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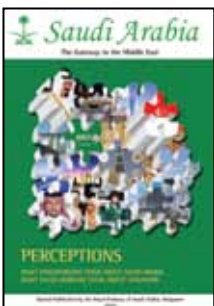
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contents

SAUDI ARABIA – THE GATEWAY TO THE MIDDLE EAST



On the Cover



This jigsaw puzzle serves as a symbolic representation of the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Singapore.

From the two national flags taking pride of place at the top to iconic scenes from

both countries, we see the events, people and revered places that link the two countries and bring them ever closer together. It is these elements, deeply seated in the hearts of the two peoples, that link Saudi Arabia and Singapore even more than the important economic ties.

As the pieces of this puzzle come together, we discover a vibrant picture of a unique relationship!

Leadership

05 The King

H.M King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques.

07 The Compassionate Crown Prince

HRH Prince Sultan Bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Aviation, and Inspector General.

09 The Second Deputy

HRH Prince Naif Bin Abdul Aziz, Second Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior.

11 The Peace Missionary

HRH Prince Saud Bin Faisal Bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, Foreign Minister.

13 Ambassador's Message

H.E. Dr. Jamil M. Merdad, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Republic of Singapore.

Singaporeans in Saudi Arabia

14 "A Fascinating Country"

Ambassador V.P. Hirubalan, Director of the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia Directorate, discusses the wonders of the Kingdom.

18 Saudi Arabia Our Record Achievement: Rotary

Rotary Engineering Chairman, Roger Chia Kim Piow, speaks about the opportunities and successes of doing business in Saudi Arabia.

20 Getting to Know, Getting to Grow Closer

Singapore university students offer their impressions and high regards for Saudi Arabia.

24 Saudi Arabia. My Heaven

A native Singaporean now married to a Saudi talks about her fulfilling life in the Kingdom.

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contents

SAUDI ARABIA – THE GATEWAY TO THE MIDDLE EAST



Saudis in Singapore

26 Alsagoffs: Bridging Two Cultures

One of Singapore's most prominent families is also a major link between the Kingdom and the Island Republic.

29 "Back Home" in Saudi Arabia

The lure of the Kingdom draws a Singaporean couple "back home".

30 Equestrian Dalma Rushdi Malhas Scores a First for Saudi Women

We look at the commitment and achievements of Saudi bronze medalist at this year's YOG.

32 Singapore Right Choice for Learning and Living: Saudi Students

Young Saudi students, both men and women, are venturing into international shores. Those in Singapore find it a great choice.

Visits

34 Iftar Reception Honours Prince

A member of the Saudi Royal family honoured Singaporeans with his attendance at an Iftar banquet.

35 "Singapore a Model to Emulate"

Mayors of Makkah and Madinah are impressed by beautiful and vibrant Singapore.

36 Parliamentarian Visit Setting New Pace

Saudi parliamentarians visit Singapore to seek partners for the Kingdom's latest Development Plan.

38 Prominent Saudis visit Singapore

This year a number of prominent Saudis visited the Lion City.

39 Saudi Patients Seeking Treatment in Singapore

Singapore's reputation as a medical hub is not the only attraction; what draws patients to Singapore is the personalized medical care.

Cooperations

40 Singapore's Middle East Institute: A Major Bridge for Understanding

A new Director at the Institute signals an even deeper commitment and understanding.

42 Hajj: An Immense Challenge Beautifully Met

How Singapore prepares local Muslims for this "Journey of a Lifetime".

45 Saudi Minister's Keynote Address at Singapore International Energy Week

Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources delivered the keynote address.

46 National Day Celebrations

Saudi Arabia's National Day was celebrated with pomp and splendour both at home and in Singapore.

47 Hands Reaching Out Across the Skies

A partnership of pride between Saudi Arabia's King Fahd and Singapore's Changi Airport management firm.

48 Fast Fact

*Congratulations & Best Wishes
to the People and
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
on their 80th National Day*



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A message from the Ambassador

Praise be to Allah, the Almighty, for His Blessings and Guidance!



With this issue of our Saudi Arabia magazine, we've set out a slightly different track, and it reflects an element close to my heart – the depth of Saudi-Singapore relations. I have often been overwhelmed by the affection and warmth shown to Saudis by the people of Singapore. And these expressions of affection are gladly reciprocated. I have also noted from Singapore delegations travelling to the Kingdom how warmly the Saudis greet Singaporeans and the friendship shown to our visitors from Southeast Asia.

With this in mind, we have set out a new orientation for this issue of our publication. This time we wanted to focus on perceptions, the depth of perceptions, and the various levels of interactions between our two peoples.

