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Poor quality of electrical items sparks concern

Closer scrutiny after mall fire

DOHA: The tragic Villaggio Mall fire has triggered calls to intensify monitoring of the import and sale of poor quality electrical fittings and household items that are considered to be a major cause of fire accidents in the country.

The Ministry of Environment has set standards and specifications for electrical products, but many nationals and residents believe that they are either inadequate or not implemented properly.

"If there is government monitoring of the sale of such products, why are they still available in the market in plenty," he wondered.

According to statistics released by the Civil Defence Department earlier, about 40 percent of the fires in the country were caused by the use of poor quality exhaust fans in commercial and residential buildings.

Overloading of electrical devices is said to be the major cause of fires during summer. The risk will further increase if the device is old or substandard. Despite repeated warnings issued by the Department in this respect, there is no noticeable drop in the use or sale of such products.

Shopping malls across the country have started summer promotions and the price war is being waged mainly for the

substandard electrical, electronic and household goods. The market is flooded with such products, especially after the opening of several new shopping malls.

"You cannot get a branded product at low prices. All the shopping centres are offering low quality or counterfeit products in their promotions. It may not be dangerous to sell a duplicate perfume, but this is not the case for a low quality exhaust fan or an air conditioner," said a resident.

Not only are shopping malls selling such products, they are also risking the lives of visitors by using unsafe devices and material in their premises.

The cause of the Villaggio fire is still under investigation, but several shopping mall officials admit that many of these huge commercial complexes are using poor quality wiring material and electric devices to reduce cost. This is more true of many residential complexes. The use of highly inflammable material for decorating the shops and buildings also poses a major risk.

"The poor wiring or a low quality exhaust fan can easily lead to an electrical short circuit and fire. Once the fire breaks out, it becomes uncontrollable due to the abundance of highly inflammable material in the premises," said an expert. **THE PENINSULA**

Arabic language forum



H H Sheikha Moza bint Nasser with other dignitaries attending the final day of a special forum for the advancement of the Arabic language in Doha yesterday. (AR AL-BAKER)

Qatar-based directors of Syrian bank quit

DOHA: The Qatar-based directors of Syria International Islamic Bank (SIIB) resigned their roles at the behest of Qatar's central bank, to comply with US Treasury sanctions against the lender.

SIIB, formed in 2006 by Qatari and Syrian investors, was designated under anti-weapons proliferation laws by the US government on Wednesday, freezing its assets in the United States and prohibiting US firms and individuals from doing business with it.

"Qatari investors in SIIB will not seek board representation and will remain passive investors," the central bank said in a statement yesterday. "The Qatar-based directors of SIIB have resigned."

Qatar International Islamic Bank (QIIB) and Qatari investors own a combined 49-percent stake in the Syrian lender, with a QIIB representative chairman of SIIB. Other Qatar-based board members include representatives from Private Projects Co. and Qatar Islamic Insurance Co. **REUTERS**

Spike in demand for a weakened euro

DOHA: Exchange houses are witnessing increased demand for euro as the currency continues to shed value against the dollar to which the Qatari riyal is pegged ahead of the long summer break when people travel in hordes for vacationing overseas.

Foreign exchange operators say it is hard to quantify the rise in demand for the European common currency this summer as compared to last year, but suggest the increase could be anywhere between 20 and 25 percent.

The euro has lost more than 14 percent against the riyal in a year since the last summer break. One unit of euro was available in the local foreign exchange market for 4.51 riyals yesterday.

The rate of euro around this time last year was QR5.25, Muzammil Hanif, Senior Vice-President of Al Fardan Exchange, told this newspaper.

"There is huge demand for euro at this time. We are selling a lot of the currency in cash as people are planning to travel to European

destinations during the summer break," he said.

Travel agencies say that a lot of families are planning to travel to places like Turkey, Paris, Vienna and destinations in east Europe, especially, during the summer break.

Not many people seem to be keen on visiting London as the Olympics is scheduled to be held there, say travel and tour trade sources.

Lebanon, which is one of the most favoured destinations

particularly for Qatari tourists, has been declared out of bounds for GCC nationals due to the security situation.

Hence Malaysia, Thailand, Turkey, Paris, Vienna and some east European cities are emerging as favourite destinations for a majority of Qatari families this year. According to Muzammil Hanif, euro is expected to lose value further against the dollar and riyals since concerns about Eurozone banks are growing. **THE PENINSULA**



Relatives carry the coffin of 7-year-old Spanish girl Isabel, who perished in a fire at the Villaggio Mall, during the funeral at Campo de Criptana, Ciudad Real, Spain, on Wednesday. See also page 2

We value Qatar's role: Pakistan FM

BY AZMAT HAROON

DOHA: Pakistan's Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar yesterday hailed Qatar's role in helping to start peace talks with the Taliban.

