



DECEMBER 18 2007

## HAJJ

### **More than 2 million pilgrims begin this year's Hajj**

More than 2 million pilgrims from 181 countries have gathered in Saudi Arabia to perform the Hajj rituals this year. Over 1.7 million pilgrims came from abroad, a 3 percent increase over last year.

The formal Hajj rituals began December 17 when pilgrims moved into Mina for the day of tarwiyah (watering). The pilgrims progressed smoothly without any major difficulty, supervised by a special traffic command.

From Mina, the pilgrims head to Mount Arafat for the Day of Standing at Arafat, the high point of the Hajj rituals. After praying on Mount Arafat, they progress to the Namira Mosque in Arafat for prayers before departing for Muzdalifah and then on to Mina, where they will perform the stoning the devil ritual at Jamarat.

Saudi authorities have ensured that all the required services and facilities are available for the pilgrims at the holy sites, including health care, fresh water, foodstuffs and communications services.

The Ministry of Health has said that so far there have been no epidemics or medical cases requiring quarantines. More than 10,000 medical personnel have been mobilized to provide care to pilgrims, including specialists from Turkey and Pakistan. Medical teams at the holy sites are providing care around the clock.

Joining the pilgrims this year is Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad, who is performing the Hajj at the invitation of King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz along with other foreign dignitaries.

## FOREIGN POLICY

### **Saudi Arabia and Jordan sign marine border agreement**

Saudi Arabia and Jordan have signed an agreement to demarcate their marine border in the Gulf of Aqaba. Interior Minister Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz and Jordanian Interior Minister Eid Al-Fayez signed the agreement at a ceremony in Jeddah December 16. Jordan and Saudi Arabia previously signed a land border agreement in 1965.

## **Saudi Arabia condemns deadly suicide bombings in Algeria**

Saudi Arabia has condemned the December 11 suicide bombings the Algerian capital of Algiers that killed at least 31. In a December 13 statement, the Kingdom denounced the bombings as criminal acts that contradict the principles of Islam and human values. King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz also telephoned Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika to offer his condolences on the deadly bombings.

## **FOREIGN AID**

### **Saudi Arabia to finance social development projects in Egypt**

Saudi Arabia and Egypt signed two loan agreements for social development projects on December 17. The Saudi Fund for Development agreed to provide \$26.8 million for Social Fund for Development projects and \$22.7 million for new health care facilities. Since 1975, the Saudi Fund for Development has contributed 12 loans worth \$370 million to Egypt.

## **SAUDI ARABIA**

### **King Abdullah pardons "Qatif Girl"**

King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz has issued a royal decree pardoning a Saudi woman who was a victim of kidnapping and rape and sentenced to 200 lashes and six months in prison, Justice Minister Dr. Abdullah Al-Ashaikh announced December 17 on Saudi TV.

The woman, from the Eastern Province city of Qatif, has become known internationally as the "Qatif Girl." More than a year ago, she was abducted at knifepoint and gang-raped by seven men as she sat in a car with a male companion.

King Abdullah made the decision to issue the pardon in the public interest and taking into consideration the fact that the woman and her companion had been subjected to a brutal crime and psychological trauma, Al-Ashaikh said. The King also stipulated that the charges against the woman be dropped and that her attackers be tried with the most punitive sentence.

Al-Ashaikh denied reports that the law license of the woman's lawyer, Abdulrahman Al-Lahem, was withdrawn. The Ministry of Justice did not take such a decision regarding Al-Lahem, he said.

