

SAUDI ARABIA IN FOCUS

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HAJJ

CULMINATION OF 1424 HAJJ WITNESSES STAMPEDE DEATHS

Early on February 1, 244 pilgrims were killed and as many injured as the result of a stampede. The official number of pilgrims for the 1424 Hajj is 1,892,710. The vast majority are from abroad, with only 473,004 from inside the Kingdom, most of them non-Saudis. Prior to the tragic incident, there had been only 272 deaths during this year's pilgrimage, from disease, old age or exhaustion.

TERRORISM

RELIGIOUS LEADER CONTINUES TO CONDEMN EXTREMISM

During a lecture in Makkah, Saudi Arabia's Grand Mufti Shaikh Al-Ashaikh warned his listeners of the destabilizing effect that terrorism can have on society. Terrorism, he said, arises from deviant ideas, and it is important to educate and protect the younger generation from such misguided thoughts, adding that terrorism is an aberration in a country that lives under Islamic law which forbids violence and terrorism.

SEVEN DEAD IN COUNTER-TERRORISM INCIDENT IN RIYADH

On January 30, security authorities were searching the Riyadh house of a suspect, aided by the suspect's father, when gunfire broke out, resulting in the deaths of the father, five security officers, and a sixth who died later of his injuries. The suspect was arrested, along with some others. The following day, seven suspects were arrested and a weapons cache seized during another counter-terrorism operation in the city of Riyadh.

OIL

THREE AGREEMENTS ON EMPTY QUARTER GAS EXPLORATION

On January 28, an agreement was announced on exploration for and production of natural gas in area 'C' of the Rub' A-Khali (Empty Quarter) with 50 percent of the new company to the Italian oil company ENI, 30 percent to the Spanish oil company Repsol, and 20 percent to the national oil company Saudi Aramco. The Russian company Lukoil was the successful bidder for Area B, and the Chinese company Sinopec for Area A; each of these two agreements called for an 80-20 division of the shares with Saudi Aramco.

U.S.-SAUDI RELATIONS

EMBASSY COMMENTS ON U.S. REVOKING VISAS FOR IIASA STAFF

Ambassador Ahmad Kattan, Deputy Chief of the Saudi Diplomatic Mission in Washington DC, has explained that the State Department's revoking of the A-2 visas of 14 staff members of the Institute of Islamic and Arabic Studies in America (IIASA), including 9 Saudi nationals, is only because their visas are no longer in compliance with diplomatic visa regulations, and their departure does not preclude them from applying for re-entry to the United States.

CULTURE

WINNERS OF 2004 KING FAISAL INTERNATIONAL PRIZES

In the category of medicine (invasive cardiology), the award went to Professor Ulrich Sigwart of Switzerland; and in that of the sciences (biology), to Professor Samir Zaki of the United Kingdom. For Islamic Studies, the prize went jointly to Dr. Yacoub Abd Al-Wahab Al-Bahussein from Saudi Arabia and Dr. Ali Ahmad Ghulam Muhammad Nadvi from India, on the topic 'Basis of Islamic Jurisprudence'. For Arabic literature, the winner was an Egyptian, Dr. Hussein Muhammad Nasser, on the topic 'Preservation of Classical Arabic to the end of the 5th Century AH'. The prize for Service to Islam will be announced at a later date.

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