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Latest Figures

GULF TIMES

TUESDAY Vol. XXXIV No. 9300
 March 18, 2014
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 www.gulf-times.com 2 Riyals

In brief

QATAR | Blaze
Fire creates scare in Bin Mahmoud area

A fire that broke out in an unattended plot in the middle of a densely-populated area in Fariq Bin Mahmoud in Doha created a scare in the locality for a while yesterday. The incident was reported around 2pm. Plumes of thick black smoke that billowed into the sky created the impression that it was a major fire but it was contained before it spread to neighbouring compounds which housed residential apartments. The timely arrival of firefighters contained the blaze within 30 minutes. There were no reports of casualties and injuries. Sources told *Gulf Times* that the Bin Mahmoud area had witnessed a number of fires in the last one year and except for one of them, the others were minor. Most of the incidents were reported in locations between the new signal on the C-Ring road and the signal near the Hamad Medical Corporation.

RUSSIA | Crisis
US and Europe impose sanctions

The US and European Union yesterday imposed personal sanctions on Russian and Crimean officials involved in the seizure of Crimea from Ukraine as Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree recognising the region as a sovereign state. The moves heightened the most serious East-West crisis since the end of the Cold War, following a disputed referendum in the Black Sea peninsula on Sunday in which Crimean's leaders declared a Soviet-style, 97% vote to secede from Ukraine. **Pages 19, 29**

AMERICA | Science
Discovery bolsters Big Bang theory

Waves of gravity that rippled through space right after the Big Bang have been detected for the first time, in a landmark discovery that adds to our understanding of how the universe was born, US scientists said yesterday. The waves were produced in a rapid growth spurt 14bn years ago, and were predicted in Albert Einstein's nearly century-old theory of general relativity but were never found until now. **Page 13**

Qatar trade surplus shrinks to QR37bn

Major export destinations for Qatar in January were Japan, South Korea and India

Booped up by the higher exports of petroleum gases and other gaseous hydrocarbons, Qatar's foreign trade surplus totalled QR37bn in January, preliminary figures released by the Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics show.

However, the foreign trade surplus shrank in January compared with QR37.6bn a year ago.

General exports from Qatar increased in a year up to January this year and totalled QR45.8bn, up 2.8% on the same period in 2013, the Ministry said.

This was driven mainly by the higher exports of petroleum gases and other gaseous hydrocarbons such as LNG, condensates, propane and butane that accounted for QR31bn in January, up 2.6% year-on-year.

However, the increase has been partially offset by a drop in exports of "petroleum oils" and oils from bituminous minerals (crude), which reached QR7.2bn (11%), and petroleum oils and oils from bituminous minerals (other than crude) that totalled QR1.5bn (4.5%).

"These decreases were due to the increase in local sales to the transport and industrial sectors," Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics said.

Major export destinations for Qatar in January were Japan (QR13bn) which accounts for 28% of general exports, South Korea (QR9bn - 20%) and India (QR6.3bn - 14%).

The data also show higher imports to Qatar in the period under review. Qatar's imports stood at QR8.8bn in January, up 27.5% on the same period last year.

The imports of motor cars and other passenger vehicles reached QR800mm in January, up 26.2% on the same period last year.

Aircraft spare parts import reached QR700mm (up 121%) and telephone sets QR200mm (+64.3%).

Qatar's imports (as of January) were mainly from the US (QR1.3bn, which accounts for 15% of the total imports), followed by China (QR900mm - 10%) and the UAE and Germany (QR700mm each or 8%).

Analysts polled by Reuters in January expected Qatar's current account surplus to come in at 24.5% of gross domestic product in 2014 and 20.9% in 2015.

New signals improve traffic flow on Corniche



A panoramic view of the Corniche stretch between the new exhibition centre under construction near the City Center and Sheraton Doha. The traffic movement along the stretch has improved significantly with the installation of new automatic signals instead of the roundabout near the Ooredoo headquarters. **PICTURE:** Jayan Orma.

Decision on 2022 World Cup timing next year

A decision on whether the 2022 World Cup in Qatar will be switched to winter will not be made before the start of 2015, Sheikh Salman bin Ibrahim al-Khalifa, the head of the task force that is making the decision on the tournament's timing, said in London yesterday.

