatories. The third phase of the GCC Electrical Linkage Project (the Power Grid) is expected to be implemented in the second half of 2011. Kuwait's crude oil exports to China jumped 26.4 percent in March from a year earlier to 945,100 tons, equivalent to around 224, 000 barrels per day (bpd), the latest official data indicated. The cost of powering Bahrain will not increase because the country is moving towards renewable sources, it was revealed said yesterday. It costs roughly BD10 million (\$ 26.5m) to produce a megawatt from wind, solar power or gas, said Oil and Gas Affairs Minister and National Oil and Gas Authority (Noga) chairman

Dr Abdulhussain Mirza. The GDN reported on Monday that two hybrid plants were being built to produce renewable energy. They will each cost BD8m to BD10m, but Dr Mirza said the investment was worth it. "A study has been done in Bahrain over the last year and a Japanese company installed machinery at Bapco to measure wind velocity to see if it is suitable to produce electricity and the results are extremely encouraging," he said. Bahrain is the best placed country in the Gulf to harness the power of renewable energy, according to one of the country's top scientists. Wind and solar power could be the perfect solutions to Bahrain's long-term energy needs, Bahrain University applied physics professor Dr Waheeb Alnaser said on the sidelines of a conference in Manama yesterday. He revealed that every square metre of sunlight in Bahrain contains the same energy as 1.1 barrels of oil. However, Dr Alnaser said more must be done to harness that power and called on the government and parliament to take action.

## **DETAILED REPORT**

### **GCC**

#### **GCC states advocate peace: diplomat**

Member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) advocate peace and stability for sake of serving objectives of the national development schemes, the Kuwaiti ambassador her said.

Sheikh Azzam Mubarak Al-Sabah, speaking during a meeting with General Sheikh Khalifa Bin Ahmad Al-Khalifa, the General Commander of the Defense Forces of the Kingdom of Bahrain, at the latter's bureau, said, "our joint history and destiny constitute the basis of our unity." He was alluding to the six member states of the GCC; Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman. These states joined hands in the early 80s, setting up the GCC, an entity for enhancing cooperation in various sectors among these countries.

For his part, Gen. Sheikh Khalifa affirmed that the solidarity among the GCC tates constitute a solid shield in the face of external challenges and "critical and sensitive" developments. Wise leaders of Kuwait and Bahrain dedicate special concern to achieving sustainable development for it is quite fruitful for the future of the two brotherly peoples, the Bahraini official noted.

#### **Prince Naif highlights the role of the GCC interior ministries in ensuring security**

Second Deputy Premier and Minister of Interior Prince Naif bin Abdulaziz Al Saud received here yesterday Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council Abdulrahman Ala'teyah and GCC deputy interior ministers currently meeting here.

Prince Naif welcomed the GCC officials and highlighting the role of the GCC interior ministries in ensuring security. Prince Naif also stressed the importance of cooperation and coordination among GCC security agencies.

#### **Al Atiyya lauds growing GCC-Russian relations**

The GCC Secretary General Abdulrahman Atiyya lauded the growing relation between the GCC states and Russia. He described the talks he had with the Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov and the Russian President's Special Envoy for the Middle East Alexander Sultanov as "important, constructive and comprehensive." The visit comes within the framework of the GCC- Russian Foreign Ministry's first political dialogue aiming to develop political, economic, cultural and security relations between the two sides, he said. The Russian efforts to urge Tehran to solve the problem of the three UAE islands currently occupied by Iran either through direct negotiations or international arbitration, he added. "This conflict has taken too long and it's high time it was solved," he also said, noting that "the neighbourly relations and Islamic fraternity binding GCC and its neighbouring countries requires Iran to react positively to the UAE's honest calls to put an end to this crisis, either through negotiations or international arbitration."

### **Al-Attiyah satisfied for convening of 12th consultative meeting of GCC on May 11**

Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Abdul Rahman al-Attiyah expressed on Saturday his happiness for the convening of the 12th Consultative Meeting of the leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council which will be hosted by the Saudi capital Riyadh on Tuesday, May 11.

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### **GCC meeting in Riyadh on May 11**

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) leaders will hold their annual consultative meeting in Riyadh on May 11. The one-day gathering, to be held between official summits of the heads of the six countries, usually has no specific agenda and is open to all subjects of interest to the member states.

GCC Secretary General Abdurrahman bin Hamad Al Attiyah said "this annual meeting represents an opportunity to review all paths of joint cooperation at the political, economic, security, military, social and cultural levels, as well as means of enhancing communication among GCC leaders".

### **Al-Attiyah, Groser discussed bilateral relations between GCC countries and New Zealand**

GCC Secretary General Abdulrahman Al-Attiyah met on Sunday the visiting New Zealand's Trade Minister Dr Timothy John Groser and the accompanying delegation. Al-Attiyah told the press after the meeting that both sides discussed bilateral relations between New Zealand and the GCC countries and ways to bolster cooperation in all fields, including commercial, trade, and investment. Both parties discussed issues pertinent to the signing of Free Trade agreement.

### **IMF urges GCC to keep fiscal stimulus steps**

Gulf oil producers and other countries in the Middle East should take advantage of lower inflation rates and maintain counter-crisis fiscal stimulus measures to boost growth in their economies, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has said.

The Washington-based Fund said fiscal policy in the six-nation Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) and other regional nations has played a critical role in cushioning the impact of the global economic crisis and in supporting domestic recovery.

"Government investment programmes, especially in infrastructure, will continue to boost domestic demand in the near term in many economies in the Middle East and North Africa. These measures should remain in place to help cement the recovery. The report said stimulus measures should also remain in place to offset a sharp slowdown in bank credit in the region because of debt default problems and a downturn in the real estate sector, mainly in the GCC. "In spite of such support, banks in the region have become more cautious, following recent episodes of financial sector distress that occurred amid sharp corrections in property markets. This will likely curb the availability of bank loans and, ultimately, credit growth," the IMF said.

### **GCC debt issuance falls in Q1**

The GCC conventional bond market recorded a poor performance in the first quarter of 2010 amid Dubai-linked and broader sovereign debt fears, NCB Capital, the largest investment bank in Saudi Arabia and a subsidiary of National Commercial Bank, reported.

Primary issuance fell by some 70 percent in value from the average of the previous three quarters to \$ 3.4 billion and the GCC Sukuk market stalled even more sharply in marked contrast to global trends.

Dr Jarmo Kotilaine, chief economist of NCB Capital, said "the growing optimism that characterized the GCC debt markets during much of 2009 seems to have largely evaporated during the first quarter. Activity was subdued as new bond issuances contracted sharply from levels seen during the preceding three quarters."

### **GCC can deal with fresh global crisis: Suwaidi**

Gulf oil producers and other Middle East countries face the risk of a fresh financial crisis resulting from a possible crash in crude prices but they have the ability to deal with it, the UAE Central Bank Governor has said. Sultan bin Nasser Al Suwaidi said the GCC and other Arab nations had been severely impacted by the global financial distress but are heading for a speedy recovery following a recovery in hydrocarbon prices and massive anti-crisis fiscal measures undertaken by regional governments.