Talking about the Taliban setting up a political office in Qatar, Khar said: "We welcome any country which plays a proactive role in the peace process. It shows you're willing to take a chance because you're saying you believe in peace and stability. We really value Qatar's contribution in that."

"As a Muslim country, Pakistan looks at Qatar as a beacon of hope — in leading forward change, and transformation, and yet maintaining cultural values, Khar

told *The Peninsula* in an exclusive interview.

Qatar has emerged as the Muslim world's leading cultural centre, Khar added.

"Qatar is going ahead with modernisation and maintaining its cultural values, its heritage, and yet not resisting change, which is why we look at Qatar as a good model," she said.

"Any movement which works towards creating an atmosphere of negotiations for peace, is something that we welcome and support," she added.

Khar, the youngest and first woman foreign minister of Pakistan, said that Pakistan has had difficult times with the United States. Following the

unilateral raid on Osama bin Laden's hideout in Abbottabad in 2011, Pakistan-US ties were affected. Relations were further strained by a US-led Nato air strike in Salalah that killed 24 Pakistani soldiers. Over 6,000 soldiers have laid down their lives fighting militants on their home soil since, Khar explained.

"With the Salala incident, the parliament expects an apology and we do not believe it is unreasonable. Pakistan has asked that there should be guarantees that such incidents are not repeated," Khar insisted. The minister argued that Pakistan is not a West-hater or US-basher.

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Pakistan's Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar speaking at the Brookings Centre Doha yesterday. (QASSIM RAHMATULLAH)

Qatari woman makes a mark in world of high finance

BY SATISH KANADY

DOHA: Qatari women are breaking new grounds in the financial world. Described as an area where they were 'feared to tread' until recently, the financial professions are increasingly becoming Qatari women's forte.

"Over the years, Qatari women have seen immense progress in terms of education and they don't believe in the stereotype 'glass

ceiling' concept", says Dalia Al Khalaf (pictured), a young Qatari woman specialising in debt and equity financing at Enterprise Qatar (EQ).

Dalia, one of very few women specialising in the field in the country, doesn't buy the theory that the financial sector is still significantly prejudiced against women. "There is growing evidence that more and more Qatari girls are joining the specialised financial professions.

The number is really increasing in Qatar", she said.

A graduate of Portland State University with a mathematical degree background, Dalia's groundbreaking career in the financial market began as credit analyst at al khaliji bank, one of Qatar's leading full-service commercial banks, where she provided comprehensive credit analysis for corporate clients as well as proactive mitigants to

identified risks. al khaliji gave her the opportunities to gain experience and general understanding of different industries and business cycle as well as sound knowledge of banking products. After gaining a solid background in debt financing, Dalia rose in the ranks as a Private Equity Associate with Qinvest, Shariah-compliant investment bank.

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Emergency in Egypt comes to an end

CAIRO: Egypt's decades-long state of emergency came to an end yesterday after its last renewal expired, the ruling military said in a statement, vowing to continue to "protect" the nation.

The military will continue its "national and historic responsibility, taking into account that the state of emergency has ended..." it said. **AFP**

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German expertise for equestrian enthusiasts

DOHA: Al Shaqab, under the leadership of H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Chairperson and H E Sheikha Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Vice Chairperson, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with two of Germany's leading equestrian institutions to introduce international courses to develop Al Shaqab and diversify its activities.

Prof Dr Arno Gego, Director of Aachen School of Course Design and Susane Schmitt-Rimkus, Director of National Stud Warendorf signed the MoU with Fahad Saad Al Qahtani, Director of Al Shaqab. Al Shaqab has over 1,000 members and the courses will be introduced to help them develop their skills of riding and knowledge in stud management.

With an attractive exchange programme and various courses, Al Shaqab will thus be a base for

equestrian enthusiasts from the region and around Asia.

"This association is a great boost for Al Shaqab's vision under the guidance of H E Sheikh Mohammed and H E Sheikha Mayassa," said Al Qahtani.

"Al Shaqab has already a long list of achievements and it is all set to record more feats in future as well. I'm confident that this education and exchange programme will further enhance Al Shaqab's reputation as the hub of Equestrian activities. We expect them to develop and benefit from the different courses that will be offered here. The chief objective of Al Shaqab is to focus constantly on improvement of its results and efforts. Through these signings, we hope to develop ourselves further and consolidate our achievements."

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Gego said: "I was here many years ago and I'm happy to see Qatar's vision is moving forward."

"Recently, I managed to see two of the Qatari riders in Germany and I was pretty impressed with their showing. I'm sure we can succeed if we are working like good partners," Dr Gego said.

