



# QATAR AIRWAYS SUPPORTS US EMBASSY EVENT

## QATAR AIRWAYS PARTNERS WITH US EMBASSY TO CELEBRATE NEW US DESTINATIONS

**KUWAIT:** Qatar Airways, the award-winning airline has supported the US Embassy event, 'The United States: A Great Place to Visit'. The event took place on 14 May and aimed to brief top US Travel Agents on the United States as an ideal travel destination for Kuwait travellers. The event also focused on how the travel agents can increase the number of travellers from Kuwait to the United States.

Qatar Airways operates flights to 10 cities in the US and recently announced the addition of its 11th and 12th destinations. Both commencing in 2018, the Las Vegas and San Francisco routes support the award-winning airline's continued growth in the US market.

Additional flights from Kuwait are also planned for the summer, one arriving in Doha

at 06:30 am local time, making it ideal for travellers to connect to exciting destinations in the US, with a transit time of less than two hours. The award-winning airline offers passengers departing from Kuwait to the US the luxury of two pieces of checked baggage allowance of 32KG, at no additional cost.

Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive Akbar Al-Baker, said: "We are proud to have supported the US Embassy event in Kuwait. At Qatar Airways we provide our passengers departing from Kuwait a stress-free travel experience to US, through our state-of-the-art Hamad International Airport to any one of our 10 popular destinations in the US including New York, Washington, Miami, Houston and Chicago. We are delighted to be adding Las Vegas and San

Francisco to our US operations, and we look forward to bringing even more passengers to the US."

Speaking about the embassy event, Ambassador Lawrence R Silverman said: "The United States is an exquisite travel destination, as there truly is something for everyone. The event gave us the opportunity to clarify the visa application process and customs entry procedures and answer any questions travel agents may have had about visiting the United States. We are pleased to have had Qatar Airways supporting this important event."

After the recent electronics restrictions on flights departing from the region to the US, the multiple award-winning airline promptly found a unique solution: offering passengers

a laptop loan service. Showing true commitment to travellers inconvenienced by the ban, the Doha-based airline took the notable step to purchase laptops available for complimentary loan on all of its US flights, ensuring uninterrupted productivity and service for Business Class Passengers while travelling on all US-bound flights.

Qatar Airways, the national carrier of the

State of Qatar, this year celebrates 20 years of Going Places Together with travellers across more than 150 business and leisure destinations. The world's fast growing airline will continue to add a number of exciting new destinations to its growing network in 2017, including Dublin, Nice, Skopje and many more, flying passengers on board its modern fleet of 199 aircraft.



## GOP FLIPS OBAMA-ERA NORMS, CLAIM A BOON TO ECONOMY

**WASHINGTON:** Final score: Republicans 14, Barack Obama's last-minute regulations, one. Congressional Republicans anxious to show voters they can get something done are hailing their reversal of more than a dozen Obama-era regulations on guns, the internet and the environment.

Over a few months, lawmakers used an obscure legislative rule to ram through changes that will have far-reaching implications for the coal industry, broadband customers, hunters and women seeking health care at Planned Parenthood and other abortion providers. The deadline for scuttling the rules that Democrat Obama imposed during his final months in office was last Thursday. The 1996 Congressional Review Act had given Republicans the power to make the changes with a simple majority, within a set time.

While the rest of Washington focused on the furor over President Donald Trump's firing of FBI Director James Comey, Republicans were celebrating their effort to reverse the rules, arguing that it would boost the economy and make it easier for businesses to operate.

"I am almost speechless when I think about the success," said Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Okla. Senators pointed out that Congress had only once before used the legislative tools stemming from the Congressional Review Act to quash a regulation - until this year. In all, the GOP was able to reverse 14 regulations that had or will get Trump's signature. Sen. Chuck Schumer of New York, the Democratic leader in the Senate, argued that overturning rules passed at the end of the Obama administration hardly constituted an agenda.

"The fact that they are bragging about these highlights how little else they have accomplished legislatively," Schumer said. Republicans have a long way to go in their efforts to repeal and replace the health care law, cut taxes and boost infrastructure spending, all Trump priorities. Still, the GOP made clear soon after election victories in November that one of the first orders of business would be to go after Obama administration rules.