Addressing the IMF's International Monetary and Financial Committee (IMFC) meeting in Washington on Saturday, Suwaidi said prospects for global economic recovery has become better but cautioned of what he described as major risks. "As for the Middle East,

the region was acutely affected but is poised for a relatively speedy recovery, supported by public spending and a rebound in commodity prices. Those two factors could sustain activity in the near-term until the recovery in advanced economies takes hold," he said.

### **GCC meet to study joint development bank**

The 33rd Preparatory Meeting for GCC Ministries of Finance will begin today at the GCC Secretariat in Riyadh to set the agenda for the 84th Meeting of GCC Financial and Economic Cooperation Commission.

The preparatory meeting will discuss Supreme Council resolutions on economic affairs of the Qatar Vision to activate the GCC council, the economic aspect of the Qatar Vision, requirements of the GCC Customs Union and joint investment in all sectors, particularly in education and health. It will also explore the establishment of a joint development bank.

### **GCC states to be connected by railway**

Municipal officials held a workshop on Tuesday during which they reviewed the Korean experience in railway construction and designing as part of their planning efforts for the planned GCC network.

Saad Al-Muhailbi, the head of the Kuwaiti Municipality's department of structural planning, said in a statement that according to the plans, the regional network will link Kuwait City with Al-Dammam in Saudi Arabia, the Bahraini capital Manama, the Qatari capital Doha, the UAE capital Abu Dhabi and the Omani capital Muscat. This regional project will require highly-equipped trains for the transportation of passengers and cargo, he said. Al-Muhailbi revealed that the projected cost for the GCC railway venture is estimated at \$ 11 billion, with Kuwait contributing \$ 880 million of that sum.

## **YEMEN**

### **Yemeni Shia rebels want 1,000 prisoners freed**

A spokesman for Shia Zaidi rebels in north Yemen yesterday demanded that the government keep its promises and free 1,000 captured militants.

"We have nearly a thousand men being held by the authorities, and none has yet been released. We call on the authorities to free them immediately," Mohammed Abdelsalam said in Dubai. He said the dozens of people already freed had nothing to do with the rebellion, but at the same time he welcomed their release "a positive move."

### **Saudis held briefly by Yemeni rebels**

Rebels have kidnapped a Yemeni man in the country's north and also briefly held a group of Saudi citizens, the government said, incidents that threaten a fragile truce with Sanaa.

The northern rebels seized the man in the Harf Sufyan district and took him to an unknown location, Yemeni security services said in a statement. A number of the rebels

held a group of Saudis captive for a few hours but then freed them, said the statement which was issued Friday.

Yemen's government agreed a truce with the rebels led by Abdel Malek Al-Houthi in February to halt the continual outbreaks of war since 2004 that have displaced 250,000 people. The cease-fire has largely held but unrest has risen in recent weeks, raising fears of greater instability in a country neighboring the world's biggest oil exporters and situated on a strategic shipping channel.

## **SAUDI ARABIA**

### **International Front**

#### **Qatari PM discusses issues of common interests with Saudi King**

Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassem Bin Jabr Al-Thani met on Monday with Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz.

According to Saudi Press Agency (SPA), the meeting tackled issues of common interests between the two countries. The meeting was attended by Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal and Saudi Deputy President of the National Guard Prince Meteb bin Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, in addition to Qatari Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Ali bin Abdullah Al-Mahmoud.

#### **Saudi King, Moussa discuss issues concerning the joint Arab work**

Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud received here yesterday Secretary General of the Arab League Mr. Amr Mousa and the accompanying delegation. During the audience, they discussed a number of issues concerning the joint Arab work. The audience was attended by a number of princes.

#### **Saudi Arabia, Belgium discuss issues of common interest**

A visiting Shoura Council delegation met yesterday with a number of advisors to the Belgian Ministry of Defense. During the meeting, they discussed issues of common interest and Saudi-Belgian relations.

### **Social Front**

#### **Armed forces ready for any aggression: Prince Khaled**

Prince Khaled Bin Sultan Bin Abdul Aziz, Assistant Minister of Defense and Aviation for Military Affairs says the Kingdom's armed forces are ready to deal with any aggression.

He said the armed forces, with the support of King Abdullah, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces and the Crown Prince, are undergoing continuous development. Addressing a banquet to honor the families of martyrs in the Northern Region, he said: "The armed forces have been making honorable

sacrifices to defend the cause of the Ummah. The field units in Tabuk have made history with their heroic participation in Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Kuwait and Somalia.”

### **Drug-related crimes on the rise in Saudi Arabia, warns study**

A study carried out by the Anti-Drug Administration at the Ministry of Interior has warned about the likelihood of a surge in drug crimes in the Kingdom, by nine percent annually until the year 2012, unless serious efforts are made to curb this phenomenon.

The study showed that there are 90,300 drug peddlers in the Kingdom. Of these, 59,600 are Saudis. It indicated that the number of people implicated in drug trafficking has risen to 20,300. A total of 270,000 people have been addicted to drugs over the past 25 years. The research has revealed that 34 percent of peddlers, smugglers and drug users are unemployed. According to the study, hashish tops the list of the natural drugs used in the Kingdom, while Captagon occupied the top position in the list of chemical drugs. The study stressed the importance of directing education and media institutions, as well as the Khateeb of mosques, to focus on the role of families in helping their children to understand the dangers of drugs and to instill Islamic values in their minds.

### **'Many' education officials hold unrecognized degrees: Saudi Ministry**

The Education Ministry has revealed that many of its officials hold degrees from universities not recognized by the Kingdom – mostly from institutions in Sudan, Jordan, Egypt and Yemen.

This revelation comes in the wake of a senior official being investigated for having a doctorate degree from Al-Nilain University in Khartoum, Sudan. The Kingdom does not recognize this university. It is also alleged that the official did not attend the university at all.

Dr. Tenaideh Bin Awwadah Al-Faidi, Director General of Education in Madina, disclosed that his department has uncovered many staff members in administrative and educational posts who hold unrecognized degrees and certificates.

### **Economic Front**

#### **Prince Naif launches a number of the projects and programs in the field of monitoring food and drug**

On behalf of Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz, Deputy Premier, Minister of Defense and Aviation and Inspector General, Prince Naif bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Second Deputy Premier and Minister of Interior, chaired here yesterday a meeting of the board of directors of the Saudi Food and Drug Authority.

Prince Naif highlighted the importance of the role of the authority and hailed Saudi leaders' care for the health of citizens. The meeting discussed items on the meeting's agenda concerning the work of the authority. Meanwhile, Prince Naif launched a number of the projects and programs of the authority in the field of monitoring food and drug.

