

Katara set to buy New York's Plaza Hotel for \$600mn



By Dmitry Zhdannikov/Reuters, London

Qatar has agreed to buy one of New York's most iconic buildings, the Plaza Hotel, for around \$600mn, adding a development that was once owned by US President Donald Trump, to its luxury property portfolio.

Qatar's state-owned Katara Holding is buying full ownership of the hotel, including a 75% stake from Indian business group Sahara India Pariwar. Katara and Sahara were not immediately available to comment.

Qatar has been buying top hotels and luxury properties in the West over the past decade as part of a drive by its \$300bn-plus sovereign wealth fund to diversify the wealth it accumulates from gas and oil exports. Qatar, the world's largest exporter of liquefied natural gas, already owns landmark hotels such as The Savoy and The Connaught in London. Its wealth fund, the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), has also invested in large Western companies such as carmaker Volkswagen and mining giant Glencore.

Qatar has said the impact of a year-long blockade by its neighbours has been mitigated allowing it to resume large-scale investments abroad, including buying a stake in Russian oil major Rosneft.

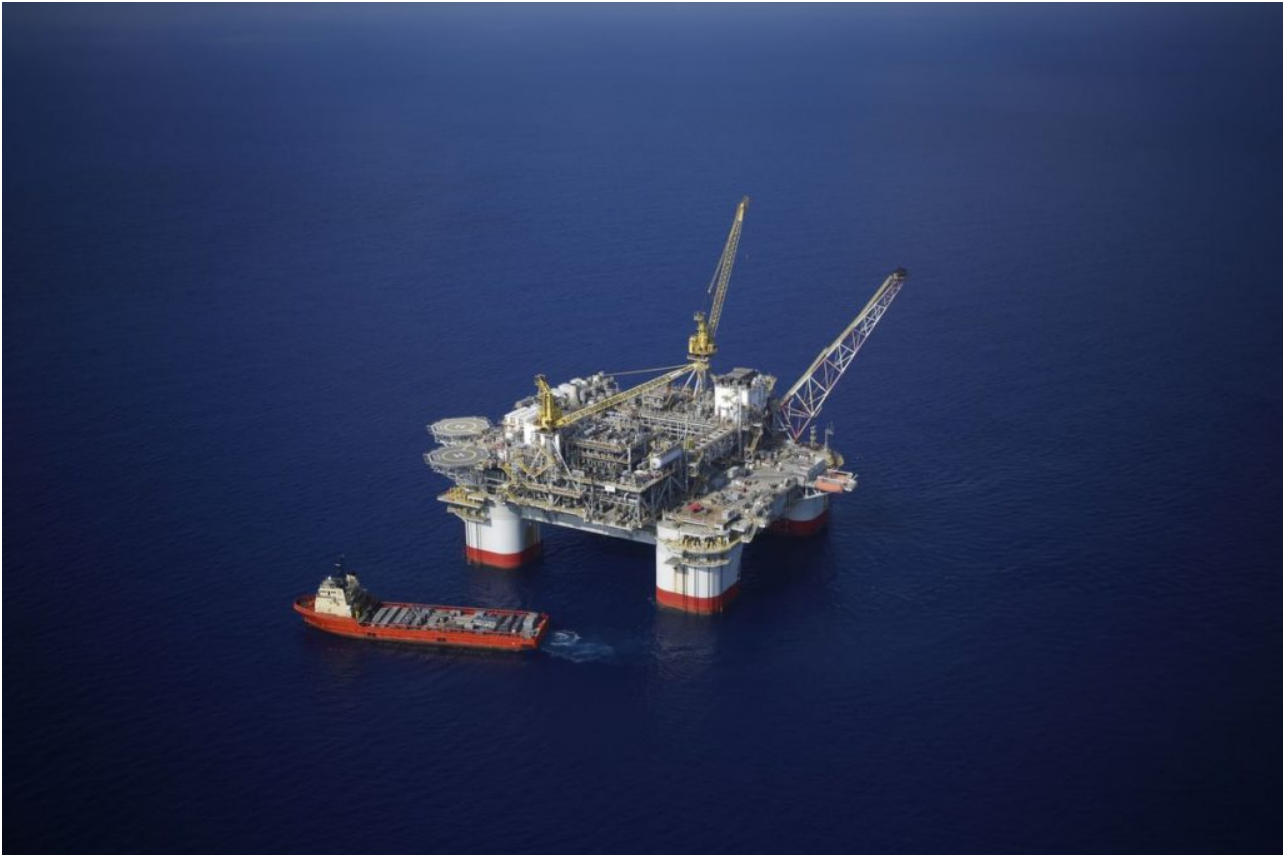
The Plaza Hotel deal is the largest investment in the Western property market by Qatar since the start of the blockade in June last year.

