

The Executive Brief

Issue 18 | The Executive Brief Strategic insights for businesses shaping their next phase of growth in Saudi Arabia.



AEI Saudi
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This edition reflects key developments from March.

This month's Executive brief is set against the backdrop of regional conflict. At AEI we continue to report on matters of interest to our clients and future investors in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) within the confines of the services we offer. Commentary on a dynamic political and security situation is not our aim; instead, we will maintain our reporting on Saudi business news, economic updates, and regulatory changes, and, when requested, we can provide more detail in response to specific enquiries.

Regular readers of the Executive Brief or those who have attended any of our events around the world will be aware that we have talked about 2026 as a year of strategic focus and prioritisation in KSA. This is materialising regardless of the conflict, but with some new additional pressures. Our teams continue to work tirelessly on behalf of our existing clients, meeting market demands, and day-to-day activity continues unabated. Likewise, having assessed their appetite for risk, new clients continue to onboard with AEI, given that their strategic planning for Saudi market entry is many months or years in the making and is a long-term commitment.

Furthermore, the \$1T Saudi market and the institutions supporting it are demonstrating characteristic resilience, underpinned by a large local population in a strong domestic market. Moreover, Vision2030 is a strategic plan that adapts (see below on Giga project updates) according to circumstances but endures on a clear course of transformation for future generations. Foreign investors play a significant role in this journey, and maintaining commitment will resonate well with local buyers and partners.

We look forward to supporting our friends and colleagues as they enter the KSA market.



Strategic focus. Enduring momentum.

Foreign investment licensing update

There has been plenty of reporting in March on the transition from a Foreign Investment licence to a registration model, a change that was initially introduced in 2025. Much of the commentary focuses on changes from a regulatory gateway-and-filter system to a simplified procedural process, with the responsibility incumbent on the investor to ensure compliance and appropriate structures post-registration. To date, our experience on the ground is that nothing has substantially changed, and a local partner like AEI is essential to navigate not only the registration with MISA, but all subsequent stakeholder engagement and regulatory compliance with other bodies.

Reach out to info@aeisaudi.com if you want to know more.

Special Economic Zone update

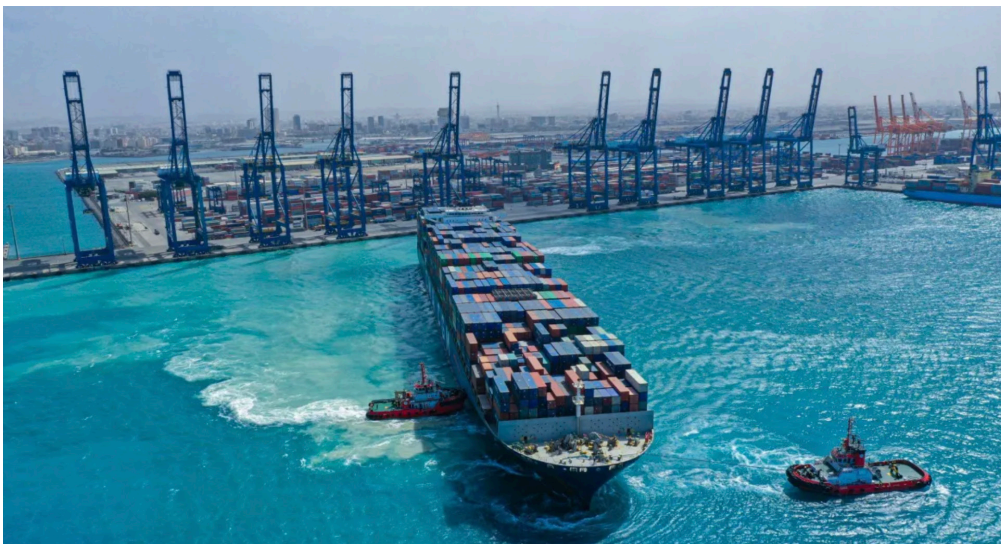
AEI have been reporting on the implementation of Special Economic Zones in the Kingdom since their announcement in April 2023. Despite the SEZ continuing to be a regulatory work in progress, we have already helped a number of clients register their businesses in SEZ.

In March, three pivotal draft regulations for public consultation were published by the Saudi Government authorities, these include draft 'Companies Rules,' draft rules of the 'Register of

Companies,’ and draft ‘Trade Name Rules’ in SEZ. The public consultation closed on 14 March 2026, with implementation to follow.

The SEZ included in the consultations are KAEC, located north of Jeddah on the Red Sea coast, Jazan SEZ located south of Jeddah on the Red Sea coast, Ras Al-Khair SEZ located north of Dammam on the Arabian Gulf coast, and Cloud Computing & Informatics Special Economic Zone located in Riyadh city.

Beyond the anticipated implications and changes, the draft rules should confirm a legal framework for SEZs, with various incentives contained within an efficient business ecosystem. As we reported three years ago the all-important tax and customs exemptions have yet to properly manifest with widespread practical application. Watch this space.



Building the Kingdom's next economic hubs

Giga Projects update

Last month, it was widely reported that the Saudi authorities had terminated two major construction contracts at NEOM. The first was the Italian company Webuild, which announced it had ended a contract to build dams for freshwater lakes as part of the Trojena project. Likewise, Malaysia’s Eversendai Corporation announced the contract to provide steel for the project had been terminated.[1] This comes on the back of the news in January that the Mukaab, the giant cube which was a centrepiece of the New Murabba project in Riyadh was also suspended.[2]

Readers from October will recall when we reported that the recalibration or prioritisation was best articulated by the Saudi Finance Minister HE Mohammed Al-Jadaan, who, when addressing the IMF in October last year, “emphasised that giga projects and investments

will be continually reassessed to ensure long-term value, productivity, and sustainability.”[3] Moreover he stated that projects will not continue out of “ego” and “If any strategy or project does not make sense to continue, we will have no hesitation to change it, stop it, or extend it.”

Whether by design or by circumstance, some of these pauses or stoppages are of course a huge disappointment. However, by contrast, where the belt was tightened in some areas, other projects are already operational and delivering a unique experience in the tourism and entertainment sector. AEI can report first-hand on an exceptional opportunity to be had at the separate Red Sea Global resorts and the Six Flags Qiddiya City. Having visited as paying guests to both Giga projects, the customer experience is hugely rewarding, but so should the supply chain opportunity, as the projects and others like them race towards full operational capacity.

We look forward to discussing these opportunities with our clients.



Where vision is already a lived experience - Red Sea Global, Saudi Arabia

Trust AEI – experts in Saudi success. We support foreign businesses to enter the Kingdom, establish operations, and succeed long term.

[1] FT 27 March 2026

[2] Arab News 27 January 2026

[3] Saudi Gazette 15 Oct 25



AEI Saudi Executive Brief

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