### **KSA-New Zealand trade volume over \$ 530m**

The Kingdom now represents the largest market in the Middle East and Gulf for New Zealand exports, Saudi Ambassador to New Zealand and Australia Hasan Tal'at Nazer, has said. The trade exchange between the two countries amounted to more than \$ 530 million in 2009 which constituted 25 percent of the total trade between New Zealand and Gulf countries.

Ahead of the Saudi-New Zealand ministerial committee meeting in Riyadh on Saturday, the ambassador said the meeting will further strengthen the friendly bilateral relations and commercial cooperation between the two countries.

### **Saudi Kingdom maintains growth despite global crisis**

The world's oil consumption is to grow by 1.1 million barrels per day (bpd), reaching 85.2 million bpd in 2010. This should in turn profit the private sector, according to the World Information Administration, which has forecast the oil consumption growth rate.

One of the countries maintaining progress in its economic growth despite the unprecedented global financial and economic turmoil, is Saudi Arabia. However, one long-term risk Saudi Arabia's economic growth faces is its overdependence on oil, especially as its real GDP is dependent on fluctuation of oil prices. Oil revenues account for 80 percent of the Kingdom's economy, according to a statement by Khalid Al-Falih, CEO and president of Saudi Aramco at the 11th annual MIT meeting on Friday. Therefore, diversification and private investment are essential to avoid any negative spillovers into other sectors.

### **Saudi Arabia to develop coastal transport to boost tourism**

Saudi Arabia has come a long way in the transportation sector, which the Kingdom has been developing continuously, according to Abdur Rahman Abumilha, undersecretary in the ministry of transport, who inaugurated the Second Autocare Arabia, and Freight Logistics Arabia exhibition - ATA '10 - at the Jeddah Center for Forums & Events on Sunday.

“Right now we are doing a study in the main cities in the Kingdom concerning all aspects of transportation, which includes railways, and buses,” Abumilha said. He added that for the first time, coastal transportation will be developed, which will help boost domestic tourism. Abumilha said exhibitions such as the present one help improve and develop the Saudi market. They give a fillip to the national industry, and provide an opportunity for technological transfer.

### **GE, Saudi Arabia in deal to fuel Kingdom's sustainable growth**

Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Commerce & Industry and General Electric Company (GE), announced on Wednesday a strategic partnership aimed at building a sustainable economy through a focus on industrialization, research and education, and creating new jobs for Saudi nationals.

The partnership marks GE's 'company to country' approach in Saudi Arabia to become a trusted partner in the Kingdom's developmental goals, the company said in a statement. Further strengthening its 70-year relationship with the Kingdom, GE signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Commerce & Industry at the US-Saudi Business Opportunities Forum, held in Chicago to highlight the economic collaboration between Saudi Arabia and the United States.

### **Current oil prices sustainable: Al-Naimi**

Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources Ali Al-Naimi warned on Wednesday that politically motivated policies in major oil consuming countries to reduce oil imports or push new forms of energy could put the world's energy security at risk.

The minister added that he thinks today's oil prices are at "more sustainable levels". He also repeated his support for current prices, which, at nearly \$ 83 a barrel, are slightly above the \$ 70-\$ 80 band that he has said is ideal for producers and consumers. "The worst financial and economic crisis in decades is slowly fading and the world is entering a new growth trajectory," Al-Naimi said.

## **UAE**

### **International Front**

#### **UAE calls again on Iran to end islands 'occupation'**

The foreign minister of the United Arab Emirates refused to back down in the face of Iranian anger and repeated on Sunday his call for Tehran to end its "occupation" of three islands in the Gulf.

Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahayan, on a visit to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, again called Iran's hold on Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs an occupation that was hindering the non-Arab, Muslim power's relations with all its Arab neighbors.

"The UAE's position is one of hope that the Iranian side will end this dispute peacefully and calmly. We hope the Iranian side will look at this dispute and the occupation not only as an obstacle to improving relations between our two countries but also as an obstacle to Iran's relations with Arab states. For the sake of everybody, we hope this issue will be resolved peacefully and as soon as possible." Sheikh Abdullah told Reuters after his meeting with Abbas.

#### **UAE keen to join forces with UN rights body: Khalifa**

The President, His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, affirmed on Sunday the UAE's keenness to cooperate with the UN High Commission for Human Rights out of its respect for international laws and legislations and its firm belief in principles of Islamic Shariah, as well as Arab values and traditions which exhort respect and esteem of human being and equality among members of the community.

Shaikh Khalifa said the UAE is cooperating with the UN organisations to attain stability, prosperity and welfare to all countries and peoples of the world. The President made his remarks as he received on Sunday, at Al Bateen Palace, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, who is on a two-day trip to the UAE as part of a 10-day visit to all six GCC member states.

### **UAE only country in region to pass law to give workers a better deal: Clinton**

Former US President Bill Clinton hailed the progress made by the UAE in protecting the rights of expatriate workers, empowering women as well as clean energy and environmental protection.

Speaking on the situation in the Middle East in an interview with ABC News on April 18, Clinton said the UAE “is the only country with huge amounts of imported workers that’s actually passed legislation to give these immigrant workers a better deal in the Middle East”. “They’ve got women in the government. They have a joint public-private decision making process. The UAE wins the international competition for the clean energy agency. And they’re going to build a carbon-neutral city in the UAE,” he said.

### **Khalifa bin Zayed, Mubarak discuss ways to further enhance relations**

President His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan telephoned yesterday President Mohammed Hosni Mubarak of Egypt.

The two leaders discussed ways to further enhance brotherly relations between the two countries, as well as current regional and international development and issues of mutual interest. Sheikh Khalifa wished President Mubarak good health. He also wished further progress and prosperity to the people of Egypt.

## **Social Front**

### **UAE committed to protecting workers' rights**

The UAE is committed to protecting workers’ rights and providing a work environment that enables workers to discharge their duties in a better way, a senior official has affirmed.

In a statement marking the International Labour Day which falls on May 1, Jasim Jamil, Director of Guidance and Acting Director of Work Relations, Ministry of Labour, called on employers to commit themselves to these principles as workers are a fundamental asset of their firms.

He said the Ministry of Labour will start its activities on Saturday to mark the Labour Day under the theme ‘Workers Are our Partners in Development’. “The celebration of this important world labour occasion sends out a strong message from the state, government and community by all its forces to the workers about the ethical and principal commitment to safeguard rights of workers,” he added.

### **Mohammed to make UAE among the best by 2021**

His Highness Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, reiterated the resolve to make the UAE one of the best countries in the world by 2021.

“We are determined to fulfil that obligation,” he said while presiding over a meeting at the Centre of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Community Welfare in Umm Al Quwain. The meeting reviewed a number of national issues related to achieving balanced development in the UAE in economic, education and health sectors. Infrastructure, houses and the other basics for creating a decent life for Emiratis were also discussed.

Shaikh Mohammed underlined his determination to achieve the UAE vision 2021 and realising the commitment from the Government to the President and the people of the UAE. “Achieving this national goal expresses the Cabinet’s pledge to the President, His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan and the dear people of the UAE,” he said. “We are determined to deliver on this pledge.”

