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SAUDI ARABIA

Crown Prince Sultan returns to the Kingdom

Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz returned to Riyadh on December 11 after a yearlong absence. The Crown Prince has spent the past several months abroad, first for medical treatment in New York, then for a recuperation period in Agadir, Morocco. To mark the occasion, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz issued royal pardons to a group of prisoners convicted of petty crimes. One day after his return, Crown Prince Sultan visited with soldiers wounded fighting infiltrators in the south at the Armed Forces Hospital in Riyadh, expressing his pride at their valor.

Children of killed soldiers and flood victims admitted to institutes

Following the directive of King Abdullah, Dr. Ali bin Nasser Al-Ghifais, Governor of the General Organization for Technical Training, instructed all technical and telecommunication colleges and vocational and industrial institutes to immediately admit the sons and daughters of soldiers who died in recent fighting at the Kingdom's southern borders. The order, issued on December 9, is also applicable to the children of those who died in last month's flash floods in the Jeddah area. Although the admissions deadline for the next academic term has passed, Dr. Al-Ghifais has asked that school officials accommodate the new applicants due to their special circumstances.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

King Abdullah leads delegation to 30th GCC summit

King Abdullah arrived in Kuwait on December 14 to lead the Saudi delegation to the 30th Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Summit. The two-day meeting, hosted by Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jabir Al-Sabah, focused on Arab, regional and Islamic issues. During the proceedings, a landmark electricity linkage project and a GCC Monetary Union were launched.

The summit concluded with the reading of the "Declaration of Kuwait," which touched on a broad range of regional topics involving the security, economic, political, legal, cultural, educational, religious, scientific and developmental fields. The GCC leaders reaffirmed their absolute support for the Kingdom's right to defend its land and its people's safety, in the wake of last month's cross-border terrorist attacks emanating from Yemen. A hostile act against the security of any

GCC country, they declared, is a threat to the stability of the entire region. The GCC's Supreme Council also underlined the significance of promoting interfaith dialogue, as embodied by the initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz. However, the Council was troubled by the results of a public referendum that banned the construction of minarets in Switzerland, calling it an "unacceptable" approach that discriminates against Islam. The Council called on Switzerland, as well as the international community, to intensify efforts to safeguard religious rights and protect places of worship.

Saudi U.N. official awarded human rights prize

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Executive Director Thoraya Obaid was presented with a human-rights award honoring her work with UNFPA on December 10. Obaid was chosen for the Louis B. Sohn Human Rights Award by the U.N. Association of the National Capital Area (UNA-UCA) for her work promoting maternal health and speaking out against discrimination and violence against women and girls. "Thoraya Obaid has been a tireless champion of women's human and reproductive rights. Throughout her career, she has been fearless in breaking down barriers and challenging stereotypes," U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said. "Under her leadership, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has played a major role in promoting maternal health and women's empowerment, and campaigns against female genital mutilation and fistula have achieved global resonance." During the awards ceremony, held in Washington, DC, Obaid said, "Such an honor will only make me, and UNFPA, more committed to promoting the human rights of women and girls who still face gender discrimination and violence, to advancing their empowerment and gender equality, and to ensuring universal access to reproductive health."

Lebanese Prime Minister visits the Kingdom

King Abdullah received visiting Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri in Riyadh on December 12. The King congratulated Al-Hariri on forming a new Cabinet and wished him success. Later, the Lebanese leader met with Crown Prince Sultan, who praised the prime minister for his accomplishments and expressed his wish for the further development of Saudi-Lebanese relations. In return, Al-Hariri expressed his joy over the recovery of Crown Prince Sultan and his return to the Kingdom and lauded Saudi support for his country.

