

SAUDI ARABIA IN FOCUS

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

NOVEMBER 15, 2005

TRADE

Saudi Arabia joins the WTO

The General Assembly of the World Trade Organization accredited Saudi Arabia's credentials November 11, officially making the Kingdom its 149th member. Saudi Minister of Commerce and Industry Dr Hashem Yamani said that the historic step would help integrate the Saudi economy into the global economy, increase domestic and foreign investments, create jobs and increase the access of Saudi products and services to international markets.

As part of its entry into the WTO, Saudi Arabia has committed to further liberalizing its trade regimen and accelerating its integration in the global economy, while offering a transparent and predictable environment for trade and foreign investment in accordance with WTO rules. In Riyadh November 14, the Shura Council welcomed Saudi Arabia's accession and affirmed that membership in the WTO would contribute positively to enacting economic reforms.

SAUDI-US RELATIONS

First Saudi-US Strategic Dialogue launched in Jeddah

Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal met with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in Jeddah November 13 as part of the first Saudi-US Joint Commission for Strategic Dialogue, a series of regular Saudi-US meetings designed to institutionalize relations and deepen coordination between the two countries on strategic and political issues. The commission – established at the April, 2005 meeting between King Abdullah and President Bush – will meet every six months, alternating between Saudi Arabia and the US, and will be co-chaired by Prince Saud and Secretary Rice.

In a joint press conference with Secretary Rice following their meeting, Prince Saud said that his fears about the disintegration of Iraq have been eased following the Arab League efforts there, and stressed that the Kingdom remains committed to Iraq. Prince Saud denied that the Forum for the Future in Bahrain was a failure because it ended without the adoption of a declaration, noting that many delicate issues were discussed in a spirit of understanding. He also stressed the importance of resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and Saudi Arabia's seriousness in combating the war on terror.

King Abdullah also met with Secretary Rice during her tenure in Jeddah. They discussed regional and international developments, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the situation in Iraq and enhancing Saudi-US cooperation.

TERRORISM

Saudi Arabia condemns bombings in Jordan

Saudi Arabia strongly condemned the terrorist attacks that took place in Amman, Jordan November 9. A Saudi official said in a statement that the attacks aimed to destabilize Jordan, and that they were committed by people without religion, ethics or humanity. Saudi Arabia stands side by side with Jordan in the fight against terrorism, and the Kingdom is confident that Jordanian authorities will apprehend the perpetrators and bring them to justice, the official said.

King Abdullah and Crown Prince Sultan both offered their personal condolences to Jordan's King Abdullah II via cable and telephone. The Riyadh-based Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Jeddah-based Organization of the Islamic Conference also strongly condemned the attacks.

Interior Minister: Saudis captured in Iraq should be extradited

Saudi Arabia has requested that any Saudis captured in Iraq be extradited to the Kingdom, Interior Minister Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz said in a press conference November 12. Prince Nayef said that there are restrictions on Saudis who try to travel to Iraq, but that some are entering Iraq via other countries, and that the Kingdom has reviewed the issue with the other countries that border Iraq.

FOREIGN AID

Saudi relief aid continues to Pakistan and Niger

Saudi cargo planes continue to deliver relief aid to victims of the October 8 earthquake in Pakistan. The latest plane arrived in Islamabad November 10 carrying 11 tons of medical supplies for the Saudi field hospital in Mansehra, which has cared for 6,135 patients as of November 12, according to its director, Dr Atif Sorour. In addition, the Saudi Popular Relief Campaign for the Pakistani People has so far distributed 15 truckloads of aid to affected areas.

Aid to victims of the drought in Niger is also ongoing. A third Saudi plane arrived in Niamey November 11 with 72 tons of relief aid. Saudi Ambassador to Niger Abdulkarim Al-Malki said in a statement that the Saudi aid includes five planes

with 70 tons of aid each, foodstuff, seven health centers, and the implementation of development projects through the Saudi Fund for Development.

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