Schmitt-Rimkus too was pleased with the joint venture, saying, "We are honoured to be approached by Al Shaqab. I'm very impressed with the facilities here. People here are very enthusiastic and more importantly, they are very close to horses. Like the Germans, many people here value their partnership with horses. We are into breeding and providing support to build a professional horse's life. We shall also enable you to find some good trainers from your own population."

Also present on the occasion were Christina Heibach, co-director of the Aachen School of Course Design, and Peter Borggreve, chief riding master, National Stud Warendorf. **THE PENINSULA**

Rush at Souq Najada



People rush to Souq Najada to avail of low prices of various products yesterday, the last day given by the Municipal Ministry for the shop owners to vacate the premises. Perfumes, electronics and ready-to-wear clothes were among the products being sold for as low as QR5 at the clearance sale. **SALIM MATRAMKOT**

Businesswoman says SMEs need govt push

Continued from page 1

There she was responsible for comprehensive analysis of potential private equity investment opportunities, including financial modelling and market research necessary for investment decision, assisting in executing investment deals and finally monitoring portfolio performance and maintaining investor relationships.

Currently, Dalia is a Senior Associate at Enterprise Qatar, SME authority, overlooking both debt and equity financing programmes and developing and implementing business strategies to ensure incremental finance allocation to SMEs through utilisation of debt and equity funding.

"Being in the financial world is certainly an impressive thing, but each step we have to convince peers that we could do it. Some of my initial fears proved to be entirely unfounded. The often-cited argument that women have to work harder than their male peers in order to be recognised as competent professionals was

proved to be a myth, at least in my case', says Dalia who is pursuing an Executive MBA at prestigious London Business School (LBS) UK to sharpen her skills.

EQ's current CEO Noora Al Mannai is a great inspiration for any Qatari girl. With a vast experience in investment banking, Noora is the CEO of two entities. She is a great inspiration for me. Her dedication, hard work and enthusiasm are worth emulating for any Qatari girl aspiring for a profession in the financial market.

On her stint with the EQ, Dalia says it was not the money that attracted her to the profession. It is the opportunities to make change that attracted me to move to EQ. There is a social element in working with EQ. It is not just making easy access to money but huge element of the scope for human development.

Dalia, who recently won the Qatari Businesswomen award for "innovation", tells Qatari business women to continue to educate themselves before foraying

into business. On Qatari's continuing reluctance to go for private sector jobs, Dalia said: "Against a global business backdrop earmarked with competitiveness and challenges, a viable and dynamic SME sector is a requisite for the sustainable growth and prosperous development of both the economic and social systems of any country."

She also added "Qatar is an emerging economy with immense potential at both the macro and micro levels. Qatar government has been proactive in recognising the need of to diversify the economy and support SMEs and has therefore established EQ to look into the needs of SMEs and foster a healthy ecosystem for this segment to burgeon... There is a need for development to fill the gap in the private sector. There is real need to push the sector further. If that doesn't happen the beneficiaries of Qatar's astronomical growth would be big corporate companies and the MNCs, not the nationals," she said.

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Pakistan ties with UK, EU healthy: Minister

Continued from page 1

"Pakistan values its relationship with US. We want cooperation. US has now an unprecedented chance to fix relations with a democratic government," she said.

Earlier on a question about US doubts over Pakistan harbouring terrorists within its military, Khar argued that it is widely believed in Pakistan that dictators have had support from the US. "Our negotiated terms of engagement with US have been broken many times," she said.

Khar said that Europe has been understanding of Pakistan. "It proves it is pro-democratic because it takes unprecedented steps. With UK and EU, we have

a very healthy relationship. As democracy grows, their involvement escalates," she explained.

Khar said India continues to be a success story for the current Pakistani government so far.

"Over the years, Pakistan and India have invested extensively in building animosity against each other. Both countries are to be blamed. We are trying to give a serious message of peace and want to work together with India," she said.

With respect to relations with Iran, Khar said that it is a neighbouring country and that Pakistan cannot be selective with its neighbours.

"Until we realise that we are

common citizens of a region, we will not move ahead with the peace process and development," she insisted.

On the issue of India's increasing involvement in Afghanistan, the Foreign Minister said that Pakistan cannot decide what kind of relations Afghanistan chooses to have and with which countries.

"Afghan refugees cross Pakistani border every day. The spillover effect of strife and war, or stability and peace from Afghanistan is instantaneous," she said.

Khar was hosted by Brookings Centre Doha and spoke on the sidelines of Pakistan's place in the world. **THE PENINSULA**

The Managing Director, Deputy Manager and staff of



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Offer their deepest condolences to the families
of the victims and martyrs on duty
who lost their lives in the
fire at Villagio Mall

*May the departed souls rest in peace and may
almighty Allah give strength to the bereaved.*