Trump bought the Plaza in 1988, but had to sell it to a group of investors more than two decades ago as part of a bankruptcy proceeding.

Sahara has been trying to sell its stake for several years amid financial difficulties for its chairman, Subrata Roy. The Plaza has hosted guests including the Beatles and Marlene Dietrich, who performed there. It was also the site of Trump's marriage to Marla Maples in 1993.

The hotel has featured in movies including the 1959 American thriller by Alfred Hitchcock, North by Northwest; the 1991 drama Scent of a Woman starring Al Pacino; and the 1990 gangster drama The King of New York with Christopher Walken.

**Future of Big Oil
Increasingly Shaped by Fate
of Global Gas**



- LNG demand is expected to grow fastest of all fossil fuels
- Shell's 2016 purchase of BG Group helped major catch Exxon

Majors including Royal Dutch Shell Plc and BP Plc have boosted their proportion of gas output in recent years, helping them trim Exxon Mobil Corp.'s lead as the world's most valuable oil company. Meanwhile Chevron Corp. added two giant Australian liquefied natural gas projects and Exxon is punching back with two major projects of its own, in Papua New Guinea and Mozambique.

Natural gas, seen as a clean bridge from coal to renewables, offers the best long-term demand growth among fossil fuels, particularly in its easy-to-transport liquefied form. At the same time, gas exploration comes with high upfront costs and long payback periods. How the majors handle those issues will become key drivers for success moving forward.

"We see the market growing rapidly, with gas demand growing

faster than overall energy demand,” said Steve Hill, executive vice president for gas trading at Shell, the world’s biggest LNG producer. “We don’t see renewables as being a threat to gas.”

Industry heavyweights and officials from LNG trading nations – including Qatar, Japan, South Korea and Australia – will discuss global gas dynamics at the World Gas Conference in Washington D.C. starting Tuesday. The meeting is in the U.S. for the first time in 30 years, reflecting America’s shale-prodded gas clout.

Emerging Gap

Liquefied natural gas demand will exceed supply without new projects

Gas emits about half as much carbon dioxide as coal. That means it’s often seen as both a cleaner-burning alternative and a complement to wind and solar since it can produce electricity when the weather doesn’t cooperate. While the global LNG market is likely to be well supplied until 2022, demand will grow by 4 percent to 7 percent annually from 2023 on, according to Bloomberg New Energy Finance.

Growth Path

“In the fossil fuel area, it’s the one clear growth part of the business,” said Brian Youngberg, an analyst at Edward Jones & Co., based in St. Louis, Missouri.

With that growth, there’s a “potential shortage” looming in the mid-2020s that can only be overcome by decisions on new export projects over the next two years, BNEF said in a March report.

Shell’s purchase of BG Group for more than \$50 billion in 2016, around the time when oil and gas prices bottomed, was primarily a purchase of gas assets. Shell’s LNG capability is

now twice as big as its nearest competitor, according to Edward Jones. It may have helped boost the Anglo-Dutch company's market value, which is now about \$53 billion less than Exxon, compared with about \$150 billion before the deal.

Gas Boom

Shell's integrated gas sales regularly wallop upstream sales

BP is also undergoing a gas expansion. By 2020, the British major expects to produce about 60 percent gas and 40 percent oil, a reversal from 2014 when it was the opposite. Last year, six of BP's seven major projects brought on stream were gas, Chief Financial Officer Brian Gilvary said in an interview.

Chevron shares have returned 40 percentage points more than Exxon over the past three years, mostly because Chevron's giant Gorgon and Wheatstone LNG facilities in Australia came on stream, moving from a period of building and overspending to cash generation.