A FIFA had said earlier a decision could be made this year, but Sheikh Salman, who is the president of the Asian Football Confederation, said a lot needed to be done before everything fell into place.

"There are a lot of partners that we need to sit and talk with and find the best solution and I am sure this decision will not be taken before the first quarter of 2015."

"The decision is to look at the possibilities of the timing, as we speak now it is still June/July but the aim of this task force is to look at the other options and the concerns that some will have."

Sheikh Salman was speaking on a visit to London where he signed a co-operation agreement with the Premier League, whose chief executive Richard Scudamore said lengthy talks were needed with all stakeholders about moving the time of the World Cup.

He said: "Our position is quite clear - Qatar were awarded it, Qatar should hold it. It was awarded in full knowledge of the conditions. The bid book contained how they were going to deal with those conditions and that is the current situation. Their entire campaign was about how you would cope with holding it in summer."

Sheikh Salman said the fact the World Cup was being held in Qatar had acted as a catalyst to improve the rights and conditions of migrant workers. "I think because of the World Cup, this issue is being addressed and looked at. I am sure that the Qatar government is co-operating positively in that sense. The best thing the World Cup is doing now is trying to improve the working conditions in Qatar."

Investigators look at suicide in jet mystery

Reuters
 Kuala Lumpur

The co-pilot of a missing Malaysian jetliner spoke the last words heard from the cockpit, the airline's chief executive said yesterday, as investigators consider suicide by the captain or first officer as one possible explanation for the disappearance.

No trace of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 has been found since it vanished on March 8 with 239 people aboard. Investigators are increasingly convinced it was diverted perhaps thousands of miles off course by someone with deep knowledge of the Boeing 777-200ER and commercial navigation.

A search unprecedented in its scale is now under way for the plane, covering an area stretching from the shores of the Caspian Sea in the north to deep in the southern Indian Ocean.

Airline chief executive Ahmad Jahari Yahya also told a news conference that it was unclear exactly when one of the plane's automatic tracking systems had been disabled, appearing to contradict the weekend comments of government ministers.

Suspensions of hijacking or sabotage had hardened further when officials said on Sunday that the last radio message from the plane - an informal "all right, good night" - was spoken after the tracking system, known as "ACARS", was shut down. **Pages 15, 28**

Qatar 'breakthrough' in Mers research

A joint Qatari and Dutch research team has succeeded in culturing the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV) in the laboratory, the Supreme Council of Health (SCH) announced yesterday.

The breakthrough will increase the knowledge for prevention and control of MERS-CoV in addition to enhancing the development of diagnostic tools and production of vaccines and treatment for the virus.

The achievement is the result of combined efforts from the SCH and the Ministry of Environment from Qatar as well as Erasmus Medical Centre in the Netherlands with support of the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The SCH has pointed out that in Qatar the efforts continue to determine the source and root of the virus transmission, resulting in a series of studies, one of which yielded the virus.

Based on WHO's recommendations, a national sero-survey will be conducted by the end of this month, to determine risk factors for MERS-CoV as well as to identify the source of the virus. The sero-survey will include screening of animals and workers.

The collaboration between Qatar, Erasmus Medical Centre and the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment of the ministry of health in the Netherlands focuses on research co-operation and exchange of experiences and expertise as well as training of laboratory technicians for the diagnosis of the virus.

This resulted in matching laboratory results between veterinary biotechnology laboratories under Qatar's Ministry of Environment with the Erasmus Medical Centre in the Netherlands in virus detection by using the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) techniques, making the labs in Qatar the first in the Middle East for the diagnosis of MERS-CoV in animals.

The SCH also announced that there had been no new human cases of the MERS-CoV in Qatar since October 2013, although intensive surveillance of the disease is undergoing in collaboration with healthcare providers in hospitals and Department of Animal Health resources.

The SCH has urged all citizens and residents to apply measures for the prevention of the disease and to communicate with healthcare providers if they develop acute respiratory symptoms, especially if accompanied by fever and there was a close contact with animals.

Hotlines for communicable diseases control in SCH: English - 65740951; Arabic - 66740948. Hotline for animal health resources: 33611924; hotline for Ministry of Environment: 998 (general).

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