

SAUDI ARABIA IN FOCUS

WEEKLY PUBLICATION OF THE
INFORMATION OFFICE OF THE
ROYAL EMBASSY OF SAUDI ARABIA
IN WASHINGTON, DC

APRIL 5, 2005

TERRORISM

FOURTEEN SUSPECTS KILLED IN GUNFIGHT IN QASIM PROVINCE

Fourteen militant suspects have been killed in a three-day gunfight in Qasim Province that begun early April 3. Five were wounded and arrested; and one suspect surrendered. Security forces, who had located a number of suspects hiding out in a residential district of the town of Ar-Rass, came under heavy fire from machine guns and hand grenades. The area was then evacuated, including a girls' elementary school. A number of security officers were slightly injured, and two hospitalized with serious wounds; but none were killed. At the April 4 Cabinet meeting, King Fahd commended the security forces for their professional handling of the incident, and for their concern to preserve citizens' lives.

EXECUTION OF CRIMINAL GANG IN JOUF PROVINCE

On April 1, three criminals were executed in Sakaka in Jouf Province, having been found guilty of murder, malicious wounding, and kidnapping, as well as of abusing religion to justify their crimes. The incidents took place between April 2002 and April 2003, during which they targeted security officers and government officials, killing four people: a judge, Shaikh Abdulrahman Al-Suhaibani, in Sakaka; the Undersecretary of Jouf Governorate Dr. Hamad Al-Wardi; Major-General Homoud Al-Swailem of the Jouf police; and security officer Ali Al-Ruwalli. They also shot and wounded a number of others, and at one point kidnapped an expatriate worker to steal his car.

MIDDLE EAST

FOREIGN MINISTER URGES SOLUTION TO MIDEAST DISPUTE

Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal, at a joint meeting in Bahrain on April 5 of foreign ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the European Union (EU), stressed the need for a solution to the Arab-Israeli dispute, pointing out that the region of the Middle East is suffering from its adverse impact. He referred to the Arab peace initiative, again endorsed at the recent Arab Summit in Algiers, as constituting a comprehensive proposal for establishing a just and comprehensive peace in line with the principles of the Madrid conference and the resolutions of the United Nations.

REFORM

ROYAL ENDORSEMENT OF PROPOSAL TO AMEND JUDICIAL SYSTEM

A Royal Order issued on April 2 approved in principle amendments to the organization of the judicial system, including the establishment of one supreme court to be based in Riyadh, courts of appeal in all 13 provinces, and specialized courts for labor, commercial, and family disputes. The new proposed law will complete the overhaul of the judicial system, following the laws for criminal procedures and for procedures before Shariah Courts in 2001.

KINGDOM TO SET UP TECHNICAL COLLEGES FOR WOMEN

Over the next five years, 17 technical colleges specifically for women and offering courses required by the job market will be set up under the auspices of the General Organization for Technical Education and Vocational Training (GOTEVOT). A total of 163 technical institutes and colleges are planned.

SHURA COUNCIL APPROVES WRITERS' ASSOCIATION

The Consultative Council (*Majlis Al-Shura*) has been discussing a system for the establishment of a fully independent writers' association that will protect the rights of authors and offer assistance in publishing and promoting their writings. The Ministry of Culture and Information will form a steering committee to choose the members who will then elect the board of directors.

ECONOMY

STOCK MARKET'S RECORD GROWTH IN FIRST QUARTER OF 2005

At the end of the first quarter of 2005 the Saudi stock market showed a record growth of 28 percent, closing on March 30 at 10,499 points, more than double the 5,182 points a year ago. The market value of the stocks issued closed at \$392.2 billion, 112 percent higher than that for the first quarter of 2004.

Meanwhile, the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) magazine, a quarterly publication by the London *Financial Times*, commended the city of Jubail on the Arabian Gulf in the Eastern Province for its economic potential. A Second Industrial City is scheduled for construction there, creating 55,000 jobs with over 70 new plants. The city has enjoyed vast foreign investment of over U.S. \$46 billion, a figure that is expected to increase.

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