"Those assets were being risked quite heavily by the financial markets," said Tom Ellacott, senior researcher at Wood Mackenzie Ltd. "Now they're sunk costs and a lot of that risk has been unwound. They're massive cash generators for the company."

Also see: LNG's dormant mega-projects roused by surging Asia demand

Exxon is not standing still. Big Oil's worst performer over the last five years has made LNG a core part of its strategy to rebuild its upstream portfolio of assets, which is suffering from production declines.

The major sources of new LNG exports are likely to be from the U.S., Qatar, Mozambique and Papua New Guinea, BNEF said. Exxon has substantial gas operations in all of these countries, and the latter two are part of the company's five key global

projects for the next decade.

Changing Mix

Gas accounts for a larger share of global primary energy consumption

Exxon is less worried about competition and more about having the lowest cost assets that will survive the price-swings that affect the market over time, Chief Executive Officer Darren Woods said in an interview last month.

Exxon currently produces about 55 percent oil and 45 percent gas. Woods doesn't expect that to "dramatically shift" but it may change slightly as major projects come on stream.

Challenged Model

With the growth of renewable energy and the success of independents in shale oil production, Big Oil's business model is being challenged. The major producers' weighting in global equity indices is now at a 50-year low, Goldman Sachs Group Inc. said in a March report.

As such, LNG, with its high up-front costs, huge technical difficulty, and good growth rates, has become something of a safe place for the industry.

"The returns tend to be lower but once they're on stream, the cash margins are generally very high," said Wood Mackenzie's Ellacott. "It's increasingly becoming the domain of the majors."

Total eyes brownfield portfolio expansion



Total is leaning towards brownfield expansion projects as the French supermajor aims to significantly bolster its liquefied natural gas portfolio, *writes Eoin O’Cinneide*.

Schemes in the US, Nigeria, Russia and in particular Qatar are to take precedence, as the French supermajor looks to add to its position as the second-largest LNG player out of the international oil companies.

Speaking at a media briefing ahead of the World Gas Conference (WGC) in Washington this week, chief executive Patrick Pouyane called Qatar’s North Field gas field, where the company has a 24% stake, “one of the jewels in the world of LNG”.

State giant Qatar Petroleum aims to boost production capacity at the field from a current 77 million tonnes per annum to 100 million tpa, through the addition of three new trains, with Total hoping to be chosen as a participant in the expansion project.

“We are working in order to be a participant in the next wave of expansion... It is up to us to make an appealing offer, but I am confident we can participate,” Pouyanne said.

In the US, Total holds a stake in Sempra Energy’s Cameron LNG development in Louisiana, where the possible expansion from three to five trains is being considered, while it is also invested in Tellurian’s envisaged Driftwood LNG project in Texas – the latter of which would be a greenfield development.

“Obviously, the expansion of Cameron LNG will be more competitive, but we are looking at both options,” Pouyanne said.

“With Cameron LNG we are integrating the value chain. We are more fully integrated between our gas production, what we will liquefy and what we will offtake.”

At Nigeria LNG (NLNG), Total and its partners – Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation and Italian major Eni – have revived a plan to add production capacity, after years ago shelving plans for the addition of huge, new trains. The so-called Train 7 expansion will see an additional 7.1 million tpa to take total capacity to 30 million tpa, by adding two new small trains.

“NLNG is one of the projects where we want to expand – one of the best projects in the world,” Pouyanne said.

In Russia, Total is looking to follow up on its participation in Yamal LNG – with local independent Novatek – with the Arctic LNG 2 project, where it has set its sights on a more cost-competitive scheme.

Pouyanne said Total is aiming to lower capital expenditure on Arctic LNG 2 by around 30% compared to Yamal LNG, “because we have taken some lessons from the first one with some gravity-based structures”.

At the Papua LNG project in Papua New Guinea, Total is targeting three new trains, having decided on a brownfield over a greenfield project.

“If it is just adding trains and you can capitalise on your existing joint partnerships or existing gas storage facilities, it is favourable,” Pouyanne said.

