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# Arab Gulf

C O U N T R Y  
B U L L E T I N S  
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The Last Thing to Read this Week

*by*

NIKOLA ZUKALOVÁ



## Kingdom of Bahrain

Saturday, 29 December—More than 300,000 Saudi travellers crossed the King Fahd Causeway as the school holiday began. To ease the traffic conditions, Bahraini authorities waived routine border procedures. Bahrain is increasingly becoming a tourism hub for the wider Gulf.



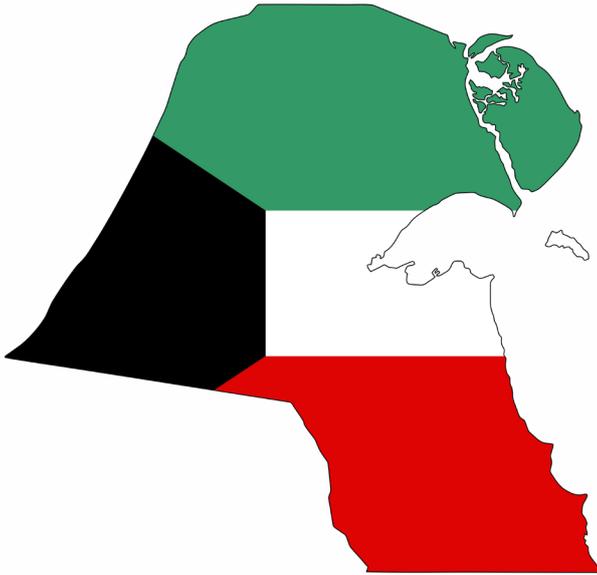
Sunday, 30 December—The Court of Cassation of Bahrain upheld a five-year prison sentence for Nabeel Rajab from 21 February 2018 for deliberately generating disinformation in relation to the Yemen conflict. The laws that reads ‘deliberately disseminating, in wartime, false or malicious news, statements or rumours [...] to cause damage to military preparations,’ ‘publicly offending a foreign country,’ and ‘insulting a statutory body’ was applied in this case.

Thursday, 3 January—Bahrain’s Cabinet held an extraordinary session to review and approve the Government Action Plan (GAP) for the Fifth Legislative Term (2019-2022) before referring it to the Council of Representatives. The GAP prioritises the strengthening of private sector’s role, achieving fiscal balance, boosting economic growth, improving services to citizens and maintaining Bahrain’s competitiveness and its role as a financial and commercial hub.



## State of Kuwait

Thursday, 3 January—Kuwait's Public Authority for Roads and Transportation announced the opening of the land section of the Sheikh Jaber Causeway's Doha-link, which connects Doha with Shuwaikh. The entire Sheikh Jaber Causeway, the world's longest bridge, linking Kuwait City to Subiyah New Town across Kuwait Bay, should be completed by April 2019. The construction is approximately 48 kilometres long and costs about \$2.6 billion.



Friday, 4 January—The US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, will visit Kuwait on 15 January to attend the third round of strategic dialogue between Kuwait and the United States. The two sides are expected to discuss military, economic, educational, trade and customs issues, in addition to joint efforts to combat terrorism as well as the current situation in Yemen and Syria, Iraqi developments, the GCC crisis and the Gulf-Iranian relations.



## Sultanate of Oman

Tuesday, 1 January—Sultan Qaboos ratified Oman's budget for 2019 projected at OR12.9 billion (approximately \$33.5 billion), which represents a 3.1% increase from 2018. The budget estimates revenues of OR 10.1 billion, of which 74% will come from oil and gas. The majority of the budget deficit (OR2.8 billion) will be covered by bank borrowings and around 14% by the state reserves.





## State of Qatar

Tuesday, 1 January—Qatar's Speaker of the Shura Council, Ahmed bin Abdullah bin Zaid Al-Mahmoud, met with Nils Schmid, Member of Bundestag and Spokesman of the Social Democratic Party's parliamentary group in the Committee of Foreign Affairs, to review parliamentary relations between Qatar and Germany and discuss ways how to develop them further. Doha will host the Inter-Parliamentary Union session in April 2019.

Tuesday, 1 January—Qatar's Cabinet approved the establishment of Microsoft's Global Data Centre, the Azure Cloud Computing, in the country. On the occasion, the Cabinet issued a draft law to establish the Media City to manage and develop media activity, and attract international technology companies, media, as well as research and training institutions in the field. The Media City should operate on its own independent budget.

Tuesday, 1 January—Qatar Airways acquired a 5% stake in China Southern Airlines.





## Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Tuesday, 1 January—The Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs and Negotiations of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Dr Abdulaziz Hamad Al-Owaishek, met in Helsinki with officials from Finland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss cooperation between the GCC and Finland.

Wednesday, 2 January—The Saudi Entertainment Ventures Company, a subsidiary of the Public Investment Fund, announced plans to build a 100,000 square-metre entertainment complex in Riyadh. It will reportedly include green and open spaces for sports, entertainment and live shows, as well as cinemas, and a variety of cafes and restaurants. More entertainment centres are expected to be built around the Kingdom over the upcoming years as the country strives to diversify its economy and increase revenues from the leisure sector.



Thursday, 3 January—The first court hearing with 11 defendants charged with being involved in Jamal Khashoggi case opened in Riyadh. Saudi Arabia's Prosecutor sought the death penalty for five of the defendants.

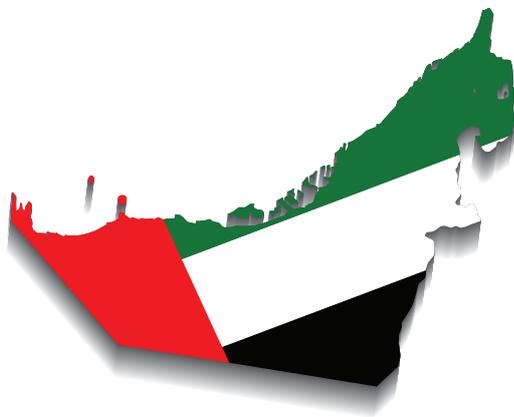
Pakistani Embassy in Riyadh to discuss strategic dialogue and free trade negotiations between the GCC countries and Pakistan.

Thursday, 3 January—The Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs and Negotiations of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Dr Abdulaziz Hamad Al-Owaishek, received a delegation from the



## United Arab Emirates

Sunday, 31 December—Mohamed bin Zayed held a telephone call with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in Egypt. They discussed ways to promote coexistence, tolerance and dialogue among people and cultures as the UAE named 2019 the ‘Year of Tolerance.’



Wednesday, 2 January—Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, signed Dubai’s budget for 2019 with expenditures of Dh56.8 billion (\$15.4 billion), the same as in the 2018 budget, which was the largest in history. The revenues are expected to slightly increase to Dh51 billion, of which only 8% comes from oil. Regarding the expenditures, 40% of the budget is dedicated to economy, infrastructure and transportation, 33% to social development, 22% to justice and safety, and 5% to government excellence, creativity, innovation and scientific research.

Thursday, 3 January—The Dubai Electricity and Water Authority signed a Memorandum of Understanding with TÜV Rheinland AG, a provider of technical and consultation services and quality assurance in the energy sector based in Germany. They will cooperate and exchange knowledge on research and development, regulations, environmental protection and business support in various areas linked to renewable energy sector to enhance sustainable development in the UAE.



*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.*

