

## 217 killed, 1,290 injured, many stranded in Hajj fire

MINA, Saudi Arabia (AP)—Fires driven by high winds tore through a sprawling, overcrowded tent city Tuesday, trapping and killing pilgrims gathered for a sacred Islamic ritual. The official death toll was 217, but witnesses said at least 300 died.

Saudi Arabia said more than 1,290 pilgrims were injured in the fire, which witnesses blamed on exploding canisters of cooking gas.

Most of the dead were Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, many of them elderly, witnesses said. Some were trampled to death as pilgrims fled the fire on the plain outside the holy city of Mecca.

"Men panicked and ran in every direction," said an Indian pilgrim who spoke to The Associated Press by telephone and identified himself only as

Irfan. Helicopters dropped water from above while civil defense workers used firetruck hoses on the flames.

Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims were stranded after the fire destroyed an estimated 70,000 tents, which the pilgrims use for shelter in the final days of the Hajj. Civil defense forces from Mecca and nearby Jiddah and Taif rushed to the scene, handing out tents and supplies.

Prince Majid bin Abdul Aziz, the royal family's representative in Mecca, ordered that new tents be provided to all pilgrims affected by the fire, Saudi television reported Tuesday.

The fire erupted shortly before noon as Muslims gathered for the Hajj, or pilgrimage, were beginning to move to Mount Arafat, where the Prophet Mohammed delivered his final sermon

in the seventh century.

There, 2 million Muslims will stand together in prayer Wednesday in the climax of the pilgrimage to the Muslim holy sites.

Less than an hour before the fire began Tuesday, security forces had thrown up a cordon around the entire plain, closing it to new arrivals to stop further overcrowding, witnesses said.

Fanned by winds of nearly 40 mph, the fire swept across the plain and quickly spread chaos through the camp, crammed with row after row of white tents.

Every Muslim who can afford it must perform the pilgrimage once in a lifetime. Every year, the Hajj brings together one of the largest groups of people in a single place anywhere in the world.



### Rulo cult murderer Dennis Ryan freed from prison

FALLS CITY — Sentenced as a teen-ager to life in prison for torturing and killing a fellow cult member in Rulo on his father's orders, Dennis Ryan became a free man Tuesday.

A judge ordered him released at a new sentencing on a reduced charge, deciding that the 11 years Ryan had spent behind bars were enough.

"I'm just sorry for what I did," Ryan, 27, tearfully told the family of victim James Thimm. "I really am."

Thimm was beaten, sexually abused, shot, stomped and partially skinned while still alive in 1985. His fingertips had been shot off on one hand.

Originally convicted of second-degree murder for his role in the death, Dennis Ryan won a new trial under a Nebraska Supreme Court ruling that "malice" must be proven as part of that charge. Under a plea deal this time around, he was convicted of manslaughter and first-degree assault.

Richardson County District Judge Robert Finn sentenced Ryan to 20 years for each charge to be served concurrently. But the judge said Ryan would have served just 10 years under Nebraska's prison good-time law at the time of the crime and already had served that.

### China avoids human rights condemnation for 7th year

GENEVA — After an intense lobbying campaign marked both by threats and tantalizing promises, China succeeded once again Tuesday in blocking U.N. criticism of its human rights record.

It was the seventh straight year that the world's most populous nation avoided rebuke by the 53-nation Human Rights Commission, the United Nations' top human rights watchdog.

The vote was 27-17 to uphold a Chinese procedural motion stating that the body should take no action on a mildly worded resolution expressing concern about its human rights record. Nine members abstained.

Speaking before a packed meeting chamber, Chinese ambassador Wu Jianmin derided the Western resolution as an "outrageous distortion of China's reality."

Beijing has suspended contacts with Denmark, which introduced the measure, and warned of further reprisals.

"They (the West) don't want to see the Chinese going their own way," Wu said. "What impudence. The Chinese people have followed their own way for 5,000 years. Nothing can turn them away, certainly not a few anti-China resolutions. No force on earth can stop 1.2 billion Chinese people from advancing."

## U.S., Saudis together forever?

### Kingdom wants to maintain Iraqi oil embargo as long as possible

**EDITOR'S NOTE** — The economic relationship between the world's lone superpower and its biggest oil exporter reaches back decades. But it has entered a new stage in the 1990s. This is the second in a three-part series on U.S.-Saudi relations.

By CHARLES J. HANLEY  
Associated Press

"Oil policy should have to do with the interests of our country, not of America."

SAAD AL-FAQIH  
Saudi dissident

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia — Quietly, steadily, in a slow parade west of supertankers and a digital flow east of dollars, the U.S.-Saudi partnership has drawn tighter since the Gulf War.

America's oil imports have risen by a third. Saudi oil revenues have more than doubled. And in a fast-changing world, the mutual dependence of the superpower and the petropower has become a dominant geopolitical fact of post-Cold War life.

To a British economist, it represents a "return of American hegemony in the international oil system." To an American oilman, it's a trap. To a Saudi dissident, it's a betrayal. And to Iraq it's bad news — very bad news.

"Saudi Arabia would like the embargo on Iraqi oil maintained as long as possible," says international oil expert Fadhil Chalabi. In America, it has a powerful partner for achieving that embargo.

