

MARINE SAFETY NEWS

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

Life is made up of constant calls to action. - Anonymous

INFOTAINMENT DVD 46

• Learn about the latest 'Save Our Seafarers' campaign launched to tackle the menace of piracy. Interviews of leading maritime personalities are also available in DVD 46 as they speak at great length about the subject.

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Customs Strike Hits Kuwait Trade, Oil Exports At Risk

KUWAIT CITY - Kuwaiti customs officers pressed a strike into a second day on Tuesday, severely disrupting air, sea and land trade and threatening to halt oil exports, a trade union official said.

"The strike is still on and we will continue until our demands are fully met," Fahhad al-Ajmi, board member of the customs trade union, told AFP.

More than 3,000 customs employees went on strike Monday demanding a pay raise and improved working conditions.

Ajmi said that movement at Kuwait's border exit points, including three commercial seaports and the only international airport, were "severely affected" and only humanitarian cases were allowed.

As many as 1,000 trucks loaded with fruits, vegetables and other goods "remained stranded at the border posts," Ajmi said, adding that only

passenger vehicles were inspected by customs officers.

The oil-rich desert state, OPEC's third largest producer, depends almost entirely on imports to meet consumption needs, especially in the fresh produce sector.

Ajmi insisted that "oil exports will be hit severely within the coming few days and could lead to a halt in production" if the strike is not resolved.

The oil ministry and the Kuwait Petroleum Corp have yet to comment on the strike, but an industry source told AFP that oil exports have not been affected.

Ajmi, however, claimed that about six to seven oil tankers have been barred from sailing out of Kuwait since Monday because customs officers refused to give them the necessary clearance to leave. (AFP)

Saudis Struggle To Find Affordable Housing

JEDDAH - Saudis, citizens of one of the world's wealthiest nations, are struggling to afford housing in a crisis spurred by urbanisation and a lack of competition in real estate.

Less than 40% of Saudis are homeowners, and demand continues to outstrip supply in the property market, driving up prices and leaving low- and middle-income families with few options to buy or even rent.

A recent study by the construction and real estate conglomerate Binladin Group said the oil-rich Gulf kingdom needs one million new housing units over the next five years.

In March, King Abdullah ordered 500,000 housing units to be built within five years and set aside USD 66 billion for the project, but the IMF said last month that more needs to be done.

"To address the affordability of housing, mitigate the land prices, and increase the supply of land...the government must unlock the static supply of land," the IMF said in a report. At the core of the problem, analysts say, are the ultra-wealthy who own massive swathes of land in major cities and on their outskirts but do nothing with it. (AFP)

Sudan's Bashir In 2-Day Visit To Qatar

KHARTOUM - Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir will travel to Doha on Monday to hold talks with the Qatari emir, the official SUNA news agency reported.

"The president will hold talks with Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, emir of Qatar, dealing with the promotion of bilateral relations between the two countries and issues of common interest," SUNA said.

The two-day visit comes amid serious concern about Sudan's deteriorating economic situation following the secession in July of the south, where most of the country's oil -- Khartoum's main foreign currency earner -- is produced.

Since then, Sudan has witnessed accelerating inflation and a sharp devaluation of its currency, the Sudanese pound.

The government has had to introduce an array of austerity measures to cope with the loss of revenue, and has repeatedly appealed for international help to alleviate its crippling debts, estimated at around USD 38 billion. With a US trade embargo in place since 1997, Khartoum has depended heavily on its Asian and Gulf allies for support. (AFP)

Bahrain MPs Join Hands To Form 2nd Largest Parliament Bloc

MANAMA - In an unprecedented move, Bahrain's Sunni and Shi'ite lawmakers joined hands on Monday to form a parliamentary bloc. The nine-member Bahrain Bloc was formed on Monday by members of Parliaments elected during the recent Parliament by-election and includes two female MPs.

The announcement of the bloc came during a press conference attended by newly elected MPs.

"The new Parliament bloc will be the second largest in Parliament and headquarters will be set up to organise its activities," said President of the bloc Ahmed Al Saati.

