Sultan of bling: Brunei monarch celebrates golden jubilee in style

Brunei is one of the world’s wealthiest nations

Job fair offers hope for Syria refugees in Jordan

ZAATARI REFUGEE CAMP: After five years without work, Syrian refugee Mohammed Ahmad was nervous but hopeful as he registered with as many firms as possible at a unique job fair in Jordan’s sprawling Zaatari camp where he lives. Around 50 companies were represented at the one-day event Wednesday as they scouted for candidates to fill some 1,000 job opportunities, compiling lists of applicants by name, age and qualification.

The EU-funded job fair, a first at the Zaatari office for employment in the tiny kingdom, comes after the launch in August of the only employment office at Zaatari following a decision by the Jordanian government, rise up to 210 dinars ($300). Overall, since the launch of the employment office at Zaatari, some 3,000 Syrians have used the facilities to help secure work in the agriculture, industrial and food-processing sectors, organizers said. —AFP

Economic woes
Brunei’s per capita GDP remains among the highest in the world due to its rich energy reserves, the government and government-linked institutions provide most employment, and its approximately 400,000 citizens enjoy generous state benefits. But as the oil price collapsed a few years ago, energy-dependent Brunei was plunged into a lengthy recession. The government has announced plans to diversify the economy but analysts warn they have still not done enough and there is a risk they may not be able to provide the same sort of secure employment for young people as for previous generations.

Vast wealth and excesses
The sultan is one of the world’s richest men and tales of the royal family’s extravagant lifestyles are the stuff of legend. He is reported to have a vast collection of luxury vehicles and his official residence—a vast pile that sits on a riverbank—is one of the world’s largest palaces, with about 1,800 rooms, his playboy younger brother Prince Jefri Bolkiah has however attracted the most attention. He had a spectacular falling-out with Hassanal over allegations of the prince’s jet-set, un-Islamic lifestyle, including controversies about the introduction of tough Islamic laws in 2014, which will eventually mean penalties such as severing of limbs and death by stoning, a move that sparked rare domestic criticism as well as international condemnation. The royal family was also deeply embarrassed by a sensational feud between Hassanal and his younger brother Prince Jefri Bolkiah over the latter’s alleged embezzlement of $15 billion during his tenure as finance minister in the 1990s. During the scandal, salacious details emerged of the prince’s jet-set, un-Islamic lifestyle, including allegations of a high-priced harem and a luxury yacht he owned called “Jil”. There are also challenges for the younger generation, who fear their futures may not be secure as the oil-dependent country struggles to find new revenue sources. “They still have not really made any significant headway moving beyond this major sector (oil and gas),” said Bridget Welsh, a University. Still, the jubilee stood out as a rare source of excitement in the sleepy sultanate, which is known for its slow pace of life and lack of nightlife—alcohol is largely banned under Islamic practice. Yesterday’s festivities began with Hassanal, dressed in yellow and gold royal finery and accompanied by his wife Anak Hajah Saleha, inspecting a guard of honor in the grounds of his palace, before the gun salute. The couple then held the royal audience in the throne room of the palace, a vast complex of resplendent white buildings with golden domes and almost 1,800 rooms, before heading to take part in the procession. —AFP