Thus, in our 2010 edition, we look at Saudis who have made Singapore their homes, be it short-term or long-term. (In the latter case, our article on the Alsagoffs is a fine example). We also look at the phenomenon of the many Saudi students and scholars who have come to Singapore for secondary or tertiary education and what they've gained from this experience. We've also polled Singapore university students who have travelled to the Kingdom about what they discovered, as well as students studying the region who look forward to visiting our historical land and what their perceptions of the country and the Saudi people are.

Another interesting phenomenon that we cover here is the significant number of Saudi citizens who have put their trust in Singapore's healthcare system by coming to the Lion City for medical treatment.

Intermarriage is, of course, one of the most profound and touching forms of connection between two peoples, and in this issue, we present a Singaporean woman who married a Saudi citizen and now lives happily with her family in the Kingdom.

And as we did not want to ignore the strong and increasing economic ties between our two countries, we also have a number of features that look at the business and investment picture, as well as a survey of prominent Singaporean companies that have set up operations in Saudi Arabia in recent years, such as Parkway and Rotary Group. One clear thing we have learned in putting these stories together: there is indeed a strong, invisible bond that links Saudis and Singaporeans together. With this exercise to enhance it, we are determined that this bond is certain to continue growing.

Dr. Jamil M. Merdad

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Republic of Singapore



V.P. HIRUBALAN, former Ambassador of Singapore to Saudi Arabia, currently Director, Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia Directorate at Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, spoke to NOMITA DHAR, Editor-in-chief about his experience and thriving Saudi-Singapore ties.

"A Fascinating Country"

▲ V.P. Hirubalan, former Ambassador of Singapore to Saudi Arabia, currently Director, Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia Directorate at Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Singapore enjoys warm and long-standing ties with Saudi Arabia. Recently there have also been high-level visits between the two nations, like in May this year when the Minister of Foreign Affairs visited the Kingdom and the Chairman of the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities HRH Prince Sultan Bin Salman visited Singapore under the Middle East Eminent Persons Programme. What do such visits mean to the relationship and are there any more in the pipeline?

The frequent high-level visits reflect the strong links between our countries and the importance of continued dialogue in areas of mutual cooperation. These visits are a platform for leaders from both countries to share ideas, build lasting friendships and establish rapport at the highest levels. Contacts at the highest levels will also facilitate

a good understanding of each other and our respective regions.

There has been a healthy exchange of high-level visits over the past few years. From Singapore, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong, Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew, Senior Minister S Jayakumar and Minister for Foreign Affairs George Yeo have visited Saudi Arabia. From Saudi Arabia, His Royal Highness Crown Prince Sultan; Assistant Minister for Defence, His Royal Highness, Prince Khalid Bin Sultan; Advisor to the Saudi Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resource, His Highness Prince Faisal bin Turki Abdulaziz Al-Saud; President And Chairman Of The Saudi Commission For Antiquities And Tourism, His Royal Highness Prince Sultan Bin Salman Bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, Minister of Education, His Excellency Dr Abdullah Bin Saleh Al-Obaid; Minister of Higher



▲ Ambassador and his wife at the ancient city of Madain Saleh.

Education, His Excellency Dr Khalid Al Anqari; Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, His Excellency Ali Bin Ibrahim Al-Naimi; and Chairman of the Saudi Shura Council Shaikh, His Excellency, Dr Saleh bin Abdullah Al-Humaid have visited Singapore.

President of the Republic of Singapore S R Nathan has extended an invitation

for His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud to make an official visit to Singapore.

His Majesty's visit would further cement the close ties between both countries. There are more visits slated for the fourth quarter, including a visit to Singapore by the Saudi-Singapore Friendship Committee and a trade delegation from Singapore to Saudi Arabia.

What are the areas of cooperation between the two nations?

Saudi Arabia is Singapore's largest trading partner in the Gulf region, recording a trade figure of almost S\$12.9 billion in 2009. Both nations have complementary economies. Singapore's economy is services-based while Saudi Arabia's is production based. The opportunities for achieving synergies are plentiful. One recent example of cooperation is a joint venture between Rotary Engineering Limited (Singapore company) and Petro Steel (KSA company owned by Saudi Aramco) to build a refinery tank at the Jubail Export Refinery. This collaboration is but one example of the opportunities for our two nations to work together and leverage on each other's comparative advantages.

