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GCC IN REVIEW

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4-8 February 2018

Kingdom of Bahrain

Monday, 5 February—Bahrain celebrated the 50th anniversary of its Defence Forces. Bahrain's Defence Forces (BDF) guaranteed the independence and security of the Kingdom, from regional threats, since the UK voted in 1968 to abandon the Gulf by 1971. On Such occasion, King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, the Supreme Commander of Bahrain Defence Force, patronised the “Power of Determination” joint mobilisation drill conducted by BDF with live ammunition with the participation of forces from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Wednesday, 7 February—Bahrain's Interior Minister, Lieutenant-General Shaikh Rashid bin Abdulla Al-Khalifa, received the British Ambassador to the Kingdom of Bahrain, Simon Martin. The meeting



focused on the implementation of agreements signed between the two countries as they mark 200 years of successful cooperation.

Wednesday, 7 February—Bahrain's General Prosecution arrested four suspects tied to the bombing of oil pipelines in the village of Buri. Authorities indentified two other suspects—currently residing in Iran—involved in the financing, planning, and execution of the attack.

Thursday, 8 February—Bahrain inaugurated a new centre to promote religious freedom and peaceful coexistence. This follows the release of the Manama Declaration by Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa, which calls for religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence. King Hamad inaugurated in 2016 the Chair for peaceful coexistence at La Sapienza University of Rome.

State of Kuwait.

Tuesday, 6 February—Kuwait's Permanent Ambassador to the United Nations and current President of the Security Council, Mansour Al-Otaibi, expressed Kuwait's deep concerns over the continued use of chemical weapons in Syria. Al-Otaibi said he regretted current disengagement over the issue due to divisions among Security Council's members.

Thursday, 8 February—Kuwait's Ambassador to the Philippines, Musaed Saleh Al-Thwaikh, met Philippine's President, Rodrigo Duterte, to discuss the suspension of overseas workers' deployment to Kuwait. The two sides are also expected to discuss the signing of an agreement to grant greater protection to Filipinos. The Filipino workforce constitutes a crucial element to ensure Kuwait's continued economic growth.

Sultanate of Oman

Monday, 5 February—Oman's Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud Al-Said, met Egypt's President, Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, in Cairo. During the meeting the two sides discussed prospects for a new trade agreement between Egypt and Oman. This signals ever-deepening relations between Egypt and GCC counties with the exception of Qatar.

Tuesday, 6 February—Oman's Central Bank (CBO) raised the interest rate of its treasury bills, short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Central Bank of Oman on behalf of the Government. These help the licensed commercial banks to invest their surplus funds in a lucrative way.

State of Qatar

Sunday, 4 February—Qatar signed an agreement to protect mutual investments and one on air services with the government of Sierra Leone. Qatar is increasingly looking for new trade partners since Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt and the UAE began to boycott Qatar due to Doha's interventionist foreign policy.

Tuesday, 6 February—The Chairman of Qatar's National Human Rights Committee (NHRC), Ali bin Smaikh Al-Marri, called on the European Union countries to demand an immediate end to the "blockade" imposed on Qatar by its Arab neighbours. This constitutes the first such appeal, by Qatari authorities, towards the EU though the latter is resolved not to get involved.

Thursday, 8 February—Qatar's International Chamber of Commerce predicted that the implementation of the 5% value-added tax (VAT) on goods and services is expected to add up to 2% to the country's GDP and increase government revenues. Qatar, along with other GCC countries, has recently introduced an unprecedented value-added tax.


Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Monday, 5 February—The spokesman for the Arab Coalition fighting to restore legitimacy in Yemen, Colonel Turki Al-Malki, speaking at a press conference in Riyadh, revealed that Iran has supplied Houthi rebel militias with weapons to target the international shipping in the Bab Al-Mandeb strait.

Tuesday, 6 February—Saudi Arabia welcomed the various parties in Yemen's port-city of Aden for committing to the Coalition's call for peace and cooperation against the Iran-backed Houthi militias. Saudi Arabia underlined the Coalition's commitment to preserve the unity of the Yemeni state.

Wednesday, 7 February—Saudi Arabia's Energy Minister, Khalid Al-Falih, announced that the Ministry presided by him awarded its first solar PV project to renewable energy developer ACWA Power. Saudi Arabia aims to generate 9.5 gigawatts of electricity from renewable energy annually by 2023 in order to reduce its oil consumption.

Wednesday, 7 February—Saudi Arabia-based President of the Muslim World League, Muhammad bin Abdul Karim Issa, met with the Secretary of State of the Holy See, Cardinal Pietro Parolin.



During the meeting, Parolin asserted the Vatican's positive ties with the League, and added that both parties successfully promote fruitful dialogue which must be based on the concept that convictions cannot be imposed and differences must be respected. The two parties jointly condemned international jihadi terrorism.

Thursday, 8 February—The Secretary General of Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Yousef bin Ahmad Al-Othaimeen, appointed Dr. Abdalla Altayer as Senior Advisor to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. This is the OIC's highest non-elected position.

United Arab Emirates

Tuesday, 6 February—Egypt's President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, visited Abu Dhabi as part of his official visit to the UAE. Shortly after his arrival Al-Sisi had a working dinner with the UAE's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan. Cairo and Abu Dhabi share common security concerns regarding a number of regional issues such as Libya's civil war, the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and Qatar's foreign policy.

Thursday, 8 February—The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has provided \$ 2 million (USD) in support of the UN programme for supplying electricity to hospitals across the Gaza strip. This decision was confirmed by the UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, during a meeting in Abu Dhabi with Nickolay Mladenov, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

by Antonino Occhiuto