### **UAE ministry sets up panel to fight human trafficking**

An anti-human trafficking panel has been set up by the Ministry of Interior, Brig. Ahmed Mohammed Nakhaira Al Muharrami, Director of Human Rights Department at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, said.

The panel will update the legislative bodies regarding human trafficking crimes at the internal and external levels. It will also coordinate with the competent authorities to launch awareness over the human trafficking crimes. The panel will coordinate with the centres sheltering the victims to ensure they are more protected.

### **Economy Front**

#### **Resolution issued to establish bureau for financial policies and budgeting**

General Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces and Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Executive Council, has issued resolution No. 24 for 2010 on the establishment of the Financial Policies and Budget in Abu Dhabi.

According to the resolution, the bureau shall report to the Crown Prince and Chairman of the Executive Council. The resolution named Dr Ahmed Mubarak Al Mazrouei as Chairman of the bureau. Hamad Al Hurr Al Suwaidi and Riyad Abdul Rahman Al Mubarak, were also named as members. The bureau is mandated to oversee all matters pertaining to the financial policies and the general budget of the government entities, including those affiliated to the Crown Prince. It shall act as a conduit between the Department of finance and the Executive Council. The bureau shall submit findings of studies and recommendations to the Executive Council for its approval. The bureau’s duties include studying, discussing and proposing financial policy and general budget for the emirate of Abu Dhabi.

#### **UAE introduces e-payment service to boost economy**

The UAE introduces e-Payment service for the Gulf Certificates of Origin with the aim to boost the national economy.

“This is among many procedures to be implemented soon to contribute to enhance the national economy, while offering an attractive environment for foreign investors in the UAE,” the UAE Minister of Economy Sultan bin Saeed Al Mansouri said in a statement on Saturday.

### **UAE bank's gains fall 12 per cent**

Emirates NBD, the UAE's third-largest bank by market value, reported a 12 per cent fall in net profit, less than analysts had expected, after booking an increased provision against bad debts.

The bank said yesterday the first quarter result reflected the "early signs of stability, increased economic activity and improved consumer sentiment and business confidence in the UAE". Analysts' average first-quarter net profit forecast was for 617m dirhams. Total deposits rose 5.6pc during the quarter, while lending slowed down 1.2pc.

### **Mansouri lowers growth forecast for 2010 to 2.5pc**

The UAE Economy Minister Sultan bin Saeed Al Mansouri lowered the country's economic growth forecast for 2010 to 2.5 per cent from 3.2 per cent, and said inflation is seen at 2 per cent.

Last month, Mansouri forecast 3.2 per cent growth for this year. “Up to 2.5 per cent GDP growth in 2010 depending on oil prices,” the minister told reporters, when asked about this year's growth.

“Definitely this is a positive supporting element to reinforce our performance in terms of the GDP,” he said, adding: “I'm very positive oil prices will give the UAE a push to utilise these revenues to inject into infrastructure and revitalise the economy,” the minister said when asked about oil prices.

### **Oman-UAE power pact signing today**

The government of the Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) will sign today in Abu Dhabi an agreement for electrical as part of the GCC power grid. The two sides will also sign technical agreements for the exchange of energy between the respective companies and authorities in both countries to benefit from the linkage project.

The first stage of the project was launched during the last GCC Summit, with Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Saudi Arabia as signatories. The third phase of the GCC Electrical Linkage Project (the Power Grid) is expected to be implemented in the second half of 2011.

### **Braka marked site for first Nuclear power units**

The Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation has identified Braka, near Ruwais in the western region of Abu Dhabi, as the preferred site for the first N-power station in the

UAE. The power station will comprise four 1,400 megawatt plants for which a Korean consortium led by Korea Electric Power Corporation (KEPCO) has already been awarded a Dh75-billion contract.

The Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation (ENEC) officials told a news conference here on Thursday they had already applied to the Federal Authority for Nuclear Regulation (FANR) for licence to start preliminary construction at the site by the Arabian Gulf.

## **KUWAIT**

### **International Front**

#### **Kuwaiti Amir's Europe tour major drive for bilateral relations**

The forthcoming official European tour by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, which will take him to Germany, Italy, and the Vatican is a major event in the development of bilateral relations between Kuwait and these nations in all fields.

The tour is scheduled to begin tomorrow with the first stop being a visit to Germany lasting several days, during which HH the Amir is to hold official talks with senior officials. Editor in Chief of Awan paper Dr Mohammad Al-Rumaihi told KUNA that HH the Amir always shows enthusiasm for bolstering the state's relations with other nations through such tours and visits. In Germany, with which Kuwait has a high level of political, economic, media, and cultural relations, HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad's visit will further enhance the already-strong relations, said Dr. Rumaihi.

#### **Kuwait, Serbia discuss military cooperation**

Military expertise and a specialist military hospital are two of the main subjects on which Serbia would like to reach agreement with Kuwait, revealed the visiting Serbian Defense Minister Dragan Sutanovac yesterday. Talking exclusively with the Kuwait Times following a meeting with several high-ranking Kuwaiti government officials, Sutanovac said, "We virtually signed minute's agreements, but in a few months' time, the Kuwaiti defense minister will visit Serbia to sign the formal cooperation agreement we recently discussed.

The defense agreement will include cooperation on military academy and establishing specialist military hospitals. "We have the most famous military academy in the Balkans," the minister enthused. "In fact our oldest military academy is 160 years old. We can help train and educate Kuwaiti military officers when we have these agreements. It's an excellent opportunity for the Kuwaiti army.

#### **Kuwait, Germany sign cooperation agreements**

Kuwait and Germany signed cooperation agreements on sidelines of His Highness Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's visit to Berlin on Monday, with attendance

of Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.

Kuwait Foreign Undersecretary Khaled Al-Jarallah signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on bilateral cooperation with German Secretary of State at the German Federal Foreign Affairs Ministry Dr. Wolf-Ruthart Born.

### **'Kuwait, GCC states closely coordinate against external threats'**

Kuwait and the other member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have been closely coordinating in face of terrorism, possible nuclear threats and external aggression, the Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister has affirmed.

Sheikh Dr. Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, also the Foreign Minister of Gulf State, shed light on the challenges and opportunities of the GCC in the next half century in a seminar he gave at the Middle East Institute here Thursday evening, entitled "The GCC in a Turbulent World." Sheikh Dr. Mohammed indicated that since its inception, the "first direct existential threat to the GCC" came as a result of the 1990 Iraqi aggression against Kuwait. "I am truly proud of the way the GCC exercised its collective security measures, in conjunction with its allies, principally the U.S., to restore and preserve its member states sovereignty and territorial integrity," he said.

### **Iraq asks Kuwait to drop legal action against airline**

Iraq called on Kuwait on Thursday to halt legal action against Iraqi Airways following Kuwaiti attempts to seize one of the carrier's planes in London in the latest row between the neighbouring countries.