One significant sign of the growing economic partnership is the decision by Singapore's economic agencies to establish a presence in Saudi Arabia. International Enterprises Singapore (IES) has set up trade offices in Jeddah and Riyadh. Changi Airports International (a subsidiary of Changi Airport Group, which manages Singapore's world renowned Changi Airport) is working with Saudi Arabia's General Authority of Civil Aviation to co-manage King Fahd International Airport in Dammam. Singapore and Saudi Arabia also collaborate in the important area of water management, which is spearheaded by the Singapore Public Utilities Board's regional office based in the Singapore Embassy to

▼ *Ambassador and his wife at an oasis in the desert.*



Saudi Arabia. Two of Saudi Arabia's biggest companies, ARAMCO and SABIC have expanded their presence in the Asia-Pacific, and we are happy that they have chosen Singapore as their base of operations. The growing linkage between Singapore and Saudi Arabia is also reflected in the increased connectivity between both countries. Singapore Airlines has been operating 4 weekly flights to Riyadh since December 2008, adding to the 3 weekly flights that it operates to Jeddah.

Education is another area of growing cooperation between our two countries. Education is important to Singapore's continued progress and development. We are prepared to share our approach to education and the unique steps we have taken to ensure that our education system remains relevant and able to meet the challenges of globalisation and rapid technological changes. Each year, Singapore universities welcome Saudi scholars under the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP). These

scholars experience the Singapore education system first-hand during their undergraduate studies. More importantly, such programmes contribute to strengthening the people-to-people link between both countries. Another example is the collaboration between the King Saud University and Singapore's National Institute of Education. Recently a group of academics from King Saud University attended a programme in Singapore to better understand our approach to pedagogy and training of school leaders.

The friendship between Singapore and Saudi Arabia is also reflected in our cooperation in other areas such as security, sharing information on subjects of mutual interest and in the international arena where we support each other's candidatures in international organisations.

Saudi Arabian leadership in recent years has accelerated the pace of development in the Kingdom on various fronts. Your views?

The enhanced pace of development is a pragmatic approach to diversify the Kingdom's economy and bring social development to the country for the benefit of all Saudis. The Kingdom's recent development plan highlights the emphasis on education, healthcare and infrastructure to ensure that its people continue to prosper over the long term. It is particularly impressive that the focus will be on enhancing technical education and training to prepare the Saudi youth for the new economy. The intensive drive to bring the Kingdom to the next level of development with emphasis on a knowledge-based economy is exemplified by the establishment of the King Abdullah University for Science and Technology (KAUST) in September 2009 – a feat achieved within three years, from concept to completion. KAUST represents an investment for the future. We are glad to note that Singapore is playing a role in KAUST through the appointments of our former President of the National University of Singapore Professor Shih Choon Fong as KAUST's first President and our former Deputy Prime Minister Dr Tony Tan as a member of the University's advisory board.

What, in your perception, is the Kingdom's role as a birthplace of Islam, in GCC, and also as a major oil producer in the world?

The Kingdom, as the birthplace of Islam and as home to the two Holy Mosques, can play an important role as a voice of reason and moderation during times of uncertainty. The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, His Majesty King Abdullah, has played a key role in combating extremism, including helping to correct the deviant views of those who misunderstand or misrepresent the peaceful message of Islam. Saudi Arabia has led efforts to rehabilitate radical extremists and has made huge strides in bringing Muslim and non-Muslim nations together through dialogue, especially through the Interfaith Dialogues. Singapore,



▲ Ambassador and his wife with Singaporean visitors in Jeddah.

a multi-religious society, welcomes the initiatives and steps taken by His Majesty to promote religious harmony and foster better understanding between Islam and other faiths.

As a major oil producer, Saudi Arabia plays a key role in the global economy. Saudi Arabia has managed to maintain stability in the oil market by responsibly managing oil prices to ensure a steady flow of oil to support global economic needs and development. It is to the credit of the Kingdom that it adjusted its production levels to meet the global energy demands while at the same time ensuring the oil prices remained at reasonable levels – a recognition that high oil prices were detrimental to the global economy and caused undue hardship to oil-importing nations.

Singapore mooted the idea of establishing an Asia-Middle East Dialogue (AMED) to promote greater inter-regional interaction and awareness in 2004 and also hosted the inaugural AMED. How has AMED progressed in these years and what are the future plans?

The idea of an Asia-Middle East Dialogue (AMED) arose during a time when international terrorism had fostered an atmosphere of suspicion and paranoia. Although there have been peaceful relations, trade and the exchange of ideas through the Maritime Silk Route between East Asia and the Middle East since ancient times, we had grown apart instead of growing closer as developing nations with shared challenges and aspirations. Singapore's Senior Minister Goh Chok

Tong proposed this mechanism in February 2004 to help foster closer ties and promote greater understanding between the two regions. Singapore hosted the inaugural AMED in 2005. We have made much progress since our first meeting in Singapore, and we now look forward to Saudi Arabia hosting the fourth meeting of AMED as the next Chairman after Thailand.