Royal Dutch Shell sets sights on Fram field's gas and oil



Royal Dutch Shell is investing further in the North Sea and is pressing ahead with the development of the Fram field.

The oil company approved a deal in January to overhaul its Penguins field and unlock about 80 billion barrels of oil held there. While the investment at Fram, which lies 137 miles east

of Aberdeen, is understood not to be as large as that of Penguins, it is another mark of the returning confidence across the UK continental shelf.

Shell is one of the largest oil companies. Its interests also include renewable energy, retail and technology. It has been reshaping its portfolio to focus on lower cost or newer assets.

The company said that a mixture of gas and oil would be extracted from Fram. At its peak the field is forecast to produce the equivalent of 12,400 barrels of oil a day.

Steve Phimister, the vice-president for upstream for Britain and Ireland, said that the company was still looking to invest in further projects as it tried to grow its North Sea business.

Shell will be the operator of the Fram field with Esso Exploration and Production UK, a subsidiary of Exxonmobil, the partner in the development.

President meets Total chief in Paris



Total's energy programme was discussed during a meeting in Paris between President Nicos Anastasiades and the general director of the company Patrick Pouyanne, during which he reiterated Total's interest in increasing its presence in Cyprus.

Government Spokesman Prodromos Prodromou said during the meeting on Saturday evening "the company's commitment to Cyprus was repeated".

At the same time, the company "reconfirmed its increased interest in the EEZ of our country".

Prodromou was in the meeting, as was Energy Minister Yiorgos Lakkotrypis.

In a tweet, Lakkotrypis said the company had expressed "intense interest in expanding its interests in Cyprus' EEZ".

Total and Italian company ENI are partners in blocks 11 and 6. An exploratory drilling carried out in early 2017 in Calypso

target revealed a “promising discovery” but no data have been disclosed yet concerning the size of the reservoir size.

Cyprus says France’s Total seeks to broaden gas search work



NICOSIA, Cyprus (AP) – Cyprus says French energy company Total is seeking to broaden the scope of its work in an ongoing search for hydrocarbons off the east Mediterranean island nation.

Energy Minister Minister Yiorgos Lakkotrypis says Total is looking to expand its activities in Cypriot waters “in a variety of ways.”

He didn't specify what those ways could be because talks are still in progress. Lakkotrypis was speaking Tuesday after senior Total executive Stephane Michel met with Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades.

Anastasiades said talks with Michel focused on ways to meet the common goal of "exploiting as many energy-producing sources as possible."

In April, Michel said Total had applied to carry out exploratory drilling in an area south of Cyprus where Italian company Eni is already licensed to search for gas.

Exclusive: Exxon Mobil breaks with past, bulks up energy trading to boost profit



HOUSTON/LONDON (Reuters) – Exxon Mobil Corp (XOM.N) is pushing deeper into energy trading, building a global cadre of experienced traders and beefing up risk-management systems to lift profit, according to executive recruiters and people familiar with the business.

The development is a sea change for a company that has stood out from rivals by limiting its past activity out of concern it would be accused of market manipulation. Exxon now aims to trade around more of its growing energy assets to get the best prices for its products and increase earnings, according to an employee familiar with the matter.

Expanded trading could add hundreds of millions of dollars to annual earnings from its own buying and selling of crude and fuels, but also comes with problems, including higher risk. Exxon (XOM.N) expects to add 1 million barrels per day of output over the next several years as new oilfields and refinery expansions kick in, giving it more assets to trade.

Exxon last year retained John Masek, a former trader at Swiss-based Glencore (GLEN.L), the world's second largest buyer and seller of petroleum, to consult on gasoline trading. Earlier this year, it poached four gasoline market specialists from refiner Phillips 66 (PSX.N).

This month, Exxon hired former BHP Billiton Plc (BLT.L) trader Nelson Lee as an international crude trader, the people familiar with the matter said. In 2014, Lee orchestrated BHP's first-ever crude exports by maintaining the lightly refined oil met criteria for an exportable product. The deals helped usher in the end to a U.S. prohibition on crude exports more than a year later.

The company has also added crude, products and liquefied natural gas specialists to London and Singapore offices. It recently hired Paul Butcher, a trader who has worked at BP Plc (BP.L), Glencore and Vitol, to advise on North Sea markets and accounting for trading transactions.

