



DECEMBER 11 2007

SAUDI ARABIA

Cabinet approves largest-ever state budget for FY 2008

The Cabinet approved the state budget for FY 2008 on December 10, the largest in the Kingdom's history. The 2008 budget is projected at \$128.5 billion [SR 410 billion], \$8 billion higher than last year.

In remarks to the Cabinet, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz said that \$10.4 billion [SR 39 billion] will be allocated to education, \$11.9 billion [SR 44.5 billion] to health care and social development, \$1.9 billion [SR 7 billion] for the development of the judiciary, \$3.9 billion [SR 14.6 billion] for transportation, and \$12.1 billion [SR 45 billion] for water, municipal services and agriculture.

In a December 10 statement, the Ministry of Finance said that the 2008 budget projects total revenues of \$120 billion [SR 450 billion] and expenditures of \$109.33 billion [SR 410 billion].

For 2007, the Ministry projected revenues of \$166 billion [SR 621.5 billion] and expenditures of \$118.6 billion [SR 443 billion]. The GDP for 2007 is expected to reach \$378 billion [SR 1.414 trillion] at current prices, growing 7.1 percent. The oil sector is expected to grow by 8 percent, the private sector by 7.6 percent, and the public sector by 3.4 percent.

King Abdullah names members of the Allegiance Commission

King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz issued a royal decree on December 9 naming 35 members of the Saudi royal family to the Allegiance Commission.

The Allegiance Commission was established as part of a new law of succession announced in October 2006 to formalize the royal succession and ensure a smooth transfer of power. Under the new system, the King will nominate a Crown Prince, and the Allegiance Commission will vote on the candidate. Previously, the King had the sole right to select the Crown Prince.

The newly named members of the Commission are all sons and grandsons of the Kingdom's founder, King Abdulaziz Al-Saud. Prince Mishaal bin Abdulaziz will serve as chairman.

FOREIGN POLICY

King Abdullah discusses Middle East peace efforts with Tony Blair

King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz met with Quartet Middle East envoy Tony Blair in Riyadh December 9 for talks about international efforts to restart the Middle East peace process. Also present at the meeting were Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal, Chief of General Intelligence Prince Muqrin bin Abdulaziz and Saudi Ambassador to the US Adel A. Al-Jubeir.

The former British prime minister has made several trips to Saudi Arabia for talks with King Abdullah, most recently on November 21, 2007.

FOREIGN AID

Saudi airlift delivers another shipment of relief aid to Bangladesh

The fourth relief plane in a Saudi airlift to Bangladesh arrived in Dhaka December 7. The plane carried 96 tons of relief aid for people affected by the deadly cyclone that struck Bangladesh recently.

The Saudi relief airlift began November 26. On November 18, Saudi Arabia pledged to send humanitarian aid and extended a \$100 million grant to Bangladesh to ease the suffering caused by the cyclone.

HAJJ

Supreme Judicial Council announces dates for this year's Hajj

The Supreme Judicial Council announced that December 10 is the first day of the lunar month of Dhu Al-Hajjah for 2007 (1428 H). Accordingly, Tuesday, December 18, 2007 will be the Day of Standing at Arafat, and Wednesday, December 19, 2007 will be the first day of Eid Al-Adha.

As of December 8, more than 1.1 million pilgrims have arrived in Saudi Arabia to perform the Hajj. Saudi embassies and consulates around the world granted 1,575,214 Hajj visas this year. Indonesian pilgrims topped the list for 2007 with 214,886 visas, while Argentina had the smallest number at 15. Notably, there was a considerable increase in Chinese pilgrims this year; the number of visas issued for the Hajj exceeded 10,000 for the first time.