More important, AMED's goal of encouraging greater inter-regional interaction and awareness has been supported by the growing engagement between the countries in our two regions. This may be seen in the growing interest of many Arab countries in the markets of India and China, as well as in the increasing number of Asian countries investing in the Middle East. A recent Singapore-Oman project to reconstruct a 9th century ship, the Jewel of Muscat, to re-trace the journey taken by the ancient Arabs along the Maritime Silk Route to Singapore highlighted not only the historical roots of our relations, but also our hopes for a new Asia, based on mutual respect and warm friendship.

Among the AMED countries, the sub-regional groupings of ASEAN and the GCC have also strengthened relations. In 2009, Bahrain hosted the first ASEAN-GCC Foreign Ministers Meeting in Manama, and we followed up by hosting the second meeting in Singapore. The meetings were a big success, and the Ministers agreed to meet annually instead of bi-annually as initially suggested. The ASEAN-GCC Foreign Ministers have also agreed

▼ Ambassador and his wife enjoying Arabic coffee in a tent.



countries. Companies from both countries would have preferential access to each other's market with lower costs. We look forward to more Saudi companies establishing a presence in Singapore not only to participate in opportunities in Singapore (e.g., Islamic finance, energy, specialty chemicals & petrochemicals), but also to use Singapore as a base to expand to the wider Asian markets.

Saudi nationals obtaining Singapore visas is said to be hard. As Singapore adds new options to its tourism landscape, do you think more Saudis can visit Singapore with relative ease?

We warmly welcome Saudi nationals to visit Singapore to enjoy our country and the new and exciting facilities we have included in our tourism landscape. We are pleased to note that the number of visitors from Saudi Arabia to Singapore has increased significantly over the past four years. Contrary to perceptions, it is not difficult at all for Saudi nationals to obtain visas to visit Singapore.

In fact, our visa policies are quite liberal when compared with most countries, including Saudi Arabia. The approval process is fast, and on most occasions we furnish applicants with long-term multiple-journey visas (MJVs). Since 1 January 2007, Singapore has waived visa requirements for Saudi diplomatic passport holders and with effect from August 2009, Saudi business visitors to Singapore are issued with two-year MJVs. Some frequent visitors will be issued with five-year MJVs and may enroll their International Civil Aviation Organization-compliant passports for automated clearance. Saudi nationals can apply for visas at the Singapore embassy in Riyadh, our consulate in Jeddah, our visa agents in Saudi Arabia or at any other Singapore embassy or consulate.

When you hear the name 'Saudi Arabia', what is the first image that comes to your mind?

A country on the move, determined to make economic and social progress without compromising its unique traditions and culture and committed to upholding its responsibility to the Muslim world. ■

to support the creation of an ASEAN-GCC Foundation to promote greater understanding and interaction through cultural, educational and people-to-people exchanges.

You've obviously spent much time in Saudi Arabia. Could you share your impressions of people, culture, food?

Yes, Saudi Arabia is a beautiful country. Riyadh possesses an austere dignity that you do not find in many other cities, while Jeddah has a lively, cosmopolitan vibrancy. The deserts of Saudi Arabia are vast and majestic, and they evoke feelings of solitude, humility and awe, as well as a sense of wonder when you come across a rare blooming flower, the crystals (Saudi 'diamonds') that form in the sand, or a coral from an ocean-bed that dried many millennia ago.

It is certainly a fascinating country. The Saudis are proud of their heritage, culture and traditions. It is a unique experience to visit the Kingdom to enjoy its varied attractions from the modern cities with their gleaming mega-malls and traditional souks to the vast desert tracts. With Saudi Arabia now promoting tourism, there will be opportunities for visitors to enjoy the unique carvings in Madain Saleh, the mountain resorts in Taif, and

the natural caves in Hofuf.

What can Singapore and Saudi Arabia learn from each other?

We are two different countries, but there are areas where we can benefit from each other's experience. One example would be the approaches to handle security challenges from extremists. There is already ongoing cooperation in this area. Other areas where we share experiences would be in the development of water resources including new desalination methods, information technology, urban and infrastructure planning, education, health care and airport management. Delegations from each country visit each other regularly to explore areas where we can enhance cooperation and work towards a win-win situation for both countries.

On the business front, do you think the countries have optimised the potential?