Bahrain's first Parliament session will be held on Tuesday since the political unrest started in February. The by-elections were held after 18 MPs of the country's largest opposition group Al Wefaq National Islamic Society resigned from their posts in protest against the government's dealing with the anti-government protesters. (Xinhua)

Kuwait Invites Asian Powers For Summit Next Year

KUWAIT CITY - Kuwait's Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah on Monday invited major Asian powers, all members of the Asia Co-operation Dialogue (ACD), to gather in the Gulf state for a summit next year.

"Kuwait calls for a summit meeting for ACD member states in 2012 to discuss all issues related to the continent of Asia... (and) Kuwait is pleased to host it," he said at the opening of a two-day conference for the 31-member ACD.

Sheikh Sabah urged stronger co-operation between Asian countries to avert the impact of the global economic and financial crises.

The current ACD summit brings together foreign ministers and senior officials from Asia's top economies China, Japan, India and South Korea with their counterparts in the world's leading oil producers, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE and Qatar, in addition to Iran and Russia. (AFP)

REGIONAL NEWS

Qatar To Acquire Luxembourg's KBL Bank For EUR 1.0bn

LUXEMBOURG - Belgian bank KBC announced on Monday a deal to sell Luxembourg unit KBL to a Qatar investment group for EUR 1.05 billion, finding a new buyer after a deal with India's Hinduja group fell through.

MARINE NEWS SUMMARY

CONTAINER VESSELS: NEXT-GENERATION WILL BE LARGEST EVER

If the need is for greater efficiency for road and rail freight during an economic slowdown, standard operating procedures might be to downgrade to smaller and lighter means of overland transport. Shipping lines, however, have a different approach: they build bigger ships. The reason, they say, is better economies of scale, costing them less to send a string of three or four huge new ships across the oceans instead of a larger fleet of smaller vessels. These bigger and newer ships will also have more efficient engines and lower emissions, which also means lower fuel costs, as the company hopes an everlasting impression on its customers. One shipping giant is reportedly spending USD 1.9 billion on 10 new ships, each of which will carry 18,000 TEUs. The new Ultra Large Container Ships (ULCS) will be more than 1,312 feet long and more than 193 feet wide, and will outdo cargo capacity of the world's largest container vessel currently afloat, by 16%. The company's chief executive said that building ULCSs was not only a top priority for the firm but also for its customers, who are heavily dependent upon this in their supply chain. Five years ago, the world's largest container ship had a TEU capacity of 9,500. According to a Paris-based maritime research firm, the container carriers' answer to challenges of sustainable shipping and reduction of emissions is to build ever-larger ships, whose sizes have doubled over a decade.

KBC Group Chief Executive Jan Vanhevel said the sale will allow the Belgian bank to release capital, reduce its risk profile and further focus on its core markets in Belgian and Central and Eastern Europe.

"The least we can say is that the market circumstances of the last few months have been particularly challenging," Vanhevel said in a statement.

"All the more reason why we are pleased to be able to announce today's deal. This agreement marks a crucial step in implementing our refocus strategy, while at the same time providing continuity, stability and certainty to the customers and staff of KBL," he said.

He further said Precision Capital wants to capitalise on links with the Middle East and Asia to boost KBL. The transaction is expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2012 after it is reviewed by regulators, with EUR 50 million in the sale depending on the results of KBL. (AFP)

5 Palestinians Launch Cycle Tour From Jerusalem-Mecca To Support UN Bid

HEBRON - Five Palestinians from the West Bank city of Hebron kicked off on Monday in a bike tour from Jerusalem to Mecca in Saudi Arabia in support of a Palestinian bid for statehood in the UN.

The trip, dubbed "From Jerusalem to Mecca ... Yes for the Palestinian State" coincides with the pilgrimage season of the Muslims all over the world, which will start early in November.

The five cyclists had made intensive preparations and received training for their trip in the desert area in southern West Bank where temperature is as high as in the Arab Peninsula.

The five would travel on their bikes for about 1,800 km, from Jerusalem to Amman, the Jordanian capital, and then to Mecca.

The Palestinian National Authority helped them get the visas to Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

Suhaib Zahdeh, the trainer of the team, told Xinhua that the cyclists conducted the 50-day trip to voice the Palestinian demand for self-determination. Sedqi Mutawea, one of the cyclists, said his participation into the trip "is the simplest mean to express support for a statehood." (Xinhua)

Saudi Fertiliser Firm Safco 3Q Profits Up 100%

RIYADH - The Saudi Arabian Fertiliser Co said its net profits doubled in the third quarter of 2011 versus the same three month period the year before.

