



DECEMBER 19, 2006

SAUDI ARABIA

Kingdom announces its largest-ever budget for FY2007

King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz announced the State budget for FY 2007 at the December 18 Cabinet meeting in Riyadh. It is the largest national budget in Saudi history. The budget will focus on development projects and job creation, in particular education, health, water, sewage, transportation and social services.

Total revenues for FY2007 are projected at \$106.7 billion, reflecting the growing strength of the Saudi economy. Expenditures are projected at \$101.3 billion. The Kingdom also announced a record budget surplus of \$70.6 billion for this year, and that the public debt will be reduced to \$97.6 billion by the end of 2006.

SAGIA forum highlights investment opportunities at economic cities

A major forum was held in Riyadh December 16 to highlight investment opportunities in four economic cities launched by King Abdullah this year in Rabigh, Hail, Madinah and Jizan.

The forum was organized by the Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority (SAGIA). In remarks, SAGIA Governor Amr Al-Dabbagh said that the goal is not only to establish economic cities, but to coordinate with developers to establish "smart cities." He noted that the economic cities would provide advanced infrastructure facilities to transfer data, establish contacts and extend services. He also said that a study is underway to determine the feasibility of establishing two economic cities in the northern and eastern regions of the Kingdom.

Intel Chairman Craig Barrett also addressed the forum. In his remarks, Barrett noted that the Kingdom has played a leading role in the promotion and use of information technology in the economic sector as well as in society.

HAJJ

King Abdullah allocates 6,000 extra Hajj slots for US pilgrims

On December 15, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz increased the number of Hajj pilgrimage slots allotted to US Muslims by 6,000. The King made the decision in recognition of the needs of Muslims in the United States. During the Days of Tashreeq, the extra 6,000 pilgrims from the United States will be housed within the vicinity of Muzdalifah to avoid overcrowding in the Mina area.



In related news, the number of pilgrims arriving in Saudi Arabia for the Hajj reached 885,043 as of December 16.

SAUDI ARABIA-US

King Abdullah meets with visiting US senator

King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz met with visiting Sen. Bill Nelson (D-Florida) and his delegation at Al-Yamamah Palace in Riyadh December 16. The meeting was attended by a number of officials, including Chief of General Intelligence Prince Muqrin bin Abdulaziz. Sen. Nelson and his delegation also met separately with Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz and Minister of Interior Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz for discussions of issues of mutual interest.

Foreign minister comments on the resignation of Saudi ambassador

In his regular press briefing in Riyadh today, Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal denied media reports linking the resignation of Prince Turki Al-Faisal as Saudi Ambassador to the United States to the state of relations between Saudi Arabia and the US.

Prince Turki tendered his resignation for personal reasons, but announcement of its acceptance was delayed pending the end of his term in office, Prince Saud said. The foreign minister added that Prince Turki has served the Kingdom with the utmost sincerity and dedication.

Sixteen Saudi Guantanamo detainees repatriated

Minister of Interior Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz announced December 14 that Saudi authorities secured the release of 16 Saudi citizens detained at the US military prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The 16 detainees arrived in the Kingdom December 14 by private plane.

The relatives of the 16 have been informed of their arrival and the Ministry of Interior is providing the necessary facilities so they can meet, Prince Nayef said. The minister also noted that the adherence to regulations and instructions by previously released detainees played a positive role in securing the release of the latest 16. They will be subject to the laws of the Kingdom, he said.

Prince Nayef expressed his appreciation for the cooperation of US authorities in the matter, and said that efforts remain ongoing to repatriate the remaining Saudi detainees in the near future.