On the business front, much progress has been made over the years, but there are more synergies that can be gained from continued collaboration between our countries. Ratification of the Free Trade Agreement between the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and Singapore by Saudi Arabia would help increase trade between our two

Saudi Arabia

Our Record Achievement: Rotary

Singapore's Rotary Engineering Limited is one of the pioneers venturing into Saudi Arabia, working on a US\$745 million contract to build an offsite utilities and refinery tank farm in Jubail which is being turned into a world-scale international industrial hub. Rotary chairman Roger Chia Kim Piow reflects on the opportunities and the experience of working in the Kingdom.

“We were not familiar with Saudi Arabia in the early days. But our strategy was to find a good local partner and start small with smaller projects to familiarize ourselves with local market conditions,” he says.

“Once we felt we were ready, we went on to bigger projects, the biggest of which is the US\$745 million Jubail oil and gas industry project,” he points out.

Chia is impressed by the young Saudi population and the potential of the people.

The Kingdom's oil and gas strategy is the backbone of national development, socio-economic progress and intensifies the focus on human resource development.

He also appreciates the Saudi government's efforts in tackling some of the challenging environmental issues for foreigners.

“One of the big challenges for Singapore companies working in the Kingdom is the weather. The other is managing the labour. But we see all these being handled by the Saudis well, as we move on to handle mega-projects in the Kingdom,” says Chia.

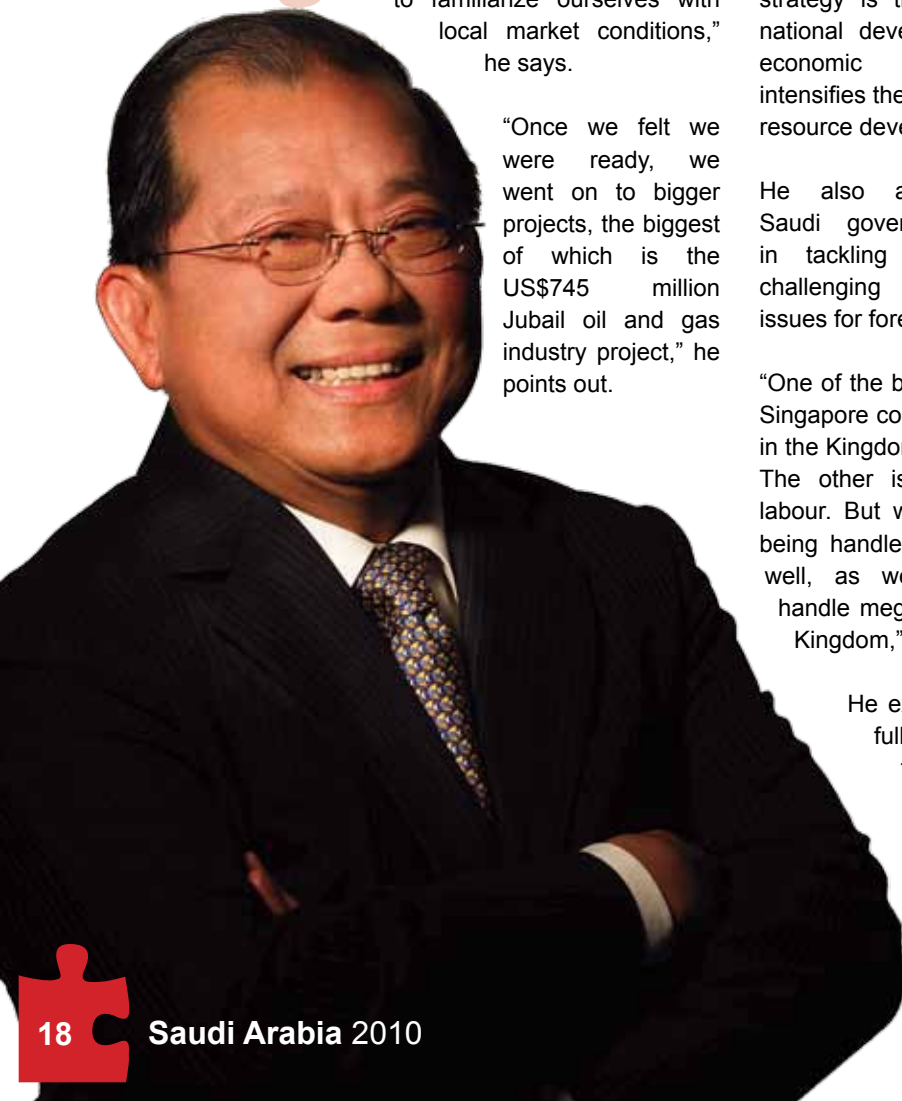
He expresses Rotary's full support for the Kingdom's Saudization

program, which aims to upgrade the skill and technical expertise of local people and get more and more Saudis to manage projects.