Safco, a subsidiary of petrochemical giant Saudi Basic Industries Corp, said on Sunday that net income in the third quarter climbed to SAR 1.21 billion compared to SAR 604 million in the corresponding quarter a year earlier.

It attributed the rising to increasing global prices for its products.

Saudi Arabia, OPEC's top oil producer, has been working to grow its petrochemical sector and other industries to wean itself from dependence on its chief cash cow, crude. Safco is 43% owned by SABIC, one of the world's largest manufacturers of chemicals, plastics, fertilisers and metals. (AP)

European IT Firms Feel Heat In Dubai

DUBAI - A random walk down the 31st Gitex Technology Week fair and exhibition, the largest IT and Telecom fair in the Middle East and North Africa, is like mirroring the current economic state of the world.

While emerging markets like China, Iran or South Korea increase their presence, European country pavilions show a much smaller presence this year.

Morocco and Malta have country pavilions for the first time at the Gitex.

Some 3,500 suppliers from 57 countries display the latest IT products, software solutions and accessories in Dubai, a central trade hub bridging Europe with East. At the same time, European firms reduce their presence.

At the Swiss Pavilion, only five ICT firms have booked a stand, and all of them are small and medium enterprises.

"The big brands fear a recession, so they save money by not showing up," said an insider of the ICT industry in Switzerland who does not want to be named. This is surprising for a country which is not part of the EU and which is hardly affected by the Euro zone debt crisis. (PNA)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Abbas, Sarkozy To Meet In Paris: Palestinian FM

BOGOTA - Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas and French President Nicolas Sarkozy will meet in Paris in the coming days on the Palestinian bid for UN recognition, Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki said on Tuesday.

Maliki said Abbas would depart for France after meeting on Tuesday with Colombia's President Juan Manuel Santos on the request for UN Security Council recognition of a Palestinian state.

Both Colombia and France are members of the UN council. We are going to have a meeting with the French President Sarkozy on the same subject because France is also a permanent member of the Security Council," he told AFP.

Earlier on Monday, Abbas said he was willing "at any moment" to restart peace negotiations with Israel aimed at a settlement that allows them to exist side by side as states.

"We are in favour of peaceful negotiations leading to the creation of a Palestinian state, alongside the state of Israel," Abbas said in Bogota, where he is concluding a Latin American tour to rally support for UN recognition.

"We are at any moment willing to return to the negotiating table if Israel is of the same mind," he said, during an event where he was declared an honorary citizen of Bogota by the city's mayor. (AFP)

Egypt Probes Deadly Sectarian Clashes

CAIRO - Egypt's military rulers ordered a speedy probe into clashes which killed 25 people, mostly Coptic Christians, as the Cabinet held crisis talks and thousands attended the funerals of 17 victims.

The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) "tasked the government with quickly forming a fact finding committee to determine what happened," in a statement read on state television on Monday as world leaders urged restraint.

It called for "all measures against all those proven to have been involved, either directly or by incitement".

Both the ruling military council and the cabinet held crisis talks, a day after the clashes in Cairo left 25 dead, most of them Copts, and more than 300 people injured, according to health ministry figures.

The SCAF, which took power when President Hosni Mubarak was ousted in February, stressed it "continues to bear national responsibility to protect the people" until it hands over to an elected civilian authority. Thousands of people attended a service at the Copt cathedral for the funerals of 17 demonstrators. (AFP)

Libya Forces Drive On Centre Of Gaddafi Hometown

SIRTE - Libya's new regime forces were battling block by block towards the centre of Sirte on Monday, eyeing the symbolic prize of finally capturing Muammar Gaddafi's hometown after a month-long siege.

On the diplomatic front, Libya's ruling National Transitional Council (NTC) said it recognises the Syrian National Council grouping opponents of President Bashar al-Assad, becoming the first government, albeit an interim one, to do so. But Gaddafi diehards were putting up fierce resistance and in their other remaining bastion, Bani Walid, they mounted a fightback, killing 17 NTC fighters.

The interim ruling NTC has been waiting for Sirte's full capture to declare the liberation of the whole of Libya, clearing the way to draw up a timetable for elections.