"Paul is known for being a very aggressive, old school crude trader. Exxon would have never hired a risk taker of that scale in the old days. The fact that he is consulting them shows they are considering changes in trading very seriously," said a trading house executive who knows Butcher.

Phillips 66 declined to comment on the employee departures.

Exxon spokesman Scott Silvestri referred questions about its trading business and recent hiring to regulatory filings, which note the historical use of financial derivatives and geographic scale to manage commodity price risks.

LIMITED RISK

Chief Executive Darren Woods wants to increase Exxon's profit and appetite for risk at a measured pace, according to people who deal with Exxon. The U.S. operation runs from a trading floor at its Spring, Texas campus that has expanded to as many

as 70 workers who will handle everything from Canadian crude to gasoline, jet fuel and diesel.

“Trading has been a virtual four-letter word at Exxon,” said Ehud Ronn, a University of Texas finance professor who studies energy and financial risk management. Exxon has drawn most top managers from engineering backgrounds, not financial services. “A change in their trading policy would indeed be transformational.”

Exxon has long lagged behind rivals BP Plc (BP.L), Chevron Corp (CVX.N) and Royal Dutch Shell Plc (RDSa.L), which have created trading units that occasionally generate more profit than their refining businesses.

During the oil price downturn of 2015-2016, companies like Shell (RDSa.L) often made more profit in refining than in oil production, also known as upstream, and often cited trading as contributing to the success of the refining division.

Shell for example trades more than 8 million barrels per day or 8 percent of global production, twice the size of its own or Exxon’s output. The huge figures come partially thanks to trading barrels of third parties, which Exxon currently does on a very limited scale.

Exxon would also normally hedge only cargoes going from one region to another and where crude is priced according to different benchmarks. BP and Shell would normally hedge all cargoes as well as taking sometimes a pure speculative position on the paper market to make profit, according to traders working for the firms.

“Exxon still doesn’t plan to begin speculative paper trading,” said one source familiar with Exxon’s thinking.

Woods faces pressure from Exxon investors to lift shares that trade at the same price as 10 years ago. He promised shareholders this year that he can double profit and increase

its oil and gas output by 25 percent by 2025.

The company's expanded focus on trading brings challenges including added risk from options, swaps and other derivatives, and developing risk-management and compensation systems for the larger business.

Exxon has held talks with at least two developers of risk-management software, Enuit LLC and Allegro Development Corp, people familiar with the discussions said. Both offer packages that manage logistics and measure financial exposure. The companies declined to comment on their discussions with Exxon, according to spokespeople.

Exxon has also put company veteran managers in charge of overall trading and risk controls at its Spring, Texas, floor, one person familiar with its operations said, to avoid potential losses as it expands trading.

"We've heard whispers in the market about this for a few years, so it's great to see them finally hiring commercial talent externally," said an executive recruiter familiar with some of the recent hires but who was not directly involved.

Additional reporting by Ron Bousso in London and Henning Gloystein in Singapore; Writing by Gary McWilliams; Editing by Richard Pullin/Adrian Croft

Arabie Saoudite : une

dictature acceptable ?



Pourquoi tant de tolérance envers un régime qui enfreint les droits de l'homme et dont le rôle dans la région, notamment au Yémen, est problématique ? Pourtant la France l'a associé à l'organisation d'une réunion d'experts, à Paris, sur la crise humanitaire au Yémen.

Le prince héritier Mohamed Ben Salman (MBS) aime à se présenter comme le modernisateur de l'Arabie Saoudite. Après avoir ouvert aux femmes la porte des stades de football et des concerts de musique, le voilà qui vient de signer le décret d'application qui leur donne l'autorisation de conduire. Nombre d'observateurs ont présenté ces avancées comme une «révolution». Ces éloges sont un signe inquiétant de l'absence de regard critique sur ce pays en même temps qu'ils révèlent la puissance du lobbying de Riyad qui s'est offert les services de quatre des plus grandes sociétés françaises de relations publiques.