Rotary Engineering has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation to establish the Petroleum & Petrochemicals Technical Institute to embark on technical training collaboration to train young Saudis to undertake the role of safety officers in future engineering, procurement and construction services in the petroleum and petrochemical industries.

“Such collaboration and cooperation are vital in supporting the Saudis and participating in their massive economic development plans,” he underlined.

“As part of our support for the Saudization plans, we at Rotary will further localize our workforce in Saudi Arabia. We are also in the process of registering ourselves as an In-Kingdom Engineering,





▲ Rotary & TVTC MOU Signing Ceremony - 16 May 2010.

Procurement and Construction contractor."

"Rotary enjoys a close and smooth relationship with our Saudi partners. Rotary is fortunate to benefit from Singapore's multi-cultural traits that enable us to assimilate into Saudi Arabia's culture and environment easily," Chia stresses.

His advice to Singapore companies venturing into Saudi Arabia: "Always do your homework and market studies before venturing into a new market. The management must be actively involved at all levels of the project."

"But overall, start small and learn," says Chia, a veteran of four decades in managing world-scale projects. Looking forward, he disclosed that overseas expansion has always been one of Rotary's strategic priorities.

"Our mega-project with Saudi Aramco Total Refining and Petrochemical Company (SATORP) has further consolidated our presence in a market where we have established a presence since 2006. We intend to capitalize on SATORP to secure more work in the Middle East," says Chia.

Chia also called on Saudi companies to seek partnerships with Singapore

companies. "We have grown together with Singapore to become one of the top oil and petrochemical clusters in the world and gained a select set of experience and skills that can be useful for Saudi Arabian companies to tap on to further improve and expand their own."

As chairman, Chia keeps with the SATORP project schedule, making regular visits to the Kingdom.

"We have 1,000 men on the SATORP project. We also have a 7.5 ha fabrication and maintenance facility for fabricating 30,000 tons of steel plates as well as 7,100 tons of piping works for the entire SATORP project," says Chia, adding that along with the business visits to the project, there is time to appreciate Saudi hospitality.

"The hospitality of the Saudi people never ends, and I look forward to my trips to the Kingdom," adds Chia, as he highlights the Saudi delicacies such as *Al-Kabsa*.

But he underlines the importance of the market, saying, "We believe we are well placed to participate in tenders for new projects as Saudi Arabia rolls out its planned expansion of oil and gas infrastructure which will transform the Kingdom from a source to a significant global processing hub for the petrochemicals industry." ■

Joint Venture

Rotary, together with its joint venture partner Petrol Steel Co Ltd, broke ground for the project in July 2010.

The joint venture is working on the Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) contract, which was awarded by Saudi Aramco Total Refining and Petrochemical Company (SATORP), a joint venture between Saudi Arabian Oil Company (Saudi Aramco) and French petroleum company Total S.A. for its Jubail refinery.

Rotary's scope of work includes the full range of EPC works that involve 62 Atmospheric Storage Tanks and eight Bullet Tanks. Fabrication and site preparation work has commenced in Jubail.

In all, Petrol Steel is to fabricate and provide 30,000 tons of steel plates as well as 7,100 tons of piping works over the entire project.

Established in 1972, Rotary has built a key competitive advantage. The mainstay of its core EPC services are the 7,000 employees, for whom Rotary's Human Resources Department adopts progressive and innovative strategies and initiatives to ensure that the group continues to attract and retain talent at all levels.

Rotary has subsidiary and associate companies in eight countries around the world.





Getting to Know Getting to Grow Closer

“It was definitely an eye-opening experience interacting with the Saudis, a group of people whom I had not previously come in contact with at all. Their eagerness and curiosity to learn more about Singapore and our culture was definitely refreshing, and it made the interaction with them both light-hearted and a real joy”, says Janet Chua, a student from SMU, Business Study Mission (BSM) to the Middle East.

One significant attempt to further Saudi-Singapore interpersonal ties is carried out at Singapore Management University (SMU), which runs an ongoing Business Study Mission (BSM) to the Middle East.

Recently, we contacted Professor Caroline Yeoh, who organizes these student visits to the Middle East and she spoke about the mission. More tellingly, eight students in this program who are about to embark on a December trip to the Kingdom made themselves available to discuss their perceptions of the country.

