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ISLAM

King, Crown Prince call for Muslim unity in Eid Al-Adha address

King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz and Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz congratulated all Muslims and called for Islamic unity in their annual Eid Al-Adha address December 30.

The two leaders noted that the Islamic civilization is a unique one that can achieve productivity, creativity, diversity, vitality and strength. Commenting on the Hajj, the King and Crown Prince noted the diversity of the pilgrims who perform the rituals each year. They remarked how the Hajj reflects unprecedented brotherhood and equality and represents the perfection of Islam.

A record number of pilgrims perform this year's Hajj

A record 2.3 million pilgrims performed the annual Hajj rituals last week. In anticipation of a large turnout, Saudi authorities went to great lengths to ensure that the pilgrimage went smoothly without any major incidents.

About 50,000 security and emergency personnel were deployed in and around Makkah to respond to any emergencies. Civil Defense officials in Makkah mobilized around 12,000 officials, 3,332 vehicles and heavy equipment and a dozen helicopters to assist in any emergency.

In particular, authorities focused on reducing overcrowding at Jamarat, where pilgrims perform the stoning of the devil ritual. Expansion of the Jamarat Bridge allowed a smooth flow of pilgrims in and out of the area, while security forces prevented people from camping out on or near the bridge.

Health care facilities were also prepared for the Hajj. The Ministry of Health readied 21 hospitals at the holy sites with a capacity of 3,932 patients as well as the new 182-bed Mina Medical Emergency Tower, and employed a staff of 9,600 medical personnel. The Saudi Red Crescent Society provided more than 300 ambulances, 106 first aid centers and 15 permanent facilities.

SAUDI ARABIA

Kingdom releases 18 former Guantanamo detainees

Saudi authorities 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.

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.

Foreign Minister comments on Iraq, Saudi ambassador to US

Minister of Foreign Affairs Prince Saud Al-Faisal held a press conference in Muscat, Oman December 25, the last day of King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz's three-day state visit to Oman. Talks between King Abdullah and Sultan Qaboos focused on the situations in Iraq and Palestine as well as the political turmoil in Lebanon.

Regarding Iraq, Prince Saud called for a national reconciliation among Iraqi factions as a basis for a solution to the crisis in that country. He stressed that the Kingdom supports those who seek Iraq's unity, independence and sovereignty.

Prince Saud commented on reports in the media that Adel Al-Jubeir, Foreign Affairs Adviser at the Royal Court, has been nominated Saudi Arabia's next ambassador to the US. The prince said he could not confirm or deny the reports, and that according to diplomatic protocol countries must receive approval from the host country before announcing the name of a nominee for an ambassadorship.

FOREIGN AID

Kingdom provides humanitarian aid to flood-stricken Indonesia

King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz issued a directive December 28 to provide urgent humanitarian assistance to Indonesia following recent landslides and flooding in Sumatra. The Saudi aid will be airlifted into the hard-hit provinces of Aceh and North Sumatra in coordination with Indonesian authorities. It will be provided by the Saudi Red Crescent Society and the Ministry of Finance.

