

## **Saudi approves strategy to combat corruption**

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The Saudi Council of Ministers has approved a national strategy for combating corruption, and also set up an authority to monitor implementation of the strategy.

The decision has been welcomed as a welcome and timely move. The cabinet urged all government departments to combat corruption by carrying out their duties in accordance with the law, reducing and facilitating administrative procedures and holding all officials, irrespective of their positions, accountable.

The National Authority for Combating Corruption will work under the direct supervision of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, who has declared a war on corruption and bureaucratic practices ever since he took over in August 2005.

The head of the authority will be appointed by a royal decree and will have a ministerial rank. All officials including ministers would be held responsible for dishonest practices.

Salim Al Qahtani, a Shoura Council member, said that state-owned companies like Saudi Basic Industries Corp (Sabic), Aramco and Saudi Electricity Company would also be questioned in case of malpractices. "We are losing billions of riyals every year as a result of corruption," said Amri Al Kholi, professor of law at King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah.

Mohammad Al Qahtani, professor of economics at the Institute of Diplomatic Studies, said the decision to establish a national authority for fighting corruption was not only an acknowledgement of corruption in the country but also an affirmation of the government's resolve to fight it.

Al Qahtani said the decline in government services, especially in the health and education sectors as well as spread of poverty show that public money was not spent in a proper manner. He said administrative corruption was taking place secretly, and added that all officials involved in graft cases must be questioned.