The students involved are all members of SMU’s Business Study Mission (BSM) to the Middle East. On

29 July of this year, the students were involved in a Mawaddah (friendship or affinity) event held at SMU. There they got to meet and interact with students from the University of Tabuk in Saudi Arabia.

Of the eight students contacted, three are Muslims, five non-Muslims. They are all Singaporeans with the exception of Febby Lasgon, who is Indonesian but not Muslim. Only one student in this group (Oliver Loke, who is also the teaching assistant for this class) has actually ever been to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia previously.

We’d like to express our hearty gratitude to SMU Professor Caroline Yeoh for her kind and essential help in conducting this survey. As you’ll see,

the results bode well for the warm relations between the two countries continuing into the future.

We asked the students what they knew about Saudi Arabia. Most of them mentioned the country’s oil wealth, but then they took it much further. The SMU Muslim students spoke of the special importance of the Kingdom to them as the birthplace of Islam. (Most of the non-Muslims had also been aware of this fact, though two of them were not.)

One of this group, Talisa Kaur Dhaliwal, added, “I have always looked at Saudi Arabia as a country which has proudly and successfully upheld its beautiful culture.” Olive Loke (the one student who has already visited) built on this,



◀ Singapore students at Saudi Aramco.

▲ In the Royal Commission of Jubail & Yanbu, the students are shown around the various petroleum upstream and downstream industries and related projects.

seeing Saudi Arabia as "... a place where they are deeply appreciative of the role of religion and the importance of families. A rich cultural fabric binds this society together."

About their opportunity to meet with Saudi students from the University of Tabuk, they were all unequivocally positive. Febbry Lasgon, the native Indonesian, called it "a great experience." Oliver Loke found the Saudi students "exceptionally warm and friendly, and in spite of the differences in the spoken language, their personalities and warmth shone through."

Classmate Janet Chua said, "It was definitely an eye-opening experience interacting with the Saudis, a group of people whom I had not previously come in contact with at all. Their eagerness and curiosity to learn more about Singapore and our culture was definitely refreshing, and it made the interaction with them both light-hearted and a real joy." Joses Wong Qi Liang, meanwhile, found his former views nicely altered: "I learnt that although the country is often seen as conservative and strict, the people

are warm and actually have many common interests with Singaporeans."

Nur Emellia Binte Rohman felt that the social meeting was "a wonderful experience, as the students of Saudi Arabia were extremely gregarious. They did not hesitate to answer any of our queries about Saudi Arabia – their culture, their tourist attractions and whatnot. Besides the valuable insights gained about Saudi Arabian culture, I was also able to truly sense the life of a student studying in Saudi Arabia."

Mohd Asheeq Mohd Rafie noted that "the experience I gained from this opportunity certainly goes a long way in defining the perceptions I had prior to meeting them. I realised that they (the Saudis) were very humble, despite their affluent lifestyle." He then went further: "And I must add that the sincerity in their conversations was a welcomed change. I also realised that the Saudis will go to great lengths with regard to their hospitality."

Nur Emellia likewise noted this feature of the Saudi character. "I also learnt that it is encouraged to greet the Arabs

About SMU Business Study Mission

Using a country-specific study as its base, the 'Business Study Mission' course offered in SMU examines the rapidly developing business environment and the available opportunities in a particular city or region. Particular emphasis is placed on the socio-political, cultural, legal environments and the influence they exert on business practices.

Introduced in 2002, SMU is the forerunner in Singapore in introducing such a course, typically to MBA students, at the undergraduate level. Through case studies, student projects and guest lectures, the course aims to present students with real-life environmental influences and challenges that impact businesses in the city or region. The course culminates in a trip to the location itself, usually the main city which is the subject of the study, where through a host of site visits, networking sessions, and presentations by prominent individuals from both private and public sectors, it aims to facilitate the development of a greater understanding of the city.

Participating students return with an enriched knowledge not just of its business developments and the lessons that can be drawn from them, but also of the rich culture and history of the country. Both of the above, too, will aid participating students in extending their personal networks to the region.

To date, over 900 SMU undergraduates have embarked on business study missions to countries such as Argentina, Bahrain, Bangalore, Chile, China, Germany, India, Israel, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Scandinavia, South Korea, Spain, Taiwan, UAE, the USA and Vietnam.

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▲ The students are shown around the various petroleum upstream and downstream industries and related projects.

with the word ‘Assalamualaikum’, which means ‘Peace upon you’. It expresses politeness as well as respect.”