A lawyer for the Kuwaiti authorities obtained a British High Court order to prevent the director general of Iraqi Airways, who is currently in London, from travelling and seized his passport, Iraq's transport ministry said in a statement.

Baghdad and Kuwait have been locked in a long-running dispute over billions of dollars in reparations from Iraq, including about \$ 1.2 billion related to aircraft and parts that were seized during former dictator Saddam Hussein's 1990-91 invasion to Kuwait. The dispute is between Kuwait Airways Corp and Iraqi Airways, both of which are state owned.

### **Kuwait signs consular agreement with Iran**

Iran and Kuwait have signed a consular cooperation agreement covering a wide range of issues, including trade, maritime and criminal matters. Iranian and Kuwaiti delegations reached the deal during three days of talks, which ended in the Iranian capital Tehran on Tuesday. In the agreement, the two sides pledged to assist each other in judicial matters such as prisoner transfers and consular access for detainees of the other nationality.

They also agreed to make it easier for Iranian and Kuwaiti nationals in general and businesspeople in particular to obtain visas from the neighboring state. The possibility of

lifting visa requirements for diplomats and government personnel of the other side was also discussed.

### **Kuwait Amir urges Iran to fully cooperate with IAEA**

His Highness the visiting Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah called on Iran to fully work with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and to gain the confidence of the international community.

Exclusively interviewed by Monday's German daily "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" on the occasion of his current visit to Germany, the Amir said: "Iran, just like other countries, has the right to obtain and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. But, this right should be exercised in line with IAEA conditions and regulations."

"Therefore, while using this legitimate right, Iran is required to fully cooperate with the IAEA, to gain the confidence of the international community and to show more cooperation with concerned countries through serious and flexible dialogue with a view to fending off potential risks," he said. He went on to say: "The Gulf countries want neither a nuclear Iran nor an attack on Iran."

### **Kuwait complains about desecration of cemetery**

Acting on behalf of the Arab Group, Kuwait complained to the international community about Israel's desecration of the Maman Allah (Mamilla) Cemetery in Jerusalem on Thursday. They called for urgent action and warned that such action may further the tension and religious sensitivity in the region.

Kuwaiti Ambassador to the UN, Mansour Al-Otaibi, sent identical letters to Secretary General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon, General Assembly President Ali Treki and Security Council President Yukio Takasu of Japan to draw their attention to the "serious matter" which is of "critical importance" to the group.

The Arab Group calls upon Your Excellency to give this matter urgent attention. The international community must denounce the desecration of the Maman Allah Cemetery, must undertake all efforts to compel Israel to suspend completely its illegal and provocative actions in this regard and halt all construction in the cemetery, and to undertake efforts to properly, with utmost sensitivity and conscience, redress the matter in order to preserve and protect this historic, religious site of great importance to Palestinian Arab and Muslim heritage," Otaibi said in his letters.

### **Social Front**

#### **Parliament has stalled development: Kuwait Emir**

The Emir of Kuwait has launched an unprecedented attack on parliament, accusing it of stalling development and blaming the constitution for lingering political turmoil.

"Parliament has disappointed the aspirations of the Kuwaiti people," H H Sheikh Sabah

Al Ahmad Al Sabah told German newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung in an interview published yesterday and cited by the Kuwaiti news agency KUNA.

The Emir is in Germany at the start of a European tour that will also include Italy and the Vatican. "It (parliament) has wasted a golden opportunity and a long time discussing issues totally far away from development projects," the Emir said.

### **Kuwaiti women urge govt to implement gender equality**

Kuwaiti women have called on the parliament and government to treat them equally to their male compatriots in accordance with the country's constitution.

Interviewed by the Kuwait Times, the women insisted that there should be more equality between male and female Kuwaiti citizens. "We are all the children of this country, and there should be equality between the Kuwaiti men and Kuwaiti women at least," one citizen Fayza Ahmed told the Kuwait Times. "I am married to an Egyptian man, and am mother to six children and my husband works here in Kuwait," she explained. "The problem is that we are renting an apartment in a building in Salmiya, I think it's my right to have a house from the government.

Kuwaiti women have previously demanded equal rights in housing and other issues. Four female MPs succeeded in the last parliamentary elections after beating male candidates to become Kuwait's first female parliamentarians. One factor that helped their victory was by obtaining a majority of female voters voting for them. One of the main issues that Kuwaiti women are pushing for is for the parliament to endorse amendments to the existing Personal Status Law, which they believe does not grant them the same rights enjoyed by their male compatriots. The Kuwaiti government is compelled to provide housing care for all its male citizens, but single Kuwaiti women and Kuwaiti widows, as well as Kuwaiti women married to non-Kuwaitis are currently deprived of this right.

### **Kuwaiti bedoons demand civil rights, new resolution**

A number of MPs and political activists urged the Kuwaiti government to resolve the problem regarding the so-called bedoon the stateless population of Kuwait.

The demands were made during a rally on Friday evening in Sulaibiyah, a predominantly bedoon area. The gathering, organized by the Stateless Committee (KSC), was made after the government decided to forward the issue of bedoons to the Higher Planning Council (HPC) for study. According to government statistics, there are about 90,000 bedoons in Kuwait. In a recently published report, the Human Rights Watch accused the Kuwaiti government of limiting the rights of bedoons to obtain essential documents such as passports, birth, marriage and death certificates. According to international organizations, this compromises the bedoons' right to proper education, medical insurance and freedom of travel.

We've organized this rally to deliver our voices to the members of the HPC who are currently looking into the issue," said Abdullah Fairouz, the chairman of the legal

committee at KSC. The committee formulated a list of recommendations for the HPC members to take into consideration while looking into the bedoon issue.

## **Economy Front**

### **Syrian, Kuwaiti officials discuss joint investments**

Syrian officials hailed increase of investment cooperation with Kuwait and affirmed keenness on offering various facilities for the Kuwaiti entrepreneurs in various sectors namely energy.

Syrian Oil Minister Sufian Allaw, in a statement to KUNA following a meeting with a delegation that grouped officials of the Public Investment Authority and Kuwaiti Petroleum Corporation, said the talks dealt with prospected investments in oil and gas drilling, exploration, building refineries and fuel stations.

The Kuwaiti officials spoke during the meeting about the Gulf state experience in building oil refineries in many countries, Allaw said. "We welcome the arrival of Kuwaiti companies for investment in the oil sector for there are potentials in drilling, exploration, and development of old fields with modern technology," he added.

### **Oil price not hampering global recovery, says Kuwait**

Kuwait Oil Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Sabah said on Monday that current oil prices of \$ 75 to \$ 85 a barrel do not hamper the global economic recovery. "So far in 2010, we have witnessed a stable level of oil prices at between \$ 75 and \$ 85 a barrel," the minister told the opening session of the 18th Middle East Petroleum and Gas Conference "This price will not create hurdles for the world economic recovery," said Sheikh Ahmad.