The effort has had strong backing from business groups such as the US Chamber of Commerce, the National Rifle Association and prominent anti-abortion groups - all key constituencies that generally back Republican candidates. The Chamber endorsed eight of the 14 repeal resolutions that Congress passed. One still awaits the president's signature before it can become law.

Republicans reversed Obama rules that enhanced protections for waterways near coal mines, required contrac-

tors to disclose violation of 14 federal labor laws for the previous three years when bidding on contracts and imposed tight restrictions on what broadband companies such as Verizon, AT&T and Comcast could do with their customers' personal data.

### The culprit

Neil Bradley, a senior vice president at the Chamber, said that when it comes to slow economic growth, it's difficult to say, "This regulation is the culprit, but collectively, that's what happens."

"Together, they affected a pretty broad base of the business community," Bradley said. Democrats overwhelmingly voted against most of the regulatory repeals. Republicans generally supported them, with Vice President Mike Pence casting the tie-breaking vote to allow states to deny federal family planning money to Planned Parenthood and other abortion providers. That reversed a rule Obama issued in his last weeks in office. While many of the actions were designed to help businesses, others addressed social issues, including the repeal of a regulation designed to keep guns out of the hands of certain mentally disabled people. The NRA as well as advocacy groups for the disabled and the ACLU weighed in. They said it was discriminatory for the Social Security Administration to forward the names of certain beneficiaries to the instant background check system based on a mental disability and having a third party manage their benefits.

Democrats and environmentalists scored one victory last week. Senate Republicans failed to overturn a rule that would have forced energy companies to capture more of the methane that's burned off or "flared" at drilling sites. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., said he considered the rule onerous but undoing it would have prevented the Bureau of Land Management from issuing a similar rule in the future. McCain, Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina and Sen. Susan Collins of Maine joined Democrats on the vote.

GOP leaders opted not to bring a couple dozen other repeal resolutions up for a vote, including one that would have blocked a rule designed to protect funds on prepaid debit cards in case of fraud and unauthorized use. Still, the 14 victories gave Republicans a chance to crow.

"In just a few short months, we have turned a significant corner from how things operated under the Obama administration," said Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky. "Instead of going around Congress to push through regulations, the president is working with us to ease the burden." — AP

## JAPANESE FIRMS PLAN TO BUY ROBOTS AS LABOR FORCE SHRINKS

**TOKYO:** Desperate to overcome Japan's growing shortage of labor, mid-sized companies are planning to buy robots and other equipment to automate a wide range of tasks, including manufacturing, earthmoving and hotel room service.

According to a Bank of Japan survey, companies with share capital of 100 million yen to 1 billion yen plan to boost investment in the fiscal year that started in April by 17.5 percent, the highest level on record. It is unclear how much of that is being spent on automation but companies selling such equipment say their order books are growing and the Japanese government says it sees a larger proportion of investment being dedicated to increasing efficiency. Revenue at many of Japan's robot makers also rose in the January-March period for the first time in several quarters.

"The share of capital expenditure devoted to becoming more efficient is increasing because of the shortage of workers," said Seiichiro Inoue, a director in the industrial policy bureau of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, or METI. If the investment ambitions are fulfilled it would show there is a silver lining as Japan tries to cope with a shrinking and rapidly aging population. It could help equipment-makers, lift the country's low productivity and boost economic growth.

The government predicts investment in labor-saving equipment will rise this fiscal year, Inoue said. The way Japan copes with an aging population will provide critical lessons for other ageing societies, including China and South Korea, that will have to grapple with similar challenges in coming years.

"More than 90 percent of Japan's companies are small- and medium-sized, but most of these companies are not using robots," said Yasuhiko Hashimoto, who works in Kawasaki Heavy Industries Ltd's robot division. "We're coming up with a lot of applications and product packages to target these companies." Among those products is a two-armed, 170-centimeter (5-foot-7) tall robot. Kawasaki says it is selling well because it can be adapted to a range of industrial uses by electronics makers, food processors and drug companies.

Hitachi Construction Machinery says it is getting a lot of enquiries for its computer-programmed digging machines that use a global positioning system to hew ditches that are accurate to within centimetres and can cut digging time by about half. "We focus on rentals and expect business to pick up in the second half of the fiscal year, which is when most companies tend to order construction equipment for projects," said Yoshi Furuno, a company official. Hitachi Construction declined to provide figures.