Comment apprécier à leur juste valeur ces quelques réformes. Les femmes ? Le mois dernier, la police du régime a mis en prison plusieurs activistes comme Aïcha al-Menae ou Hassa al-Sheikh, figures historiques de la lutte des droits des femmes. Tout se passe comme si le palais souhaitait envoyer le message que les nouvelles avancées sont uniquement le fait du jeune prince et non la conséquence d'un engagement de la société civile. Imane al-Nafjan, fondatrice du blog Saudi Woman et personnalité du combat contre la tutelle masculine, croupit toujours dans un lieu tenu secret derrière les barreaux avec d'autres féministes. Trainée dans la boue par la presse officielle, elle a été qualifiée de «traïtesse».

Les droits de l'homme ? Le bilan est accablant. Si, en valeur absolue, la Chine reste en tête des exécutions capitales (84% du total en 2017) devant l'Iran et l'Arabie Saoudite, l'ordre du trio s'inverse si on le rapporte à la population du pays ; c'est Riyad qui trône avec un ratio d'exécution 12 fois supérieur à celui de Pékin ! Sur le terrain pénal, le royaume continue à appliquer les mêmes sentences que le défunt Etat Islamique (Daech) : amputations pour vol, lapidation pour adultère, tortures et décapitations publiques, crucifixion, exposition des cadavres jusqu'à pourrissement des chairs, exécutions de mineurs, le tout en public.

Les cas de Raef Badawi ou Ali Mohamed al-Nimr sont à cet égard significatifs. Le premier a été condamné à dix ans de prison et 1000 coups de fouet suivis d'une d'interdiction de sortie du pays pour avoir animé un blog appelant à plus de droits et de libertés dans le pays. Incarcéré depuis juin 2012, il subit un châtimeut public par «tranches» de cinquante coups à intervalles réguliers... Son épouse, réfugiée politique au Canada, s'inquiète pour son état de santé car il souffre de différentes pathologies et nul ne sait s'il bénéficie d'un traitement adapté. Quant au second, arrêté alors qu'il était mineur lors des manifestations populaires du «printemps saoudien» de 2011, il paie sans doute le fait d'être le neveu

du célèbre dignitaire et opposant chiite Nimr Baqr al-Nimr, condamné à la peine capitale le 2 janvier 2016 et exécuté par décapitation puis crucifixion. Il faut reconnaître que pour faire bonne mesure, le religieux a été mis à mort en public en même temps que 45 salafistes sunnites considérés comme terroristes. D'autres prisonniers d'opinion comme Abdullah al-Zaher et Dawood al-Marhoon, poursuivis pour avoir participé à des manifestations, peuvent aussi être exécutés à tout moment.

Rappelons également qu'en Arabie Saoudite et ce, à la différence de tous les autres Etats musulmans, aucun autre culte que l'Islam n'est toléré et l'apostasie et l'athéisme y sont qualifiés de «terrorisme» donc passibles de la peine capitale. Cette réalité n'est pas une vue de l'esprit et le poète palestinien Ashraf Fayad, actuellement dans le couloir de la mort, en est la preuve vivante. Selon les juges de la charia, il faisait la promotion de l'athéisme dans un de ses livres. Sans oublier que le royaume inonde toujours la planète du salafisme, matrice du djihadisme mortifère contemporain qui, outre les milliers de victimes à travers le monde musulman, a causé dans les rues de Paris la mort de 240 personnes et fait quelques 900 blessés...

Plus bénin l'alcool : en septembre 1999, deux tablettes de chocolat contenant de la liqueur ont été découvertes dans le bagage du Philippin Faustino Salazar. L'accusé a tenté de se défendre en disant qu'il avait acheté ce chocolat dans un magasin Duty free à l'aéroport de Bahreïn mais il a été condamné à 75 coups de fouet et quatre mois de prison. En mai 2013, deux femmes de ménage d'Asie du Sud-Est ont été condamnées à mille coups de fouet et à dix ans de prison pour un «préjudice magique» infligé à leurs propriétaires. En 2007, un pharmacien égyptien Mustafa Ibrahim a été accusé de «pratiquer la magie et la sorcellerie, l'adultère et de profaner le Coran». Ses voisins l'avaient dénoncé en disant qu'il «conservait le Coran dans ses toilettes». L'enquête a révélé qu'à l'aide de la magie noire, Ibrahim avait détruit la

relation d'un couple et possédait dans son appartement un livre sur la sorcellerie, des bougies avec des inscriptions mystérieuses et des herbes à odeur étrange. Le pharmacien a donc été décapité au sabre. Les bourreaux saoudiens souffriraient-ils de surmenage du fait de la fréquence des peines physiques dans le royaume ? Les autorités de Riyad ont recruté en juin 2017, huit nouveaux coupeurs de tête.

