



Insight

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Families-only shopping mall coming up in Muaither area

A NEW upscale shopping centre, which will be open to families only throughout the year, is coming up in Muaither. Wathnan Mall, slated to open in February, promises to bring an international shopping experience to people living in and around Muaither.

Located near the Racing and Equestrian Club, the shopping centre will focus on offering the best facilities for children among other attractions. It will have a purpose-built play area and the mall is planning to import 12 ponies from Australia to be used as children's mounts inside the mall, project manager Ibrahim Kreidie said.

Kreidie touted an "exclusive family experience" as the mall's

unique attraction. "We want to make it absolutely clear that no bachelors will be admitted all seven days of the week and through the year. We are very particular about that. What we are building is a luxury, family-oriented shopping complex," he said.

The 41,000sq m mall, with 22,000sqm of office space, will house some 100 shops including "one of the best" hypermarkets in Doha. The list includes high-end international brands and fashion labels, exclusive boutiques, coffee shops, a food court comprising 16 shops and department stores. There is parking for 700 cars.

About 20% of the space has

already been rented out. Those who have already signed agreements include Masraf Al Rayan, Al Jabor Watches, Al Jazeera Perfumes and My Fair Lady, Kreidie said. The project draws heavily on Qatar's heritage for inspiration, Kreidie said. Wathnan was the name of the best horse owned by the third ruler of Qatar, Sheikh Abdullah bin Jassim bin Mohamed al-Thani. The mall's owner Sheikh Fahad bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani chose the name, Kreidie said. Kreidie said the mall's promoters are also looking to enhance the profile of Muaither with a top-of-the-range shopping complex.

Source: Gulf Times, 20th November 2008.

Single men complain over ban at malls during Eid

The first day of Eid Al Fitr yesterday was welcomed with a great outcry from single men as malls imposed Family Day turning one of the most festive days in the Muslim world into a day of sadness.

Visitors to City Center Doha yesterday expressed disgust over the situation crying it's unfair. The signboard at the City Center says: 'Family Day for the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd days of Eid from 10am to 10pm'. I have waited for this three-day holiday to come but my excitement suddenly turned to disappointment when I found out that the Eid holiday is Family Day for

malls". A middle-aged woman along with her two children was also denied entry for some reason. "I have been waiting here for 20 minutes but they won't allow me get in," she said angrily. She could do nothing but leave.

Some single men used their old strategies of tagging with families or joining single women just to be able to access the mall. The guards refused to answer questions saying that they were not allowed to entertain any queries or receive any complaints. "If you have any complaints, you may talk to the management. We are just doing our job," the chief guard said.

Source: The Peninsula, 1, Oct. 2008.

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Qatar's role in building interfaith harmony

Qatar has rapidly gained reputation among Christians as a country that is serving as a bridge between religions, an Anglican bishop said yesterday. The Right Reverend Michael Lewis, whose responsibility includes all Christians in Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula, as well as Iraq and both parts of Cyprus, was speaking during a visit to Doha International Center For Interfaith Dialogue (DICID).

During the week-long visit, Lewis's second, he will oversee the construction phase of an Anglican church in Abu Hamour, work on which started recently. "The Qatari government which has generously asked my congregation to build a facility for all apostles here and we appreciate HH the Emir's decision", he noted.

As part of the plan, churches for various congregations will be built at a site in Abu Hamour and once com-

pleted will serve 15,00 to 20,00 faithfuls on any given Friday. "Currently we are in the fund raising phase even though we have started building most of the funding comes from locals rather than any government. Qatari government was kind enough to allocate land for us, for free", Rev Schwartz explained.

The first ceremony of the Anglican church in Qatar took place on May 9th 2008. Bishop Lewis, 55, who holds a degree in oriental studies and in Theology from the University of Oxford, also praised DICID's role in bridging religious divides. I was there earlier to participate in the 6th Doha Conference of Interfaith Dialogue organized by DICID and was impressed by the level of contribution it was offering", Lewis said. As for immediate results of the unique conference, he said, it will be a while. "Our duty is to continue to work together and

try our best in solving the problems" he reminded.

DICID was inaugurated this year in May, on the sidelines of a two-day Interfaith conference in Doha. The Doha Declaration that was announced by Muslim, Christian and Jewish scholars after the conference was available on DICID's website www.dicid.org, in English and Arabic. The Center's chairman board of director, professor Ibrahim Saleh Al-Naimi and director Yusuf Al-Siddiqi were present yesterday.