Mid-sized companies are planning on increasing spending much more than large-caps, which are projecting just a 0.6 percent increase in the fiscal year, according to the Bank of Japan. Smaller companies tend to have less flexibility in overcoming labor short-

ages by paying workers more or by moving production overseas.

### Working population plunging

Some companies could end up spending less than originally planned. But with demographics only worsening, companies will need to continue to search for solutions to the labor shortage problem. Japan's working-age population peaked in 1995 at 87 million and has been falling ever since. The government expects it to fall to 76 million this year and to 45 million by 2065.

In the fiscal year that ended March 31, 2016, mid-sized companies with 100 to 499 workers advertised to fill 1.1 million new positions, the highest in five years and almost five times the number of open positions at companies with 500 workers or more, Labor Ministry data show. Among the robot makers to report stronger revenue in the last quarter was Fanuc Corp. Its revenue was 7.9 percent higher than a year earlier, the first increase in seven quarters.

Meanwhile, Yaskawa Electric Corp's revenue grew 5.1 percent in January-March from the same period a year ago, the first increase in five quarters. Robots and labour-saving gear aren't just found in manufacturing and construction.

They are also being sought by property developers, food and beverage makers and hotel chains.

The Hen na Hotel, or the "Odd Hotel," near Tokyo Disneyland, for example, bills itself as a robot hotel because it uses 140 different robots and artificial intelligence to serve guests in its 100-room hotel and can operate with as few as two to three people, according to the manager Yukio Nagai. Each room contains an egg-shaped robot, or personal assistant, called Tapia, that uses artificial intelligence to recognize people's faces and respond to their voice commands. It can wake you up, manage your schedule, and control other Internet-linked devices like the TV and air conditioning. Other robots can carry bags and take out the trash.

"Originally we sold this product for use in the home, but now we are getting a lot of enquiries from companies," said Sayaka Chiba, a director at MJJ Co, which makes the Tapia. "Banks, hospitals, and hotels are interested in using Tapia for reception work and communicating with customers." "Companies say they are interested in Tapia because of labor shortages. Nursing homes are also interested," she said. "We'll continue to sell this for use in the home, but all the interest from companies show that the market has shifted somewhat." — Reuters

## UK EMPLOYERS PLAN SMALLEST PAY RISES SINCE 2013: SURVEY

**LONDON:** British employers plan to increase pay at the weakest rate since 2013, a survey showed yesterday, offering poor prospects for British households already strained by higher inflation since last year's Brexit vote. Employers on average expected to raise basic pay awards in the year ahead by 1.0 percent, down from 1.5 percent in the previous quarter's survey, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) said.

Last week Bank of England Governor Mark Carney warned that households faced a challenging time, as wage growth was set to turn negative in inflation-adjusted terms. Rising inflation, fuelled by rising energy costs and the pound's post Brexit vote plunge, almost completely cancelled out the growth in pay of British workers during the three months to February, official data showed last month.

Living standards are a hot political topic ahead of a June 8 national election. Prime Minister Theresa May will promise yesterday to extend British workers' rights in a push to win over supporters of the opposition Labour Party. While the BoE's expectation for solid economic growth in the next few years hinges on wage growth picking up significantly, the CIPD survey showed no sign that employers are thinking about ratcheting up pay as yet.

Gerwyn Davies, labor market adviser at the CIPD, said weak pay partly reflected British businesses' long-standing difficulties at raising productivity, and said he expected living standards would fall for many employees this year.

"This could create higher levels of economic insecurity and could have serious implications for consumer spending, which has helped to support economic growth in recent months." Other indicators of future wage growth, like the monthly REC survey and the Bank of England's regional agents' report, have pointed to a dearth of upward pressure on pay. The government capped annual basic pay rises for most public-sector workers at 1 percent in 2013, after a three-year pay freeze.

The CIPD said pay expectations for the private sector held steady at 2.0 percent, but weakened in the voluntary sector and were stuck at 1.0 percent in the public sector.

Still, the survey suggested employment will continue to increase in the second quarter, albeit at a slower rate than at the start of this year. Official monthly labor market data are due on Wednesday. Economists polled by Reuters expect growth in average weekly earnings, excluding bonuses, held steady at 2.2 percent in the three months to March. — Reuters