A column of NTC troops thrust towards central Sirte from positions east along the Mediterranean coast, coming under heavy rocket and small arms fire as they inched forward house by house. They advanced about a kilometre into the city centre from the south and east by the afternoon, backed by heavy shelling and tanks. (AFP)

Syria Opposition Gets New Boost Despite Regime Threats

LUXEMBOURG - Support grew for Syria's opposition on Monday despite threats by Damascus to act against any country that recognises a new grouping aimed at toppling President Bashar al-Assad's repressive regime.

EU foreign ministers said the bloc "welcomes the efforts of the political opposition to establish a united platform," and hailed the creation of the Syrian National Council (SNC) "as a positive step forward."

"It calls on the international community also to welcome these efforts," added a statement approved by the EU's 27 ministers in Luxembourg.

While short of outright recognition, the statement comes a day after Syria threatened retaliation should nations recognise the SNC.

FINANCIAL NEWS

FOREIGN EXCHANGE

USD 1 = 0.377 BHD, 0.2762 KWD, 0.385 OMR, 3.6414 QAR, 3.7504 SAR, 3.673 AED

GBP 1 = 0.5904 BHD, 0.4324 KWD, 0.6029 OMR, 5.7022 QAR, 5.873 SAR, 5.7518 AED

EUR 1 = 0.5153 BHD, 0.3774 KWD, 0.5262 OMR, 4.9764 QAR, 5.1254 SAR, 5.0197 AED

PETROLEUM

Brent Spot: USD 108.520 per barrel.

"It is not on the same lines as our recognition of Libya's NTC," a European diplomat said.

"But we needed to make a gesture to the SNC to counter the regime's bid to create puppet groups," the diplomat added. As Assad renewed a pledge of reforms Sunday, Foreign Minister Walid Muallem warned Damascus will retaliate against any country that recognises the SNC, set up in Istanbul in late August. (AFP)

UN Exposes Torture In Afghan Custody

KABUL - The UN said torture is practiced systematically in some Afghan intelligence detention centres and that children under 18 are among those who suffered, according to a report published on Monday.

The UN mission in Afghanistan said it had "compelling evidence" that Afghan intelligence officials at five centres "systematically tortured detainees for the purpose of obtaining confessions and information."

Detainees described being hung by the wrists from the wall or ceiling; and being beaten especially with rubber hoses, electric cables or wires or wooden sticks and most frequently on the soles of the feet, the report said.

Electric shock, stress positions including forced standing, removal of toenails and threatened sexual abuse were among other forms of torture that detainees reported, it added.

Routine blindfolding and hooding, and denial of access to medical care in some facilities were also reported.

The UN documented one death in Afghan custody from torture in Kandahar in April 2011. The findings were based on interviews with 379 pre-trial detainees and convicted prisoners at 47 detention centres across the country, conducted from October 2010 to August 2011, said the UN. (AFP)

 WEATHER

Abu Dhabi: 27-34c Sunny
 Riyadh: 21-34c Sunny
 Kuwait: 22-37c Sunny
 Muscat: 27-30c Sunny
 Doha: 28-33c Sunny
 Manama: 26-34c Sunny

 SPORTS NEWS

China, Iraq Face 'Critical' Clash

SINGAPORE - China and Iraq face a "critical" World Cup qualifying clash on Tuesday as Asia's big powers look set to step closer to the 2014 tournament in Brazil. Australia host Oman, Japan entertain Tajikistan and South Korea are at home to UAE in games the 'Big Three' should win easily as they march towards the fourth round. But China's match-up with Iraq is shaping up as a tense affair after Zico, Coach of the 2007 Asian champions, called it a must-win.

The teams are level on points in Group A behind leaders Jordan with four rounds to play.

"The situation of Iraq in the qualifiers is critical, we have no choice other than victory against China," the Brazilian legend warned.

"China is good and well prepared team and will be playing at home. We have to be cautious but the players' confidence is sky-high," he added. China Coach Jose Antonio Camacho blasted his team as "lazy" and threatened to banish some players from his squad after last week's friendly against UAE, when they were forced to hang on for a 2-1 win. (AFP)

Football: Focused Australia Ready For Oman Test

SYDNEY - Australia Captain Lucas Neill on Monday vowed his side would not be guilty of complacency in their home tie with Oman, as they eye the next round of qualification for the 2014 World Cup in Brazil.