The Kuwaiti minister, whose country is OPEC's fourth largest exporter, said OPEC will step in to raise output if oil prices soar above \$ 100 a barrel. Sheikh Ahmad said Kuwait will continue to invest in crude capacity increases to reach its target of four million barrels per day by 2020. "Our current production capacity is 3.1 million bpd and if compared with our quota of about 2.2 million bpd, it means we have a capacity surplus of around one million bpd," he said.

### **Kuwait to launch investment projects in Syria**

Kuwaiti Finance Minister Mustafa Al-Shimali said on Friday Kuwait is on the verge of implementing a number of investment projects in Syria to embody the distinguished relations between the two countries and peoples.

This came in a statement to Kuwait News Agency at the conclusion of a two-day visit to Syria during which he held talks with Prime Minister Muhammad Naji Al-Otari and Ministers of Finance Mohammad al-Hussein and Tourism Saadallah Agha. He added that during his meeting with the Syrian Premier, many topics related to investment activity in Syria and Kuwait were discussed, in addition to progress of some projects implemented by the State of Kuwait in Syria.

### **Kuwait crude oil exports to China jump 26%**

Kuwait's crude oil exports to China jumped 26.4 percent in March from a year earlier to 945,100 tons, equivalent to around 224, 000 barrels per day (bpd), the latest official data indicated.

Kuwait provided 4.5 percent of China's total crude oil imports, compared with 4.6 percent in the same month of last year and 2.1 percent in February, according to the General Administration of Customs. For the first quarter of 2010, Kuwait, OPEC's fourth largest exporter, shipped 2.09 million tons (170, 000 bpd), up 32.1 percent from the January-March period last year. China's overall imports of crude oil surged 28.9 percent year-on-year to 21.06 million tons (4.98 million bpd) in March, just short of December's all-time high of 21.26 million tons (5.03 million bpd).

## **OMAN**

### **International Front**

#### **UAE, Oman sign agreement to link power grids**

The UAE and Oman have signed an agreement for linking their electric power grids, which will enable them to exchange electric power in time of need.

The landmark agreement was signed by Mohammed bin Dha'en Al Hamili, UAE Minister of Energy and Chairman of Federal Electricity and Water Authority (FEWA), and Ahmed Abdul Nabi Mekki, Omani Minister of Economy and Chairman of Council for Economic Affairs and Energy Resources. The agreement, which followed a memorandum of understanding on electricity, will allow both countries to exchange power resources to fuel socio-economic development by linking their electricity grids.

#### **Oman, UK review bilateral cooperation**

Sayyid Ali bin Hamoud Al Busaidi, minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, received here yesterday Baroness Helene Valerie Hayman, speaker of the British House of Lords, and the delegation accompanying her.

They reviewed cooperation between the two countries in various fields. The meeting was attended by Dr Yahya bin Mahfoudh Al Mantheri, chairman of the State Council

#### **Oman-WHO co-operation discussed**

Sayyid Ali bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court received here yesterday Dr Hussein Abdel Razzak Al Gezairy, Regional Director of the World Health Organization (WHO) for the Eastern Mediterranean. Al Gezairy was received by Ahmed bin Abdulnabi Macki, National Economy Minister and Deputy Chairman of the Financial Affairs and Energy Resources Council.

#### **Pillay hails the Sultan's stance on human rights**

On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq al Said, received here yesterday Navanethem Pillay, the High Commissioner for Human Rights,

who is currently visiting the Sultanate. HH Sayyid Shihab welcomed the High Commissioner, wishing her a successful visit and a pleasant stay. The meeting reviewed co-operation between the Sultanate and the Commission.

The Commissioner expressed her delight to visit Oman and commended the Sultanate's comprehensive renaissance. She expressed her appreciation for His Majesty the Sultan's stance on human rights, as well as the Sultanate's government's efforts in the field. In this respect, she cited the Royal decree establishing an independent human rights commission which, she said, is an important step to enhance the Sultanate's image locally and globally.

### **Oman-Iran parliamentary co-operation discussed**

Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Isa'ee, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura, received here yesterday a delegation from the Iranian Shura Council currently visiting the Sultanate to take part in the Omani-Iranian Parliamentary Friendship Group.

Al Isa'ee commended the keenness of the positive role of the Sultanate and Iran in promoting peace and stability in the region. He also highlighted the importance of parliamentary friendship committees, saying that the Sultanate and Iran share good relations as neighbours.

Al Isa'ee pointed out there are good opportunities for the two countries to enhance co-operation in food security and exporting of products and that the private sectors in both countries have a greater role to play in this respect. On his turn, the Iranian guest expressed his delight to visit Oman for the third time, stressing the deep-rooted Islamic ties between Iran and the Sultanate.

### **Economy Front**

#### **Port Sultan Qaboos cargo volumes rise 20pc in Q1**

Cargo volumes handled at Port Sultan Qaboos jumped nearly 20 per cent during the first quarter of this year, underlining a healthy uptrend in economic activity in the Sultanate, the chairman of the Port Services Corporation (PSC), which operates and manages the port, said in the chairman's report for the quarter. Around 2.678 million Freight Registered Tons (FRT) of cargo were handled at the country's main commercial gateway during the January-March period, compared to 2.242 million FRT during the same period last year.

#### **Oman's economic forum to discuss 5-year plan**

The second Omani Economic Forum kicked off yesterday under the patronage of the Minister of National Economy and Deputy Chairman of the Financial Affairs and Energy Resources, Ahmed Bin Abdunabi Macki. This year's Oman Economic Forum is organized by Al-Iktissad Wal-Aamal Group and The Ministry of Trade and Industry in cooperation with the Capital Market Authority and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The Forum will focus on all aspects of Oman's economic vision and the topics up for discussion include the government's five-year economic plan, developing infrastructure, financing requirements and the role of banks and financial markets, and the future of the industrial sector.

### **Oman IT show displays latest trends in technology**

At a high-profile ceremony here on Monday, senior royal family member Sayyid Shihab bin Tareq Al Said inaugurated 'Comex 2010', the country's top IT, telecom and technology show, in the presence of a large gathering of dignitaries from the government and private sectors.

Boasting many new activities this year, the annual event showcases the latest trends in technology, hardware, software, gadgets and consumer electronics for end users. The highlight of the five-day event includes an 'e.oman' pavilion comprising the official eGovernment Services Portal, Oman Government Network, ePayment Gateway, National Data Centre, Innovation and Support Centre, eTransactions Law, National IT Training and Awareness, Oman National CERT, and the e.oman Awareness Campaign.

### **Oman to conduct study prior to food security strategy**

Oman has appointed an international consultancy firm to assist it to conduct a study ahead of preparing a food security strategy for the country, Commerce and Industry Minister Maqbool bin Ali Sultan has revealed. He said the study would identify the short and long term objectives of the proposed strategy. He was making a keynote speech, titled 'Oman's Food Security Strategy', on the second and final day of the 2nd Oman Economic Forum here on Monday.

