



JANUARY 22, 2008

FOREIGN POLICY

Kingdom to increase humanitarian aid to the Palestinians

Saudi Arabia has decided to increase its humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people, the Cabinet said in its weekly meeting January 21.

The Cabinet expressed concern at Israel's practice of collective punishment in the West Bank and Gaza, and stressed that continued Israeli violations of international law render peace initiatives empty. In addition, the Cabinet called on the Quartet to act quickly to preserve the human rights of the Palestinian people, and said that it would be contacting Middle East envoy Tony Blair on the matter.

In related news, the Cabinet highlighted the deep friendship between Saudi Arabia and the United States, and expressed confidence in President Bush's commitment to the establishment of a Palestinian state. President Bush paid a three-day official visit to Saudi Arabia last week.

SAUDI ARABIA

Cabinet approves consumer rights group, Railway Authority

On January 21, the Cabinet approved the organization of the Consumer Protection Association, which is intended to safeguard consumer rights in both the private and public sector as well as promote consumer awareness.

The Cabinet also approved the establishment of a Railway Authority. The new authority will organize railway transport and safety, issue licenses to railway service providers, monitor unfair competition, and investigate railway accidents and losses. It will be an independent body in terms of finance and administration, and its governor will be appointed by royal decree. The Cabinet stipulated that the Saudi Railway Organization (SRO) would continue to function until the Authority's rules and regulations are in place.

Second Global Competitiveness Forum held in Riyadh

The second Global Competitiveness Forum (GCF) was held in Riyadh January 20-21. The two-day forum was organized by the Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority (SAGIA) under the patronage of King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz.

The GCF is an annual meeting of top business executives, international political leaders, selected intellectuals, and academics who share an interest in global competitiveness. The theme of this year's event was "Competitiveness as an Engine for Economic Growth," and it aimed to draw attention to the macroeconomic benefit of competitiveness and to position competitiveness as a key global challenge.

In opening remarks on behalf of King Abdullah, Riyadh Governor Prince Salman bin Abdulaziz said that Saudi Arabia would continue to move forward with economic reforms and provide many opportunities for investment.

Madinah Knowledge Economic City and Cisco to develop "smart city"

The Madinah Knowledge Economic City (KEC) and the San Jose-based tech giant Cisco Systems announced an agreement for the development of a "smart city" January 20.

Cisco will provide the network architecture for the city. All of KEC's buildings will be interconnected and can be managed over a highly secure Internet Protocol (IP) network, allowing for centralized management and reduced operational costs for the city. The network will facilitate data, voice, video and mobile communications for commercial and residential buildings.

To further develop the human capital in Saudi Arabia, Cisco is also committed to establishing the Cisco Networking Academy in the Knowledge Economic City to help train skilled professionals to design and maintain networks.

ENERGY

Oil Minister meets with US Energy Secretary in Riyadh

Oil Minister Ali Al-Naimi met with US Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman in Riyadh January 19 to discuss current and prospective market supply, demand, reserves and environmental issues.

Al-Naimi gave Secretary Bodman an overview of Saudi efforts to ensure sufficient petroleum supplies, as well as the Kingdom's plans to increase production capacity both domestically and abroad.

Both sides agreed on the importance of stable oil markets and the development of technology to protect the environment. They also highlighted the importance of bilateral cooperation in the field of energy, particularly in the area of science and research.