Australia go into Tuesday's qualifying match against Oman in Sydney with wins against Group D opponents Thailand and Saudi Arabia to their name, but Neill warned there was still a long way to go to secure a World Cup berth.

"We're not through to the next round until it's mathematically done," Captain Lucas Neill said on Monday.

"We all know that a win would be an important win, but we all respect and follow the theory that no games are easy and we shouldn't think we've won before we've won," he added.

Coach Holger Osieck said all teams in Australia's group still had the chance to go through to the next round of qualifiers. "First we have to win and it's going to be a very, very tough one and we have to really put a lot of effort into it to make it happen," he said. (AFP)

Iran To Play Bahrain In FIFA World Cup Qualifiers On Tuesday

TEHRAN - Iran will play Bahrain on Tuesday in Group E of the 2014 World Cup qualifiers at Tehran's Azadi Stadium. Iran's national team Captain Javad Nekounam said in Tehran on Monday Iran is determined to defeat Bahrain in the 2014 World Cup qualifiers, the semi-official Mehr news agency reported.

"We want to qualify for the next round as the first place team and must beat Bahrain in our home game," Nekounam was quoted as saying on Monday.

"The fans must believe in their players. They must support us to help us defeat our opponent," Nekounam said.

Iran's football Coach Carlos Queiroz said Bahrain is a dangerous opponent but he has faith in his team's ability to defeat them. "Bahrain is a dangerous team with good players, however, we know the way the Bahrainis play and want to beat them in our home game," Queiroz was quoted as saying by Tehran Times daily on Saturday. (Xinhua)

Bahrain Geared Up To Host GCC Games

MANAMA - Bahrain is all set to host the largest sporting event in the region where over 1,500 participants from GCC states will compete on Tuesday. The Bahrain 11, is the first ever GCC Games to hold in the country from October 11-22. The event is anticipated to be the largest sports celebration of its kind.

The opening ceremony on Tuesday will be held under the patronage of King Hamad at the Bahrain National Stadium in Riffa.

Organisers of the event said the participating GCC countries will be sending their national teams to compete in 8 main sports - Football, Basketball, Volleyball, Handball, Athletics, Swimming, Cycling and Bowling, and 2 sub-disciplines - Table Tennis for Women and Goalball; making a total of 10 sporting activities altogether.

The event provides GCC athletes and their national teams an opportunity to prepare for Olympics Games and place them on international events. (Xinhua)

Spectre Of 1993 Haunts France's Euro 2012 D-Day

PARIS - France may require just a point at home to Bosnia-Herzegovina on Tuesday to reach Euro 2012, but Les Bleus have been here before and thrown it all away in heart-breaking fashion. Eighteen years ago, France approached consecutive home games with Israel and Bulgaria needing one point to book their place at the 1994 World Cup in the US.

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It should have been a straightforward conclusion to a straightforward qualifying campaign, but instead it turned into one of the most traumatic episodes in the country's sporting history.

Stunned 3-2 by an Israel side that had not previously won a game, France were drawing 1-1 with Bulgaria in their final game when a last-minute counter-attack for the visitors ended with Emil Kostadinov lashing in an unforgettable winner.

Laurent Blanc was the defender who hurled himself vainly at Kostadinov's feet and in the build-up to Tuesday's game, the France coach has been obliged to re-visit that agonising November night at Parc des Princes.

"You can make a parallel (with 1993), but it's starting to get a bit old," he said last week. "The media are always there to remind us about it," he added. (AFP)

Messi Has Made Me A Better Player, Says Villa

MADRID - Barcelona striker David Villa says playing alongside Argentina's two-time World Player of the Year Lionel Messi has made him a better player.

"Messi is a player who demands a lot from those who play alongside him because you must always pay attention. Sometimes it seems impossible that he has seen you and yet he has," he said in an interview published in Monday's edition of the newspaper El Pais.

"As a result of that playing alongside him has helped me improve," added Villa, the top scorer in Spain's national team with 49 goals.

Messi has been the top scorer in the Champions League for the past three campaigns, in which time Barcelona have won the title twice and reached the semi-finals.

The 24-year-old won the World Player of the Year award in 2010 for the second year running. He made his debut for Barca's first team in October 2004 and became the club's youngest league scorer when he netted against Albacete in May 2005 at the age of 17 years, 10 months and seven days. (AFP)