



DECEMBER 26, 2006

## FOREIGN RELATIONS

### **King Abdullah makes official visit to Oman**

King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz paid a three-day official visit to Oman this past week on the invitation of Sultan Qaboos. On December 24, the King and the Sultan held official talks on major regional and international issues. The talks focused on developments in the Arab and Gulf arenas, particularly the situations in Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq.

In a joint statement on December 25, the two leaders reaffirmed their support for a peaceful solution to the crisis over Iran's nuclear program. They called on Iran to continue dialogue and cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The statement also expressed concern with the deteriorating situation in Iraq, and called on both the Iraqis and the Palestinians to unify.

## SAUDI ARABIA

### **Kingdom releases 18 former Guantanamo detainees**

Saudi authorities have released 18 former detainees of the US military prison at Guantanamo Bay, the Ministry of Interior announced December 25.

Maj. Gen. Mansour Al-Turki said that the 18 were released because they had completed their jail sentences and had met the necessary legal requirements. Authorities explained to the 18 men that their adherence to rules and regulations are critical to obtaining the release of the remaining Saudi detainees at Guantanamo.

The 18 men were among a group of 29 detainees – 28 Saudi citizens and one resident – who were repatriated to the Kingdom by US authorities this year. Eleven former detainees were released last week after serving their jail terms.

### **Omani conjoined twins arrive in the Kingdom**

Omani conjoined twins Safa and Marwah arrived in Saudi Arabia December 22 for possible separation surgery at the National Guard's King Abdulaziz Medical City.

After a medical examination of the twins, Dr Abdullah Al-Rabia'a, executive director for health affairs at the King Abdulaziz Medical City, said that the girls are joined at the head and that separation is possible, but that further examinations are required.

The girls were brought to the Kingdom at the invitation of King Abdullah. To date, 12 sets of conjoined twins have been successfully separated in the Kingdom, nine at King Abdulaziz Medical City.

## HAJJ

### **Number of Hajj pilgrims tops 1.6 million to date**

Thousands of pilgrims continue to arrive in Saudi Arabia for the Hajj ritual. As of December 25, 1,601,545 pilgrims have already arrived in the Kingdom for the annual pilgrimage.

Saudi authorities and organizations are prepared and stand ready to deal with any events that might occur. Indeed, on December 26 the Civil Defense responded quickly to reports of a fire in a Makkah apartment building in which pilgrims were lodged. The residents were evacuated and the fire quickly contained. Sixteen people were injured and taken to the hospital, but were soon found to be in stable condition and discharged. An investigation of the cause of the fire is currently underway.

According to the Supreme Judicial Council, the Day of Standing at Arafat will take place December 29, and the first day of the Eid Al-Adha will be December 30.

