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The Last Thing to Read this Week

by

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Kingdom of Bahrain



Sunday, 29 July— Sheikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa, First Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Council of Youth and Sports and President of the Bahrain Athletics Association received Sheikh Sultan bin Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, after his recent appointment to ambassador of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to Bahrain. Sheikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa said that the relationship between Bahrain and the UAE is a model of brotherhood, and reinforces the historic relations between the two countries.

Wednesday, 1 August — The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has release new data indicating that Foreign Direct Investment inflows to Bahrain grew at an impressive rate between 2017 and 2018. The UNCTAD cited amendments to the country's commercial law, allowing 100% foreign ownership in several sectors, as one of the main reasons for growth. Among the most prominent developments in 2018, has been the growth of the Bahrain Fin-Tech ecosystem, including the launch of the largest fintech hub in the Middle East and Africa, the Bahrain Fintech Bay.



State of Kuwait

Monday, 30 July— The United States (US) State Department approved the sale to Kuwait of 300 AGM-114R Hellfire missiles, and related equipment, for an estimated cost of \$30.4 million. This is consistent with a policy, increasingly embraced by the US, of sharing the burden of security in the Arab region with its regional allies. The principal contractor for the proposed sale will be the Lockheed Martin Corporation.

Tuesday, 31 July—The Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, received the United Nations (UN) Special Envoy to Yemen Martin Griffiths to discuss the latest efforts and developments regarding the conflict. After the meeting, Griffiths declared: “I don’t think we will succeed in Yemen in stopping this war and bringing political resolution to it without the help and experience of Kuwait.” Kuwait has been the primary location for UN-mediated talks between the parties of the Yemen conflict, between 2016 and 2017.

Wednesday, 1 August — Kuwait’s Oil Minister Bakhit al-Rashidi, said that under the recent OPEC and non-OPEC agreement to boost output, Kuwait has raised its oil production to 2.8 million barrels per day (bpd), over a maximum production capacity of 3.1 million bpd. An upcoming joint OPEC and non-OPEC committee meeting, to be held in Algeria on 22-23 September, will review supply levels possibly leading to an increase of roughly 1 million bpd in output.

Tuesday, 31 July—Sheikh Nawaf Saud Al-Sabah, Chief Executive Officer of Kuwait Foreign Petroleum Exploration Co. (KUFPEC), announced that its firm is borrowing \$1.1 billion, from Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corp. and Societe Generale SA, to expand its shale oil and gas operations. Kufpec, which currently produces 100,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day, expects to pump 119,000 next month and 150,000 in 2020, a level it is planned to maintain until 2040.



Sultanate of Oman

Sunday, 29 July—Oman has hired British multinational banking and financial services company Standard Chartered Plc to help raise as much as \$1.2 billion to finance infrastructure at the country's Duqm Special Economic Zone. The funds, that could be backed by the World Bank's Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency, may be raised through a loan or bonds with a potential maturity of 15 to 20 years.

Monday, 30 July—The Oman Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs, Yusuf bin Alawi, has concluded a week-long visit to the United States. Alawi met Defence Secretary James Mattis, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, members of Congress, including House Speaker Paul Ryan, and national security and treasury officials. Talks focused on the Yemen conflict and on solving the Qatar crisis. The Minister also highlighted the country's perspective on the importance of dialogue in the confrontation with Iran.

Tuesday, 31 July— Two of the biggest banks of Oman, Bank Dhofar and National Bank of Oman (NBO), agreed to begin talks regarding a possible merger, according to disclosures filed to the Muscat Securities Market (MSM). According to the banks' most recent financial statements, NBO's total assets at the end of June stood at \$8.96 billion, while Bank Dhofar's stood at \$10.99 billion.





State of Qatar

Saturday, 28 July — The Washington Post revealed that a meeting took place in Doha between senior Taliban officers and Alice Wells, the United States' top diplomat for South Asia. The meeting was held to talk about future peace talks on Afghanistan, in one of the most significant developments amid efforts to find a negotiated end to the country's protracted war.



Monday, 30 July—A ceremony has taken place at Fincantieri's Muggiano yard in Italy to inaugurate the production of a major contract awarded by the Qatari Ministry of Defence to the Italian firm. The contract, amounting for Fincantieri to approx. 4 billion euros, envisages the supply of seven surface vessels, of which four corvettes, one amphibious vessel (LPD - Landing Platform Dock), and two patrol vessels (OPV - Offshore Patrol Vessel) as well as support services in Qatar for further 10 years after the delivery of the vessels.

Tuesday, 31 July—The Qatar Financial Centre (QFC) has reported a 69% increase in the number of companies registered during the first half of 2018, bringing the number of firms registered at a record number of 532. New firms are predominantly from Qatar, but also from Europe, India and Pakistan. Related sectors include information technology, advisory and consulting, advertising and marketing, legal services and investment clubs.



Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Sunday, 29 July—International media outlet revealed a letter sent by Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz to the White House in which Saudi Arabia expressed its rejection of US President Donald Trump's peace plan, known in the media as the 'Deal of the Century - The rejection is tied to the US' decision to move its Embassy to Jerusalem. Saudi King Salman stressed that the Kingdom remains still committed to the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, which stipulates the establishment of a Palestinian state in the borders of 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital and the right of return for refugees.

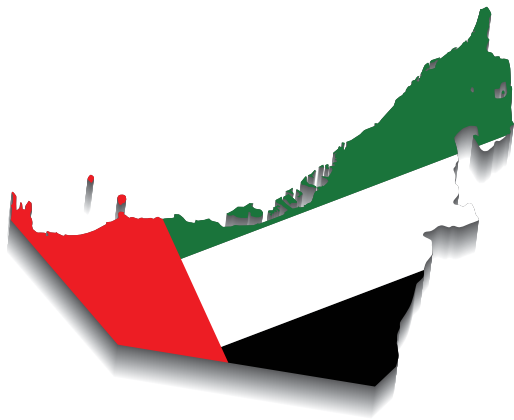
Tuesday, 31 July—Aramco Chief Executive Amin Nasser stated that a much-anticipated Initial Public Offering (IPO) of 5% of the company, earlier scheduled for this year, will be pushed back amid unfavorable market conditions. However, Aramco confirmed preliminary talks to acquire a "strategic stake" in SABIC, the world's fourth largest petrochemicals company that is 70% owned by the government-run Public Investment Fund (PIF). This would be a complex alternative to raise liquidity for the kingdom's top sovereign wealth fund, amid uncertainties regarding Aramco's IPO.





United Arab Emirates

Friday, 27 July—According to diplomatic sources, the Trump administration is quietly pushing ahead with a bid to create a new security and political alliance with six Gulf Arab states, Egypt and Jordan, tentatively known as the Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA), in part to counter Iran's expansion in the region.



Friday, 27 July—The UAE's top diplomat, Anwar Gargash, dismissed Qatar's demand for a Washington summit on the current Gulf crisis as "wishful thinking." The summit was thought to be prepared under the auspices of the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in the fall of 2018.