Source: Gulf Times, Friday 26 September 2008

Out of bounds

In a move that smacks of arbitrariness and not a small bit of racism, the swanky Villaggio mall has declared the three days of Eid to be family days, meaning many Asian 'bachelors' were left outside glumly looking in at the goodies they were not allowed to buy. Eid is one of the few times a year workers get some time off and an opportunity to dress up in their best clothes to go shopping and enjoy some leisure time from backbreaking work. What is even more ironic is perhaps many of these workers left stranded outside yesterday may have played some role in building the plush Villaggio mall. Mohammed Khan, Villaggio Security Manager, gave a bizarre explanation to The Peninsula of the 'Families Only' policy for the holidays. "It is a matter of the mall's honour. We are not allowing people in from the Industrial Area or those dressed in plastic slippers and wearing shorts. They do not have money to spend in the

fashionable shops and if they do have money, they will spend it in Carrefour. Groups of these people tend to create trouble." He said similar policies were being implemented in other malls as also the Corniche.

However, that specious argument holds little water as around noon, Carrefour was about the only store open while the so-called fashionable shops were shut, to open later in the evening. Asked why western residents were allowed in, as well as nationals and other Arabs — a few were spotted entering without hindrance in shorts and slippers — he said nothing could be done about single Qataris being allowed in. As for westerners, he said: "Westerners are good and will spend money."

One such person, a senior executive, has decided to boycott malls and other public places that enforce the policy of segregation. "I cannot believe such abominable policies of discrimination are practiced in the 21st century," said Raymond Paul. "The only way I can protest is boycotting such malls."



Source: The Peninsula, 1st October 2008.

Menard to continue as head of media forum

Robert Menard, who yesterday announced his registration as the secretary-general of media watchdog Reporters without Borders, will continue to be the director general of the Doha Centre for Media Freedom, a spokesman for the centre said. "The Doha Centre for Media Freedom is to receive a major boost as Menard will be able to devote more time to the centre," Mohammed Ouahalima, deputy head of communications at the

DCMF told *Gulf Times*. "Menard is not currently in Doha. He will be back by the beginning of the next month. I think this will be a very positive turn of the Doha Centre for Media Freedom as he will be able to devote more time to the centre. It will give the activities of the centre a major boost," he said.

Announcing his decision at a meeting of the organization's International Council in Paris, Menard said: "I am stepping down from this post but I will of course continue to

be a member of Reporters Without Borders. I have dedicated 23 years to this organization and I will continue to participate in its activities. But in a different way. I cannot imagine a life that does not involve a commitment to serving the values of democracy, freedoms and human rights, which in my view gives meaning to our lives."

Source: *Gulf Times*, 27-9-2008.

Journalists' union boss survives attack

Baghdad : The head of the main journalists' union in Iraq survived an assassination attempt yesterday when a bomb exploded outside his office in the capital Baghdad. Muayad al-Lami, the chief of the Iraqi Journalists' Union, was rushed to hospital after he was wounded in the blast at the gates of the union building in the northern Waziriyah neighbourhood. "He was seeing off three guests when an improvised explosive device exploded in front of the gate," colleague Hassan al-Abudi said. "He was wounded and taken to hospital along with his guests who were also wounded." The union has a membership of several thousand active journalists across the country. There was no immediate claim of responsi-

bility. Lami's predecessor, Shihab al-Timimi, died four days after being shot in a drive-by shooting in Baghdad in February. Lami was elected as the head of the union at July elections. Iraq is regarded as the one of the world's most dangerous places for journalists. According to the Iraqi journalism freedom of observatory, an organisation for the defence of media worker's rights in Iraq, at least 243 media workers have been killed since the US lead invasion of March 2003. Groups of Shia extremists trained in Iran are returning to Iraq with plans to bomb high-profile targets, the chief of Dhi Qar province's police said yesterday. Brigadier General Sabah al-Fatlawai said Shia extremists are returning by crossing the border from Amara, the capital of Shia Maysan province in the south. "The special

groups are returning from Iran after receiving training in using new tactics. We have seized 20 motorcycle bombs in Nasiriyah." Fatlawi said, referring to the capital of Dhi Qar, which neighbours Maysan.

The US military claims that special groups are cells of Shia militants who are trained, funded and armed by Iranian-linked groups. Tehran denies the charges. "They are crossing the border through Amara," Fatlawi said. "They intend to target officials in the country and in Nasiriyah," he said adding that local authorities had put in place tight security measures, including banning the use of motorcycles.

Source: *Gulf Times*, 21st September, 2008.