Sur le plan régional enfin, est-il utile de rappeler que le régime joue un rôle moteur dans la déstabilisation d'une grande partie du Moyen-Orient ? Le soutien aux groupes islamistes en Syrie commence à se tarir. Mais à Bahreïn, ce sont ses troupes d'occupation qui, depuis sept ans, maintiennent à bout de bras la monarchie sunnite des al-Khalifa qui a failli être renversée par un mouvement populaire exigeant plus de justice sociale. Depuis, la majeure partie de la population de l'archipel vit sous la loi martiale avec arrestations arbitraires, interdiction des partis politiques, blocus total contre les villages «dissidents» et déchéance de nationalité au quotidien... Au Yémen, guerre voulue et déclenchée par MBS alors qu'il était ministre de la Défense, le massacre se poursuit en silence et le pays, après une épidémie de choléra, est menacé par la famine. La situation ne fait aujourd'hui qu'empirer avec l'assaut violent ordonné il y a quelques jours par les troupes saoudiennes et émiriennes sur le port d'al-Hodeida par lequel arrive la majeure partie des importations et de l'aide internationale.

Dans ces conditions et alors que s'est tenue à Paris une réunion en trompe l'oeil sur le drame humanitaire que vit le Yémen, comment comprendre le silence obséquieux de nombre de responsables politiques et médiatiques qualifiant de «révolution» les gestes du jeune prince alors qu'une énumération d'actes identiques aurait cloué au pilori n'importe quel autre pays du globe ? Si les mesuretteuses sur les femmes annoncent une «révolution», alors Kim Jong-Un devrait ouvrir un Mac Do à Pyong Yang pour montrer sa volonté de

«démocratiser» son pays. Encore faut-il qu'il ait les moyens de s'offrir les mêmes réseaux d'influence que la dictature saoudienne, une «dictature protégée».

European parliament urged to condemn siege violations



QNA/Brussels

HE the Chairman of the National Human Rights Committee (NHRC), Dr Ali bin Smaikh al-Marri, has called on the European Parliament to shoulder its responsibilities and issue a decision condemning the violations committed by the siege countries against Qatar.

HE Dr al-Marri reiterated that the National Human Rights Committee will continue its efforts to trigger the international justice mechanisms until an end to the violations and redress for the victims.

HE Dr al-Marri was speaking during a meeting with President of the European Parliament Antonio Tajani, during a series of important meetings he held with a number of European officials in Brussels.

The NHRC chairman handed over a copy of "One Year on the Siege

of Qatar” report to the European Parliament president.

The report documents all the violations of the siege countries against the Qatari people and the residents of the GCC countries, and the efforts exerted by the National Human Rights Committee inside Qatar and abroad to stop these violations.

HE Dr al-Marri praised the positive role of the European Union and the European Parliament towards the siege imposed on Qatar, referring to the European Parliament’s support for the report prepared by the delegation of the technical mission of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights following its field visit to Qatar, and its condemnation of the siege.

He also highlighted the discussions during the hearing session he held at the European Parliament, and the strong support of the MPs for the efforts exerted by Qatar and the NHRC to stop the violations resulting from the siege imposed on Qatar since June 5 last year.

The NHRC chairman called on the president of the European Parliament to take more effective measures and stronger positions to urge the siege countries stop their violations and to put an end to the suffering of thousands of Qatari and GCC families.

