



# GCC IN REVIEW

*A Weekly Publication of the main news surrounding the GCC States*



**25 February – 1 March 2018**

## **Kingdom of Bahrain**

Sunday, 25 February—Aluminium Bahrain (Alba) is set to own the world's largest single aluminium smelter complex, following a \$ 3 million (USD) investment to expand the smelter and increase its production capacity by 540,000 metric tonnes. This will take the smelter to a total capacity of 1.5 million tonnes per year while allowing Bahrain to reduce its financial commitment to the company.

Sunday, 25 February—Bahrain's Undersecretary for International Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Abdullah bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa, met, in Brussels, with the Acting Director of the Department of Middle East and North Africa Affairs of the European External Action Service, Ambassador Colin Scicluna. The Undersecretary stressed the importance of cooperation between the Kingdom and the European Union in the field of human rights, stressing the Kingdom of Bahrain's firm commitment to the protection of human rights. This was part of a comprehensive trip, by the Undersecretary, aimed at enhancing Bahrain-EU relations.

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Monday, 26 February—The Chairman of the Bahrain-based investment firm GFH Financial Hopes, Jassim Alseddiqi, announced a plan to develop new businesses in Saudi Arabia. This comes at a time of increasing cooperation between Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE in all sectors, including economic development.

## **State of Kuwait**

Wednesday, 28 February—Kuwait's Red Crescent Society (KRCS) delivered food parcels to besieged Syrians in Eastern Ghouta. KRCS's Secretary General, Maha Al-Barjas, announced that the relief operations are set to expand and include medical aid for civilians.

Thursday, 1 March—The Ambassador of the Philippines to Kuwait, Renato Pedro, declared that delegation from the Kuwaiti Interior Ministry will travel to Manila in the second half of March to seal the deal with the Philippines Labour Ministry. This is the first major positive development to resolve the diplomatic spat which began following Philippine's President, Rodrigo Duterte, announced a departure ban for Filipinos planning to work in Kuwait.

## **Sultanate of Oman**

Monday, 26 February—Oman's Economic Committee of the State Council discussed the draft law of commercial companies. Oman's government attaches great importance to commercial companies as they represent the mainstay of the national economy. The commercial companies in the Sultanate have witnessed remarkable growth over the past 5 years in terms of their number and capital.

Wednesday, 28 February—Oman's Ministry of Tourism announced it granted as many as 109 tourist guide licences in 2017. More than double of the 41 conceded in 2016. This comes as the Sultanate facilitated the entry of tourists of various nationalities into the Sultanate through the newly created tourist visa facilities. Oman is steadily increasing its appeal among tourists worldwide.

## **State of Qatar**

Monday, 26 February—The UK company Vodafone, the world's second largest mobile operator, sold its stake in Vodafone Qatar to its joint venture partner, the Qatar Foundation, for \$371 million (USD). International companies are withdrawing investments in Qatar.

Wednesday, 28 February—Qatar's government announced that the country's Emir, Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, will attend a meeting with US President Donald Trump in Washington, DC. The meeting will address intra-GCC tensions and will be attended by high representatives from both Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Thursday, 1 March— The Director of France's Institute of Advanced National Defence Studies, Lieutenant General Bernard de Courreges d'Ustou, accompanied by the Commander of the Qatari Emiri Land Force Major-General Mohammed bin Ali Al-Ghanim, visited the simulations centre of the operations and training institute of the Qatari Army. Military cooperation between the two countries is increasing, as signalled by Qatar's purchase from France of 24 Dassault Rafale fighter jets. Then again, Doha is buying from all arms sellers.

## Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Sunday, 25 February—Saudi Arabia's Minister of Energy, Industry and Mineral Resources, Khalid Al-Falih, announced the beginning of talks, among countries members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), regarding an agreement to reduce productions in the start of 2019. This would increase the price of oil.

Tuesday, 27 February—Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, fired his top military commanders and reshuffled his cabinet in a shake-up of key security and government ministries. Lieutenant General, Fayyad bin Hamed Al-Ruwayli, was appointed as the new chief of staff. The move aims to give renewed vigour to the military operations against Iran-backed Houthi militias in Yemen.

Wednesday, 28 February—Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, discussed the threat posed by Iran's ballistic missile programme with US President, Donald Trump. Trump thanked Saudi Arabia for highlighting ways in which Gulf Arab states "can better counter Iranian destabilising activities and defeat terrorists and extremists."

Wednesday, 28 February— Lebanon's Prime Minister, Saad Hariri, arrived in Riyadh and met with Saudi Arabia's King Salman in his first official visit since announcing and then suspending his resignation. Hariri declared that his November resignation aimed to provide a positive shock to Lebanon's political system, currently dominated by Hezbollah.

Thursday, 1 March—The spokesmen of the Saudi-led coalition, fighting to restore the UN-legitimised government in Yemen, Colonel Turki Al-Maliki, announced the coalition ensured the arrival of 18,000 relief vessels in Yemen. In his speech Al-Maliki specifically referred to efforts by the Arab coalition to intercept and destroy suicide speedboats operated by Houthi rebels and targeting international navigation in the Gulf of Aden.

## United Arab Emirates

Monday, 26 February—The United Arab Emirates announced the launch of "Operation Decisive Sword" targeting Al-Qaeda operatives in Yemen. The UAE Defence Ministry declared that Emirati troops will be deployed to Wadi Al-Masini and Hadramaut provinces and will be supported by Yemen's national army.

Tuesday, 27 February—The Houthis, a rebel militia active in Yemen and supported by Iran, released a video in which it announced the targeting of the headquarters of the UAE forces in the Yemeni city of Marib with ballistic missiles. In the video the rebels parade Iranian-made Qiams missiles, an extended range version of the Scud.

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