Insurance initiative to benefit low –paid workers

Although most companies insure staff for fatal accidents in the workplace, financial aid following death by natural causes is uncommon. The new initiative – developed by Indian embassy officials and community leaders – now means the families of workers who suffer such a tragedy will no longer be left high and dry with no means of support. The Indian Community Social Security Fund (ICSSF) covers low-paid workers without insurance in the event of a natural death while employed in Qatar. Legal expert Nizar Kochery said the fund has been set up to provide an avenue to streamline essential support to the families of those who die here.

The fund, formally launched today by Indian Ambassador George Joseph, will ask members to contribute as little as QR12 a year to be part of it.

“Those opting for two-year membership only need to pay QR20,” said Kochery who developed the concept with social activist and business analyst Shabeena Moideen.

Kochery told Gulf Times it was the virtual absence of any social security for the families of low-paid Indian workers that prompted him to create the fund.

“There are a few schemes to support the families of those killed in accidents, either at work or on road, but there are no such security schemes for the kith and kin of those who have a natural death,” he explained. Each year a number of Indian labourers die of natural causes in Qatar – and their deaths cause severe financial difficulties for families back home.

Kochery helped mastermind a similar initiative a couple of years ago which resulted in low premium personal accident insurance for labourers working throughout the Gulf. The popular and affordable scheme was

launched in association with the National Insurance Company, an Indian government undertaking. Kochery said he explored the possibility of launching a similar scheme for life insurance, but no Indian companies were willing to cover ‘natural death’ at a nominal premium.

“That’s how our thoughts converged to set up a community social security fund to support the families of poor Indian workers in the fund who die from natural causes or other reasons but are not covered by any death compensation benefits,” said Kochery.

He added that the fund might also extend assistance to those suffering from terminal diseases on a case-to-case basis.

The fund, Kochery said, would also follow up compensation issues regarding accidental death as the law sets a one-year time limit for filing claims. He revealed that there had been instances of families of a number of poor labourers losing blood money payouts because of a lack of appropriate guidance.

The minister at the Indian embassy will be the ex-officio patron of the fund and an embassy official will be the chief co-ordinating officer.

The source of funds will come mainly from corporate supporters and by various money-raising initiatives and there are four different membership options; Founding Members (QR1,000 and above paid before the first board of trustee meeting); trustee members (a one-time membership fee of QR200 and above); associate members (QR50 and above per annum – on making a total payment of QR200 the associate member will be automatically upgraded to a trustee member); institutional members (business or voluntary organisations paying in QR1,000 and above; represented by

an Indian national as its nominee).

Kochery added that, on consensus at the meeting of the board of trustees, the fund shall engage in social activities for the protection and welfare of the Indian community.

Mr. Nizar Kochery is the legal expert for the Indian Embassy here in Qatar.

Source: Gulf Times, 20th September 2008

Addition

Want to know more about Mr. Nizar Kochery? Refer to page six for an in-depth interview with the human rights activist himself.

Poor living conditions ‘making workers mentally ill’

POOR working and living conditions of labourers are increasingly causing some of them to end up at the psychiatric unit in the country, a senior government official has said.

Dr Suhaila Ghuloum, who is the assistant chair of Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC)’s Psychiatry Department, told Gulf Times that “about 98% of the expatriate workers who come here are also subsequently deported, even after completing a medical course.” “You know their living conditions are much different to what they may have anticipated. Their salaries too may be much less; they might also have problems with actually receiving this salary on time; and they have a lot of debts back home,” said Dr Ghuloum, who is a Member

of the Royal College (MRC) for, Psychiatry.

“This puts them under a lot of pressure because even if they wanted to go back, they cannot, as the looming debt-collector is always on their mind.” According to her, if a patient does want to continue to work the fact that they have had a mental illness - even though acute - comes in the way and most likely they are deported from the country. “This is one of the problems that we regularly face when we want to discharge somebody from the hospital after an acute mental-related illness; the sponsor wants to send them back and the patient himself may want to go,” Dr Ghuloum said.

“But the first worry they describe

is that I have a huge debt and I don’t know how I can pay it off when I get back.”

The total number of outpatient visits at the HMC’s Department of Psychiatry figured at 17,882 compared to 14,964, a decade ago.

On how the workers end up at the hospital, the mental-health expert said: “Most of the time they are taken to the emergency room by their colleagues or room-mates, and from there the patients are sent to us for evaluation.”

Source: Gulf Times, 27th August 2008.

Childrens Rights

Child labourer likens fighting poverty with Eid

Faisalabad •What the Eid-ul-Fitr festival will bring for 10-year-old Ihsan Ali, a child-labourer in this giant industrial city in central Pakistan, can be anybody's guess as he continues to struggle with poverty as the festivities draw closer. Interviewed as he was returning home after his 11-hour job at the factory, he initially hesitated to talk and insisted that his owner had asked him not to tell anyone about his working at the factory or else the police would arrest him.