## **BAHRAIN**

### **International Front**

#### **Bahrain-Morocco boost ties.**

His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Deputy Supreme Commander yesterday attributed the strength of the Bahraini Moroccan relations to the dedication and wisdom of the two brotherly countries.

"The solidity of the deep-rooted Bahrain-Moroccan relations, founded by our ancestors, consolidated by the subsequent generations and strengthened by His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa along with his brother Mohammed VI, pave the way for exemplary bilateral cooperation, especially at the military level," HRH Crown Prince said during the meeting, highlighting the importance of such brotherly visits in boosting and strengthening bilateral ties.

#### **Bahrain PM, Al Hariri discuss ways of boosting bilateral relations**

His Royal Highness Prime Minister Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa discussed over the phone today with his Lebanese counterpart Sa'ad Al Hariri ways of boosting bilateral brotherly relations and cooperation in various fields. Both sides also discussed ways of

promoting bilateral coordination at international gatherings as well as regional and international issues of common interest.

### **Mideast peace is vital: Bahrain Crown Prince**

HRH the Crown Prince yesterday stressed Bahrain's support for all efforts seeking a peaceful and just settlement to the Palestinian issue.

"The resolution of the Palestinian issue will contribute, to a great extent, to ensuring political stability and consolidating security in the region," he said as he received at Riffa Palace a US Council on Foreign Relations delegation.

### **Bahrain CP hails US role in ME and GCC**

The solid friendship between Bahrain and the US is based on institutional co-operation for the common interest of both countries and for the sake of securing peace in the region as outlined by His Majesty who is keen to safeguard high-level relations with subsequent US administrations, HRH the Crown Prince yesterday said.

This came as he received the US Central Command Commander and his delegation. He said co-ordination in defence and development is necessary to strengthen relations. Both sides discussed the situation in Iraq, stressing the need to help it regain its stability, security and role as a key regional partner.

### **Bahraini PM hails strong relations with Jordan**

HIS Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince and Deputy Supreme Commander, yesterday said common features shared between Bahrain and Jordan are principles linking their leaderships and peoples which define their solid relations.

"We are confident that the brotherly relations, anchored by His Majesty and his brother King Abdullah, are successful," he said as he received at Al Riffa Palace the Jordanian Premier and Defence Minister.

### **Bahrain-Jordan ties boosted**

Bahrain and Jordan expressed their keenness to boost bilateral trade during official talks held yesterday. It was chaired by His Royal Highness the Prime Minister Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa and his Jordanian counterpart Samir Zeid Al Riffae.

They agreed to activate the role of the Supreme Bahraini-Jordanian Joint Committee, implement bilateral accords, exchange views on ways of benefiting from the FTA with the US and consolidate co-operation in the fields of power, renewable and nuclear energy.

### **Social Front**

**Constitution of Bahrain 'is sovereign', government says**

Constitutional amendments can only take place if the concerned article does not keep pace with changes any longer, the government has said. Due to its sovereign aspect, the Constitution cannot be a target for amendments whenever an event occurs, however immense it may be, it said in reply to changes proposed by parliament. Under the amendments, the National Assembly will be chaired by parliament chairman instead of Shura Council chairman and draft laws will be referred to the government through parliament.

### **Bahrain marriage orientation course to check divorce rate**

Activists in Bahrain have called upon the government to make the marriage orientation course compulsory for all couples who want to tie the knot. The calls have been made after official statistics revealed that 20 per cent of marriages in Bahrain ended in divorce.

A member of the Family Development Centre at the Bahrain Women Development Society, Dr Sumaya Al Jowder, told Khaleej Times on Monday that the course is the need of the hour to check divorce rate in Bahrain. According to statistics of the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs, out of 5,000 marriages in Bahrain annually 1,000 ended in divorce.

### **Bahraini MPs appeal to reinstate unionists**

MPs yesterday demanded that all suspended unionists are reinstated in their jobs immediately. They said that it was shameful for a country like Bahrain, which celebrates Labour Day annually, to have employees suspended just because they demanded better working environments and privileges.

Al Asala bloc, who is behind the proposal, questioned companies' actions saying that they were a clear breach of the country's Constitution and legislations.

### **Ruling on minimum wage is slammed in Bahrain**

A human rights campaigner yesterday slammed the government's decision to rule out the introduction of a minimum wage for foreign workers.

Migrant Workers Protection Society chairwoman Mona Almoayyed rejected the government's claims that a minimum wage would undermine the country's economy, saying it is stealing the rights of the labourers. She said improving the salaries of migrant workers was crucial to the society because without it expats are being exploited into giving up their basic human rights.

"If we go back to the basics of any civilised society then we will know that protecting the rights of the weak is important," said Ms Almoayyed. "But what's happening here is that the weak are being preyed on, unprotected and exploited because there are no restrictions on the wages.

## **Economy Front**

### **Bahrain signs deals to avoid double taxation**

Bahrain has signed a number of agreements and a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Bermuda, Seychelles and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). Finance Minister Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Khalifa signed them with Bermuda's Minister of Labour, Home Affairs and Housing David A Burch, Seychelles Finance Minister Danny Faure and World Bank managing director Juan Daboub, during a visit to the US.

A deal to avoid double taxation and prevent evasion of income tax and an MoU on economic, trade and technical co-operation were signed with Bermuda. According to the MoU, both sides will seek to develop and strengthen co-operation in financial and professional services, trade, industry, construction, agriculture, transport, telecommunications, education, tourism and investment.

### **Trade law reforms paying dividends: Bahraini minister**

Streamlined measures play an important role in boosting trade activities in Bahrain. "Laws are crucial to regulate the trade sector, ensure flexible transactions and procedures," Industry and Commerce Minister Dr Hassan Fakhro said yesterday.

He raised the issues as he chaired a meeting with Economic Development Board (EDB) chief executive for operations Kamal Ahmed.

### **Bahrain planning solar energy push**

The cost of powering Bahrain will not increase because the country is moving towards renewable sources, it was revealed said yesterday. It costs roughly BD10 million (\$ 26.5m) to produce a megawatt from wind, solar power or gas, said Oil and Gas Affairs Minister and National Oil and Gas Authority (Noga) chairman Dr Abdulhussain Mirza.

The GDN reported on Monday that two hybrid plants were being built to produce renewable energy. They will each cost BD8m to BD10m, but Dr Mirza said the investment was worth it. "A study has been done in Bahrain over the last year and a Japanese company installed machinery at Bapco to measure wind velocity to see if it is suitable to produce electricity and the results are extremely encouraging," he said.

### **Bahrain ideal for green energy**

Bahrain is the best placed country in the Gulf to harness the power of renewable energy, according to one of the country's top scientists. Wind and solar power could be the perfect solutions to Bahrain's long-term energy needs, Bahrain University applied physics professor Dr Waheeb Alnaser said on the sidelines of a conference in Manama yesterday.

He revealed that every square metre of sunlight in Bahrain contains the same energy as 1.1 barrels of oil. However, Dr Alnaser said more must be done to harness that power and called on the government and parliament to take action.

