

## Headlines:

- **Qatar to Tax Alcohol**
- **Bringing Bashar back from the Cold**
- **Bangladesh Elections marred with Corruption**

## Details:

### Qatar to Tax Alcohol

Qatar will introduce a 100 percent tax on alcohol from 1 January 2019, a government official confirmed. The "sin" tax is being introduced just weeks after the Gulf nation announced in its annual budget statement that it would introduce a levy on "health-damaging goods", including energy drinks. With the new levy, a 100cl bottle of Bombay Sapphire gin will now cost \$93 and a 75cl of Shiraz wine from South Africa will be sold for \$23. It is legal to buy alcohol in Qatar with a permit, and also to drink in licenced bars, clubs and hotels. The issue of alcohol is likely to be a sensitive subject in the run-up to the World Cup in four years' time. Tournament organisers in Qatar have said alcohol will be available for fans in designated areas, but not in public spaces, out of respect for the country's traditions. The Gulf States have for long built economies upon attracting Western tourists and expats. It is in this context the Gulf nations have a host of contradictory laws trying to keep its Western tourists happy alongside some semblance of Islam.

### Bringing Bashar back from the Cold

The UAE reopened its Embassy in Damascus on 27 December 2018. The actions by the regional and international powers are now in full swing to normalise relations with the pariah regime including giving it a seat at the table of the OIC. After arming and financing many rebels groups in order to derail their attempts to overthrow the al-Assad regime the surrounding Arab states are now openly working with the regime. It took over seven years, the might of all the global and regional powers to deal with a revolution by a few million people. This battle has been won by the regime, but the lack of manpower will be a huge problem for any political resolution.

### Bangladesh Elections marred with Corruption

Bangladesh's election commission confirmed Sheikh Hasina's Awami League has secured a third consecutive term, taking along with its allies 288 of the country's 298 parliamentary seats, 96% of the vote. Allegations of voting irregularities including polling booths closing for "lunch breaks", voters being turned away, and ballots being counted unrealistically quickly were widespread. The Awami League's main rival, the Bangladesh National party (BNP), and its allies won only seven seats, but one marred by weeks of violence, the mass arrest of opposition activists and the deaths of at least 17 party workers and police on polling day.