He said his father earned too meager an amount to be able to make both ends meet. "I have to work really hard; the day seems too long

but at every sunset I take home 'something' to feed the family".

Holding his tools and fixing a cutter blade on his ear, the little workman says he had never been to school and was employed at the factory as soon as he was offered the 'advantageous' job. "But that doesn't mean that I didn't want to get education. Every morning when I see children going to school, I feel bad about not being among them".

The child labourer had a clear-cut message for the powers-that-be that "if the government wants us — children like me — to go to school instead of work at

factories, it must extend financial assistance to encourage us to bid farewell to powerlooms and other such workplaces". Child labour has assumed alarming proportions in Faisalabad as hundreds of children are working at various powerloom units to financially support their families. Most of the children are under 10 years of age, doing hazardous jobs that risk their life and limb despite laws prohibiting child labour.

Source: The Peninsula, 28th September, 2008.

Human Rights Activist of the Month: Mr. Nizar Kochery

How did the idea for the new insurance policy come about?

When we analyze the statistics of deaths amongst the lower income Indians in Qatar there has been considerable number of deaths (non accidental) leading to their families back in India being left high and dry with no means of support.

The wage level of a worker in Doha has no comparison with the cost of living. While we scan the dream of an immigrant: a self sufficient family, settled children, an upgrade of the current social and economic level of the family will occupy the priorities. There is no point in talking GDP to him. The fact is that the poor cannot participate in the benefits of the economic advantage of globalization and all, still continue as latent market for the produce of the upper. The residue on death is found “zero” in most cases.

Our search went knocking all the possible doors in India to support the heirs of the deceased by some sort of insurance, but no insurance company was willing to offer a scheme to cover natural death at nominal premium. This lead converging our thoughts to initiate setting up of a Community Social Security Fund to support the family of the poor Indian worker who dies from natural causes or other reasons is not covered by any death compensation benefits.

In the yester year we managed to establish a low premium personal accident insurance scheme beneficial and affordable to the poor labourers working in different sectors in Gulf countries with National Insurance Company, a Government of India Undertaking. This thought was provoked by accidental deaths without any compensation. For example when there is a road accident and the offender is not identified the family of the deceased are further victimized by not paying any compensation.

Why aren't employers liable for covering the insurance of their employees?

Compensation on natural death is not mandatory under employment or any other laws. Only few organizations, in order to reduce Labour turnover offer this as their welfare programme.

How do you think conditions have changed for labourers since you have been in Qatar?

I can see that profile of the country got elevated, standard of living at all levels gone up, life style gone up, ambitions of young exploded by innovation and it reached to a stage where technology is the co-traveler with remarkable speed. But when we look at the labour sector, the growth is not inclusive, the socio economic realities of the bottom of the pyramid of the economic strata failed to receive appropriate attention. The economic growth by and large by passes the poor.

Entrepreneurs are of two kinds. One who exploits manpower as and when an opportunity strikes, and the other who regards the employees as a partner in progress. Most of the entrepreneurs think that they can run their business and be productive while they ignore the needs and ambitions of their staff. They fail to get the best out of their manpower and they fail to develop the right culture in the organisation for a constant growth. We would have a more civilized society if we learned to think intelligently about people.

There are companies price its products to break even. Any one can play around with prices to push turnover. Most of the time the customers are taken care of but the most neglected in any business are the employees.

What is being done in India to stop the scams and lies often associated with recruitment to the Gulf?

Authorities in India are always in search of new and effective steps to

stamp out this human trafficking.

As a result bilateral agreements are in place with most of the Gulf countries and generally Indian Embassies abroad blacklist the recruiters and the companies involved.

The mindset of an ambitious under privileged immigrant worker while in search of survival opportunity in Gulf is exploited. It is obvious that one of the biggest parts of this problem is the “unscrupulous employment agencies” “manpower agents” the middleman stationed both here in Qatar and back in India. These ‘fellow countrymen’, demand exorbitant payments.

Indians are an integral part of Qatar's society and development, but beyond Prince Tamim's recent positive comments on the Indian community, do you think they generally get the reward and recognition they deserve?

I take Prince Tamim’s remarks as recognition of the host country on the contributions of the Indian community in the wider perspective.

Prospered in such spectacular fashion the great planning, long-term vision, resource management expertise, infra-structure development, matching human resource development, in order to harness wealth towards stability and self-reliance, Qatar has presented itself as a model to the world.

I doubt the migrant Indian community receives the reward and recognition they fully deserve.

Mr. Kochery is a lawyer who has been working closely with the Indian Embassy to help implement this valuable and much-needed scheme.

