

# *SAUDI ARABIA IN FOCUS*

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## **HAJJ**

### **More than 1.2 million pilgrims arrive in Saudi Arabia for the Hajj**

As of January 1, 1,269,209 pilgrims have come to Saudi Arabia from abroad for the Hajj. According to Director-General of Passports Maj. General Salem Al-Blaihed, 1,149,991 arrived by air, 21,123 by sea and 98,095 by land.

In remarks at the January 2 Cabinet meeting, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz welcomed the pilgrims and emphasized the importance of providing them with all the necessary services, and called on officials to double their efforts to serve the pilgrims.

Minister of Commerce and Industry Hashem Yamani announced on Monday a plan to meet pilgrims' needs at the holy sites in Makkah and Madinah. The plan includes coordinating with merchants to ensure the availability of essential food items, as well as allowing 510 vendors, 375 refrigerated food trailers and 2,000 mobile food storage cars at the holy sites. More than 4 million meals will be distributed by the private sector.

In addition, Saudi philanthropist Mohammed bin About Al-Amoudi has financed two soup kitchens to provide more than three million free meals to pilgrims – a \$15.67 million kitchen in Arafat and a second \$4 million one in Muzdalifa.

The Ministry of Commerce is inspecting housing units, jewelry shops and fuel stations for possible price gouging and health code violations. Makkah's director of civil defense, Col. Jameel Arbaeen, said December 28 that his officers had inspected 5,176 buildings, over 750 restaurants and hotels, and 51 tunnels. Seven teams are monitoring pollution in city tunnels and residential areas, and a fleet of helicopters stands ready for firefighting, reconnaissance, and search and rescue operations as needed.

## **TERRORISM**

### **Two most-wanted terror suspects confirmed dead in shootout**

On December 28, the Ministry of Interior confirmed that two terrorist suspects on the Kingdom's most-wanted list issued on June 28, 2005 were killed in shootouts in Qassim Province December 27. Five security men were also killed.

Abdulrahman Salih Abdulrahman Almit'eb, 26, #4 on the most-wanted list, was killed in a shootout with security forces near al-Midhnab. He operated as a recruiter and fundraiser for Al-Qaeda. Mohammed Abdulrahman Alsuwailmi, 23, #7 on the list, died in the hospital after being shot in a car chase with Saudi security forces near Buraidah. Alsuwailmi was a computer expert who posted Al-Qaeda messages on the Internet as well as a recruiter.

In its January 2 session, the Cabinet offered its condolences to the families of the five slain security officers, and praised the security forces for their bravery and loyalty. The Cabinet emphasized the Kingdom's determination to eradicate terrorism and stressed Saudi efforts to destroy Al-Qaeda and its collaborators.

## **ECONOMY**

### **Crown Prince Sultan chairs Civil Aviation General Commission board**

On January 3, Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz chaired the first meeting of the Civil Aviation General Commission's board of directors following the Cabinet's decision to privatize some sectors of civil aviation.

Crown Prince Sultan – who is also the Minister of Defense and Aviation – highlighted the importance of the civil aviation sector and underlined the fact that the board includes representatives from both the public and private sectors.

## **WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

### **Woman wins seat on Saudi Engineers Council**

Nadia Bakhurji won a seat on the new 10-member board of the newly formed Saudi Engineers Council. Ms. Bakhurji, the only woman running, came in fifth in a field of 71.

The Saudi Engineers Council has only 20 women among its 5,000 members. One of Ms. Bakhurji's objectives is to increase membership and visibility and to create a database of all female engineers, designers and architects.

She joins other woman pioneers who were voted onto the boards of other professional organizations, including Ms. Nawal Al-Rashed and Ms. Nahed Bashatah, who won seats on the board of the Saudi Journalists Association in 2004; and Ms. Lama Sulaiman and Ms. Nashwa Taher, who were elected to the board of the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry last month.

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