

SAUDI ARABIA IN FOCUS

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FOREIGN POLICY

King Abdullah ends Asian tour with state visit to Pakistan

King Abdullah ended his four-nation Asian tour with a state visit to Pakistan February 1-2, following visits to China, India and Malaysia. President Pervez Musharraf honored King Abdullah by conferring upon him Pakistan's highest civil award, Nishan-e-Pakistan, in a colorful investiture ceremony.

Talks with President Musharraf and Prime Minister Shawkat Aziz focused on the war on terror and expanding trade ties, as well as Kashmir, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Iraq, Iran's nuclear program, Afghanistan and Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) reform.

The two nations issued a joint communiqué renewing their commitment to bilateral cooperation in trade, investment, economy and education. They also signed several agreements, including a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on political consultations and accords on technical education, the avoidance of double taxation, the prevention of tax evasion, and scientific cooperation.

Saudi Ambassador stresses crackdown on terror financing

In an interview with CNN's Wolf Blitzer on February 5, Saudi Ambassador to the US Prince Turki Al-Faisal stressed that Saudi Arabia has cracked down on terror financing. "Saudi Arabia has implemented the cutoff. No single penny leaves Saudi Arabia today through any group or organization for any charitable or other activity at all," Prince Turki said. "All the bank accounts of all charities in Saudi Arabia have been stopped from exporting any money anywhere."

The ambassador said that although there is a joint standing US-Saudi committee handling these issues, Saudi Arabia has invited US Treasury officials to come and look for themselves.

Asked whether Saudi Arabia will continue funding the Palestinian Authority if Hamas forms the next government, Prince Turki said the issue would be dealt with when the situation arises. For now, there is an interim Palestinian government, which the Saudis continue to support financially through the Arab League, and more funding through international and nongovernmental groups.

Asked to respond to President Bush's statement during his State of the Union address of the need to end America's "addiction to oil," Prince Turki noted that

the US imports only about 15% of its oil needs from Saudi Arabia. Prince Turki pointed out that last year, King Abdullah and President Bush had agreed on a joint oil policy in Crawford, in which the Kingdom would increase output and work together with the US to expand refining capacity.

ARAB WORLD

Saudi teams join rescue effort in Red Sea ferry disaster

On February 3, the Ministry of Interior confirmed that the Egyptian ferry Al-Salaam 98 sank in the Red Sea en route from the Saudi port of Dhiba to Safaga, Egypt with 1,398 passengers and crew on board.

Saudi authorities immediately began assisting the rescue effort, including placing the Makkah Province rescue coordination center on full alert and sending out distress messages to all vessels in the ferry's vicinity. Saudi forces also joined search and rescue efforts at the direction of King Abdullah, and rescued a number of survivors. So far, Saudi teams have recovered 239 bodies and handed them over to Egyptian authorities.

BUSINESS

Jeddah Economic Forum to focus on sustainable growth

Nearly 2,500 businessmen and women from Saudi Arabia and other countries are expected to participate in the annual Jeddah Economic Forum (JEF), which opens at the Jeddah Hilton on February 11.

The theme this year is "Seeding Potentials for Economic Growth: Honoring Identity and Celebrating Common Grounds." Delegates will present their ideas for cultivating sustainable growth while preserving cultural diversity and discuss 32 working papers on the issue. Seventy-five international personalities are slated to address the forum, including former Vice President Al Gore and former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder.

FOREIGN AID

Kingdom to set up second field hospital in Pakistan

A second Saudi field hospital is being established in the Pakistani city of Mansehra, Minister of Finance Ibrahim Al-Assaf said February 1. The first such hospital was set up immediately following the October 8, 2005 earthquake.

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