



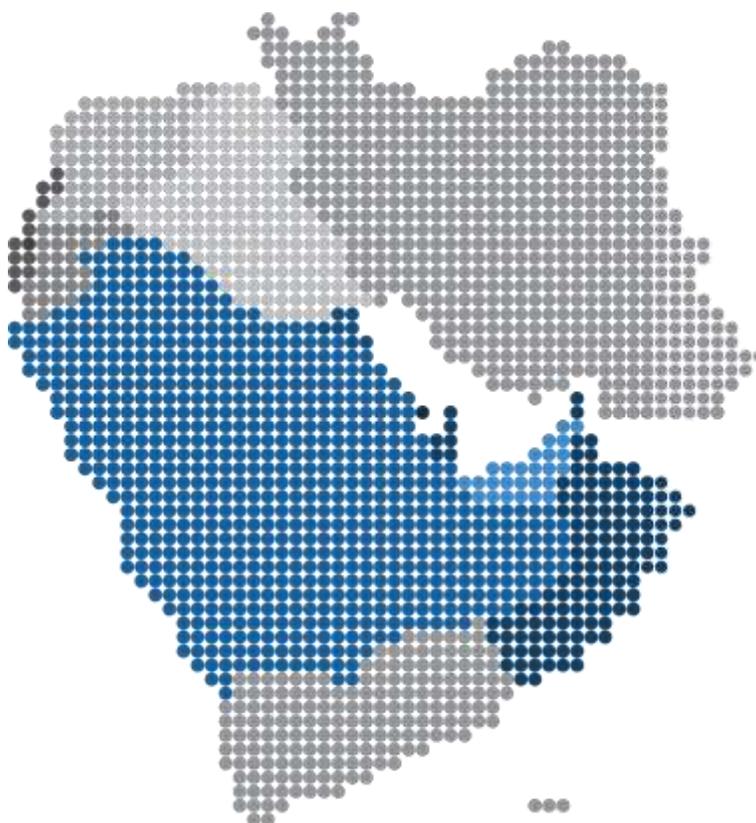
CBN03
04 2018

EGIC

Euro-Gulf
Information
Centre

Arab Gulf

C O U N T R Y
B U L L E T I N S
April 15 -19



The Last Thing to Read this
Week

by
Frauke Greiffenhagen



Kingdom of Bahrein



Monday 16 April – Bahrain won a seat on the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the United Nations Economic and Social Council in New York. The kingdom will hold the seat for four years, from 2019-2022, together with newly elected members India, Pakistan and China. Iran lost its seat in the same vote. Bahrain's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Jamal Fares Al-Ruwaie, praised the vote and commented that the Kingdom's reforms and directives have helped Bahrain to enhance its status in international forums.

Wednesday 18 April – Mondelez, the American company producing OREO cookies, has inaugurated its latest 'Factory of the Future'; at the Bahrain International Investment Park in Hidd. The \$90m (USD) plant is equipped with advanced manufacturing technology and will yield an annual capacity of 90,000 tonnes, initially producing the company's OREO cookies and Barni cakes, to deal with the growing demand of the local market. The factory was opened by Shaikh Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, son of Bahrain's Crown Prince.



State of Kuwait

Tuesday 17 April – Kuwait’s Minister of Commerce and Industry, Khaled Al-Roudhan, flew to the US to hold talks with his counterpart, Wilbur Louis Ross, on promoting bilateral commercial relations and improving the domestic investment environment. The Minister is also scheduled to give a lecture at the US Chamber of Commerce and meet with representatives of the World Bank, to discuss improving Kuwaiti business in accordance with international criteria.



Wednesday 18 April – Kuwait continues to work on lifting a ban on recruitment of Ethiopian maids, despite announcements made earlier this month claiming the lift had been finalised. The Kuwaiti government is working with the Ethiopian Ambassador to Kuwait, Abdul Aziz Ahmad, who presented a letter to the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs, demanding better working conditions, a paid holiday, as well as equal salaries to other nationalities, in return for lifting the ban. Kuwait’s domestic worker market has not yet recovered from the crisis following a Pilipino ban on domestic workers to the Gulf state and is seeking to find a solution before the holy month of Ramadan.



Sultanate of Oman



17 April–Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) will open the first of many mega service stations in Saudi Arabia, in an effort to push the company to global operations. The service station will be located in Dammam and span 40,000 square metres, to be opened by the end of the year. OOMCO's CEO, David Kalife, explained the station will include cafes as well as recreational areas and luxury automated carwashes.