### **Bahrain leads GCC in adverts expenditure**

Bahrain has achieved the highest growth amongst the GCC countries in advertising expenditure for the first quarter of this year, reaching 43 per cent compared to last year, an expert has said.

Figures have increased from \$ 22 million to \$ 32m, said International Advertising Association (IAA) Bahrain Chapter president and World Council member Khamis Al Muqla. "This is a reflection of the increase by both the government and private sector," Mr Al Muqla said at an IAA business luncheon at Ritz-Carlton Bahrain Hotel and Spa.

## **QATAR**

### **International Front**

#### **Qatari PM discusses issues of common interests with Saudi King**

Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassem Bin Jabr Al-Thani met on Monday with Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz.

According to Saudi Press Agency (SPA), the meeting tackled issues of common interests between the two countries. The meeting was attended by Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal and Saudi Deputy President of the National Guard Prince Meteb bin Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, in addition to Qatari Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Ali bin Abdullah Al-Mahmoud.

#### **Qatar, Sudan sign labour pact**

Qatar and Sudan yesterday signed a supplement protocol of an agreement organising recruitment of Sudanese labourers in Qatar.

The protocol was signed by HE the Minister of Social Affairs and Acting Minister of Labour Nasser bin Abdullah al-Hemaidi, and Major General Elson Manani Maqaya, the Sudanese Minister of Labour, Public Service and Human Development. The ceremony was attended by Hussein al-Mullah, undersecretary of the labour ministry, Ibrahim Fakiri, the Sudanese Ambassador in Doha and senior ministry officials.

#### **Qatar, Algeria discuss military bilateral relations**

H.E. Chief of Staff of the Qatari Armed Forces Maj. Gen. Hamad bin Ali Al Attiyah met here on Sunday with Algerian Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Ahmed Qayid Saleh, currently visiting Qatar.

During the meeting they discussed bilateral relations and means of enhancing them especially in the military fields. The meeting was attended by several Qatari Armed Forces' senior officers and Algerian Ambassador to Qatar Abdul Fatah Zayani

#### **Qatar, France discuss bilateral relations**

HE the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor al-Thani with the visiting French Minister of Interior and Overseas Territories, Brice Hortefeux, yesterday. Talks dealt with bilateral relations and means of cementing them.

### **Qatar, US discuss bilateral co-operation**

HH the Deputy Emir and Heir Apparent Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, who is also the deputy commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces, yesterday received US Central Command chief Gen David Petraeus and the accompanying delegation on the occasion of their current visit to Qatar. Talks dealt with bilateral co-operation as well as a host of regional and international issues of mutual concern.

### **Qatar and Lebanon sign several accords**

Qatar and Lebanon signed several agreements on wide-ranging issues yesterday with a view to boosting bilateral relations following a meeting of the Qatari-Lebanese Higher Joint Committee held at the Government Palace here, chaired by HE the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor al-Thani and Lebanese Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri.

The agreements included, executive programmes, memoranda of understanding (MoUs) and draft agreements. An agreement on the promotion and reciprocal protection of investments between Qatar and Lebanon, signed by HE the Minister of State for International Co-operation and Acting Minister of Business and Trade Dr Khalid bin Mohamed al-Attiyah, and Minister of Economy and Trade of Lebanon Mohamed al-Safadi.

### **Diplomatic contacts underway to deter Israel: Qatari PM**

Visiting Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jasem Al-Thani condemned on Wednesday recurring Israeli threats against Lebanon and Syria.

Speaking at a news conference with his senior host, Lebanon's Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri, Sheikh Hamad said, "Israel should realize that military adventures will not be successful." He indicated that Qatar along with some Arab states held intensive contacts with international influential quarters to repulse possible Israeli attacks, "but we cannot guarantee what the current government in Israel might do."

### **Social Front**

#### **Reducing water cost big challenge: Attiyah**

The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Energy and Industry, H E Abdullah bin Hamad Al Attiyah, yesterday said Qatar was working on reducing the heavy cost of water desalination by developing cutting-edge technologies. How to reduce the cost of water desalination is one of the greatest challenges the country is facing, especially in view of the burgeoning demand for potable water, Al Attiyah said.

He was speaking to the media after the formal opening of the Global Water Sustainability Center (GWSC) at the Qatar Science & Technology Park. "Qatar is a country that heavily relies on desalinated water. The production cost of one cubic metre of desalinated water is one dollar. The huge money being spent by the government for water

desalination needs to be addressed properly, especially in view of the country's high rate of projected water demand for the coming years", the deputy premier said.

### **Qatar committed to fighting obesity**

Qatar is committed to combating high incidence of obesity, with at least 43 percent of children weighing above the normal range, according to H E Abdullah bin Khalid Al Qahtani, Minister of Public Health and General Secretary of the Supreme Council of Health.

### **Ministry gets strict on labour law violators in Qatar**

The Ministry of Labour will soon launch a massive crackdown on companies violating the provisions of the Labour Law, according to Al Sharq. Inspectors from the Ministry will conduct raids at the company premises as well as labour accommodations to check whether they comply with the provisions of the labour law.

The campaign follows the stringent regulations issued by the Ministry recently regarding recruitment of foreign workers. The drive will focus on vocational health and safety, payment of salaries as well as the issue of run away workers, the paper said.

### **Economy Front**

#### **Qatari PM launches QR2bn initiative to develop small businesses**

The future of Qatari economy hinges on the private sector's pace and the government has earmarked QR2bn for the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) which seek to foray regional and global markets, according to Prime Minister and Foreign Minister HE Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor al-Thani.

"The future of Qatari economy hinges upon the growth of the private sector, not only as far as productivity and provision of services are concerned, but also when it comes to expanding the labour market and creating real opportunities for entrepreneurship, innovation and excellence," Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim said launching the Enterprise Qatar (EQ), a QR2bn initiative for developing SMEs.

#### **Qatar and Macedonia sign aviation agreement**

The state of Qatar and the Republic of Macedonia have initialled an air transport agreement on the basis of open airspaces between the two countries.

The agreement was signed for Qatar by the Civil Aviation Authority's Deputy Director and Director of the Air Safety Department Ibrahim Abdul Qader and for Macedonia by the Civil Aviation Director General Zoran Krestivski. The agreement stipulated the operation of an open number of flights between the two countries aboard any types of airplanes of the national carries to be decided by the two countries.

#### **Qatari economy emerges stronger from financial crisis**

Qatari Minister of State for Energy and Industry Affairs Dr. Mohammad bin Saleh Al-Sada said here Thursday the Qatari economy emerged stronger and more composed from the global financial crisis.

In a keynote speech to the opening session of the " Qatar-Latin America Investment Summit" the minister said the Qatari economy was able to maintain its good growth rate thanks to the accurate economic and monetary policies of the government. "The economic policies focused on capitalizing on the country's natural resources particularly the natural gas resources," Al-Sada pointed out.