Energy is only one strand in a web of U.S.-Saudi economic ties that has grown in the six years since an American-led army rolled back Iraqi aggression in the Persian Gulf.

### Growing reliance on U.S.

Statistics tell the story: U.S. products, 16 percent of Saudi imports before the war, now make up 24 percent. Imports from America — computers and turbines, cigarettes and F-15 fighters — totaled \$7.3 billion last year.

The story plays out, too, in the streets and government corridors of this sprawling capital: in the gleaming new Toys R Us store in north Riyadh; in the Cadillacs and Suburbans cruising the desert roadways; in the two dozen American economists at work in the Finance Ministry; in the U.S. business advisers hired to counsel King Fahd, led by James A. Baker III, secretary of state during the Gulf War.

Oil has long linked the two countries, "but now we have a much more complex and dynamic relationship," Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin told

the U.S.-Saudi Arabian Business Council, a group formed since the war.

But for all the complexity, oil remains key.

As U.S. oil output declined, imports climbed. America's Saudi imports last year — 1.25 million barrels a day — were twice the level of those in 1986. Saudi oil revenues, meanwhile, grew from \$22 billion before the war to \$50 billion last year, halting an economic slide that began in the mid-1980s.

### You scratch my back ...

Some say an "entente" has been forged since the war, that the United States has agreed to protect the Gulf monarchies and remain a dependable customer in exchange for reliable supplies at stable prices.

"You'll never find anything in writing, but all events suggest that things are under control," said energy scholar Peter Odell of the London School of Economics.

This "hegemony" is a force for oil price stability, he said. The Saudis' spare capacity would enable them to ratchet production up or down to influence prices.

U.S. officials dismiss talk of secret agreements. They acknowledge the two governments regularly consult on the oil market — and especially, lately, on the anti-Iraq embargo. It was high on the agenda of recent U.S.-Saudi talks in Washington.

The U.N. embargo, imposed after Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, shut down Iraqi oil exports of 3.2 million barrels a day. Limited sales have been allowed since December, but the embargo remains a disaster for the Iraqi economy.

In the absence of Iraqi oil, Saudi exports surged to 8 million barrels a day from 5.4 million.

London's Center for Global Energy Studies, headed by Sheikh Ahmed Zaki Yamani, the former Saudi oil minister, determined that Saudi Arabia has earned more than \$100 billion in oil revenues from the embargo — more than covering the \$55 billion the war cost the Saudi treasury.

### Keeping the lid on

With the bonus billions, the Saudis largely maintained government spending on their fast-growing population, deferring expected increases last year in gasoline, electricity and other subsidized prices.

That kind of economic security helps keep the lid on in a land with no political freedom and an increasingly vocal dissident movement. And that means, Chalabi said, the Saudis cannot allow Iraqi oil back on the market, where it could drive down prices or force a cutback in Saudi exports.

A well-informed foreign source in Riyadh, who is in touch with Saudi thinking, said the Saudis are, indeed, working against the return of Iraqi oil. "They don't want it coming suddenly onto the market," he said.

Although the sanctions have been maintained because of Iraq's efforts to build weapons of mass destruction, Western officials suggest they may stay as long as Saddam Hussein rules Iraq.

To some Americans and Saudis, the real problem is the oil partnership itself.

The surge in U.S. oil imports — from 30 percent of consumption in the mid-1980s to 54 percent last year — leaves the American economy too reliant on outside sources, U.S. energy conservationists say.

Some describe the billions the Pentagon spends to protect Persian Gulf oil as a giant "welfare" program for U.S. energy multinationals.

"I think you're trapped now," said well-known Texas oilman T. Boone Pickens. "It would take years to work your way out of this problem."

The U.S. General Accounting Office advises Americans to enjoy the "trap." Lower-priced oil saves the U.S. economy billions of dollars a year, it reported in December.

What looks like a boon to American drivers looks like a rip-off to some Saudis.

"Oil policy should have to do with the interests of our country, not of America," Saad Al-Faqih, an exiled Saudi dissident, said in London.

## Senate bars, then admits woman and her guide dog

WASHINGTON (AP) — Embarrassed by a blind congressional aide being kept off the Senate floor in a dispute over her guide dog, the Senate unanimously agreed Tuesday to make the chamber more accessible to people with disabilities.

A congressional fellow, working for Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., was kept out of the Senate chamber because she insisted that her guide dog, a big yellow Labrador named Beau, remain with her.

It took fewer than 18 hours Tuesday for the Senate to realize its gaffe and engineer a delicate retreat.

The senators agreed unanimously to lift any prohibition against guide dogs and directed the sergeant at arms to allow staff members with disabilities to bring into the chamber whatever aids they consider necessary.

"This is the right thing to do," said Majority Leader Trent Lott, R-Miss. He said the interim step was taken, pending a review of a proposed permanent change in Senate rules on access involving people with disabilities.

The issue surfaced Monday when Wyden had sought unanimous consent from his colleagues to allow Moira Shea, an energy policy expert, to accompany him onto the floor for a debate on nuclear waste.

But Sen. Robert Byrd, D-W.Va., telephoned the cloakroom to object. That was enough to keep Shea and her dog waiting at the door.

Byrd issued a statement Tuesday saying that he objected because he wanted to ensure "proper procedures" were followed before the Senate considered changing its rules on access.

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