He demanded the European Parliament to uphold the principles for which it was founded and to take more effective action to protect human rights in Qatar and the Gulf Co-operation Council countries, explaining that position of neutrality loses all its justification when it comes to the humanitarian tragedy of thousands of families who have been suffering for more than a year because of the intransigence of the siege countries and their refusal to come to the dialogue table to end all cruel measures that did not harm Qatar as much as they affected the families which were separated and forced to leave Qatar, or expelled from the siege countries, the children who were deprived of their parents, the patients who were prevented from following their treatment in the Qatari hospitals, the students who were expelled from the siege countries, and the businessmen who suffered huge losses and

were deprived of their properties.

Dr al-Marri also gave a detailed explanation on the issue of politicising religious rituals by the Saudi authorities and their continued intransigence in preventing Qatar's pilgrims from performing the rituals.

The NHRC chairman also briefed the president of European Parliament on all the issues raised in international human rights forums in order to stop the violations resulting from the siege of Qatar, as well as the complaint filed by the State before the International Court of Justice against the UAE.

Dr al-Marri stressed the importance of continuing judicial and legal proceedings in the international arbitration bodies to stop the violations of the siege countries and to redress the victims of the siege, noting that all the evidence and the reports of the international human rights organisations confirm the involvement of the siege countries in serious violations of human rights, in breach of all international norms, rules and provisions.

GECF contributes to 60% of global pipeline, 54% of LNG trade



Doha-headquartered Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) is now contributing to 60% of global pipeline trade and 54% of the global LNG trade, which, according to its secretary-general Yury Sentyurin, “is a dominant position” in terms of market share.

Over the last 50 years, LNG industry has been evolving significantly regarding markets, trade, and capacity. The rapid evolution of the LNG industry has brought new market dynamics.

“GECF producers have already proven their credibility and reliability backed by the numerous years of experience and expertise in the industry, with cost effective supplies providing them a competitive advantage over the new comers to the LNG business,” Sentyurin told Gulf Times in an interview.

In terms of liquefied natural gas, GECF LNG exporters could compete with new non-GECF LNG projects in terms of prices, historical commercial relationships, access to the markets, and the competitive advantage of first movers.

“Likewise, at GECF we are emphasising co-operation and co-ordination with all market stakeholders, as a key to gaining efficiencies and reducing trading costs. Similarly, it is important to bring down production costs investing in new

technologies and innovation to create new LNG markets,” Sentyurin said.

On the other hand, in addition to the 60-plus million tonnes per year (mtpy) of LNG capacities under final investment decision process, the GECF member countries took FIDs for gas pipeline projects, where the forum expects an additional gas pipeline capacity of 140.5 bcm between now and 2020.

As an indication, the secretary-general pointed out the new gas pipeline exports capacity from GECF to Europe and China represents 19% and 16% of their respective current gas consumption.

On the impact of flexible LNG supply (with not destination clauses) on the market, the GECF secretary-general said, “First of all, flexibility is not only on the molecules of LNG produced with significant cost to move from the production place to the market, once in the hands of the trader who has only operational expenditure (OPEX) to recover.

“Flexibility is rather in the availability of the supply whenever there is a demand for it, and the ability of this supply to reach any market, under the contractual terms and conditions binding the seller and the buyer. This is what GECF member countries have been guaranteeing to the markets in a sustainable manner, comforting their concern over the security of supply.”

In addition, he noted the bulk of LNG supply, around 80%, is still under long-term contracts and most of it is with destination clauses. The so-called “flexible” LNG without destination clause is still small.

“In our opinion, more “flexible” LNG would likely represent an increase in available volumes traded on the spot markets. Such “flexible” LNG coupled with increasing liquefaction capacity triggered the appetite of a number of consuming countries to establish LNG trading hubs, particularly in Asia, such as Singapore, China and Japan.

“Such initiatives are at embryonic stage and the major conditions for such hubs to see the light are still not gathered,” he said.

Regarding the long-term contracts and destination clauses, Sentyurin said, "It should be reminded that, as far as the long-term contracts and/or destination clauses are concerned, shifting away from them, does not necessarily reduce the prices of natural gas, but create more volatility on the market." Contrarily, he said the advantages of long-term contracts have been proven resilient to support a resilient supply to the respond to the needs of the market, through guarantee of sufficient investments in gas industry.

The post oil price drop of 2014 witnessed a considerable decline in investment in oil and gas industry, with 30% decline in new LNG projects, he added.