18 April–The Sultanate has reportedly achieved 97% of its recruitment target of 25,000 Omanis to be employed in the private sector between December 2017 and April 2018. The national daily 'Times of Oman' reports that 24,172 citizens were employed during the same time, of which 7,879 were women. The 'Omanization' project is part of initiatives across the GCC countries, where the governments strive to employ more of their citizens in the private sector.



State of Qatar



Tuesday 17 April–Japanese Mizuho Securities pulled out of a position as bookrunner in the \$12 billion Qatari bonds transaction issued last week. The Qatari bonds were issued at the same time as Saudi Arabia issued \$11 billion in competing U.S. dollar denominated bonds. Mizuho was initially set to also hold a role in the Saudi issue, however it did not make the final list of banks chosen by the Saudis, reportedly due to the Japanese bank not disclosing it was in the running for the Qatar deal.

Wednesday 18 April–Qatar and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) have signed a partnership agreement for the launch of a diplomatic training program for diplomats in developing countries, to help in peacekeeping and conflict prevention efforts. This is part of Qatar's diplomatic offensive to cushion the effects of their increasing international isolation.

Wednesday 18 April–Qatar provided some 30 busses and two cranes to Somali officials in Mogadishu. The gesture comes only a week after Somali forces stormed a UAE aircraft and seized \$9.6 million in a serious breach of diplomatic protocol, which led to the UAE ending its military training programme in Somalia. Qatar has been using Somali airspace since the GCC crisis began last summer, and its ally, Turkey, is operating a major military base in the country. These factors contribute to the perception that the recent gesture is to be seen in the context of the enduring GCC rift.



Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



Sunday 15 April–Saudi Arabia’s King Salman opened the 29th Arab League summit in the eastern Saudi city of Dhahran. In his opening remarks he criticized Iran’s ‘Blatant interference’ in regional affairs, as well as the US decision to move its embassy to Jerusalem. Seventeen leaders from the Arab world were in attendance, as well as the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Federica Mogherini, who reiterated the European Union’s support for a two-state solution with East-Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian state. Qatar sent its Arab League representative, as the Emir did not attend.

Monday 16 April–King Salman oversaw the closing ceremony of the month-long Joint Gulf Shield-1 military drills in Jubail. The exercises included units from 24 countries; and aimed at demonstrating Arab military unity and the ability to conduct joint military action. The drills included special forces units, search and rescue drills, advanced military vehicles and missile systems as well as air and naval operations and the showcasing of advanced aircraft and helicopters

Wednesday 18 April–Saudi Arabia ended a 35-year ban on cinema with the screening of the global Walt Disney Co. blockbuster ‘Black Panther’ at the Kingdom’s first public cinema. US- based movie theatre operator AMC signed an agreement allowing the cinemas operation only two weeks ago, and is planning to build up to 40 AMC cinemas across the country within the next five years. Expanding the entertainment industry is part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s Vision 2030, under which the Kingdom aims to have 350 movie theatres opened, a project that will bring some \$24 billion to the economy and add more than 30,000 permanent jobs.

Wednesday 18 April–Matt Prater, President of Google for Europe and MENA, and Saud Al-Qhatani, adviser to the Royal Court, signed an agreement for the construction of five *Innovation Hub* centres across Saudi Arabia. The centres will promote local talent in the production of prototypes, mobile applications and artificial intelligence. The first centre will be built in Riyadh, and will be the largest of its kind in the world, capable of accommodating 40,000 trainees annually.



United Arab Emirates

Tuesday 17 April – UAE armed forces seized an Iranian-made Qasif-1 drone filled with explosives. The intended targets were coalition forces along the Red Sea coast line, who are preparing for a push to capture the Iran-backed Houthi-held port city of Hodeidah.



Wednesday 18 April – Hyperloop Transportation Technologies and Aldar Properties have signed what is being called a ‘historic agreement’ for the first commercial Hyperloop transportation system to be built between Abu Dhabi and Dubai. The track will be built in several phases, with the first 10k section set to be completed in time for Expo 2020, which will be located nearby and is expected to attract millions of visitors from opening day 20 October 2020 to closing day 10 April 2021. The Hyperloop was thought up by billionaire inventor and Tesla-CEO Elon Musk in 2013, and will be the most advanced and fastest system in the world, transporting passengers at speeds of up to 750 mph (1,200 km/h).



The Arabian Gulf is rapidly becoming a geopolitical pivot. As a result, it is important to understand the internal and international dynamics unfolding in the region and the countries that compose it. We at EGIC are proud to present “The Last Thing to Read this Week” segment which contains a small, carefully selected, batch of the most important events unfolding in the countries of the Arab Gulf to help you map the region’s trends.