While the students learned about the many similarities between the young people in both countries (including a love of football!), there were key differences and perhaps Singaporeans could profit from some of the Saudi ways. For instance, Janet Chua discovered, “One major interesting cultural difference would be that the people of Saudi Arabia generally marry young and have kids at a very young age. Most of the friends I made have adorable young children, and they were much surprised to find out that despite being only four to five years younger, I had no plans to get married soon or have kids. Also, I learnt that there are important guidelines regarding gender interaction, and, generally, the males and the females dine separately during meal times. Additionally, I really admire their strong national pride.”

Nur Emellia Binte Rohman added, “From the mingling session, I found out that most Saudis love big families as

it provides them with intrinsic security. This is very different to Singapore – as most Singaporeans prefer smaller families due to the rising cost of living in our country”.

Being Singaporeans (with that one exception, Febbry), the SMU students were, of course, interested in and eager to discuss typical Arabian cuisine. Almost everyone loved the hummous (a crushed chickpea dip), especially when it’s enjoyed with fresh pita bread.

Janet Chua agreed, but she chose another popular Saudi dish as her favourite: “My favourite dish, however, definitely has to be the lamb chop. Not being a huge fan of spices and yoghurt or white cheese, I found the meats to be more palatable. That being said, I am not a huge fan of lamb either, but the cooking style made it much more appealing than the lamb I am used to.”

With such warm and hospitable people and delectable foods, it’s no wonder that all these SMU Business students were quite looking forward to their upcoming trip. Most had already chosen places they would like to visit while in the Kingdom. The Muslim students, of course, were looking forward to visiting the Two Holy Mosques (in Makkah and Madinah), which are barred to visits by the non-Muslims. But they’ve all felt enriched by learning about the Kingdom and getting to meet the Saudi students.

Perhaps their feelings about the experience is best captured in Oliver Loke’s take on the whole experience: “I’ve become more appreciative of the rich heritage of Saudi Arabia and its keen desire to be a place of learning and modernity, based on Islamic and Arabic customs and practices.” ■

▼ Getting to know Saudi Aramco.



Saudi Arabia My Heaven



“I love Saudi Arabia. After coming here, my life has changed. It is like heaven to me,” gushed Aziza Abdulqadir. The 62-year-old mother of four is a Singaporean who married a Saudi Arabian and moved to the Islamic nation in 1980. Over the last 30 years, she says, she has come to love her adopted country more than any other place.

“C n its soil I feel cleaner and closer to God,” Aziza said, beaming proudly at her two young daughters, who, like their mother, can’t imagine being in any other place except Saudi Arabia.

What makes this Singaporean feel this way, one might wonder? For Aziza, it’s all quite simple.

“That is where I was married. The marriage took place in Makkah. I had my four children there, who are today well educated and confident individuals,” says Aziza.

“I am grateful for everything the government and King Abdullah has done for us. Not just us, but for many other Saudis. There’s so much to be proud of.”

Aziza, currently a public relations officer at the Global Legal Experts

House in Jeddah, met her husband while on Hajj in 1975. Five years later, the proposal for marriage arrived.

Her father, who had till then brought up all his children with the right mix of discipline and freedom, consented.

The permission to marry was sought from the Saudi government, since Aziza was a Singaporean. And then began her beautiful journey in the oil-rich Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

When the newly married Aziza arrived in Saudi Arabia, women in the country



“I am grateful for everything the government and King Abdullah has done for us.”

Aziza Abdulqadir

didn't enjoy the same freedom that many in her homeland took for granted.

But for Aziza, the most wonderful experience has been the changes and growth she has seen the nation make since.

“It's not like that anymore. King Abdullah has brought about a lot of positive changes and done a lot for the nation. Women can study as much as they want. Earlier, you would find women only as teachers and doctors.



But now they are taking up managerial roles, becoming lawyers and many other things,” she says.

Her three daughters are all studying and pursuing their careers. Her eldest, Ayesha, is on a government scholarship to do her Masters in Nutrition from New Zealand. The government also funded Ayesha's husband for the trip.

Second in line Amina, 24, wants to be a teacher and plans to

enrol for a Masters in English Literature soon.

In fact, such is her desire to follow her passion, she has put marriage on the backburner.

The youngest, 22-year-old Affaf, though engaged to be married in a month, is intent on studying further after she completes her bachelor's degree in Linguistics.

“We can study what we want.

There's no problem at all. Saudi Arabia may not be as open as other countries, but I think it has the right blend of modernity and tradition,” says the confident Amina.

Aziza's son is a successful engineer, currently working for the carmaker BMW in Jeddah. She insists she is equally proud of all her children.

“For me, the most important part is not how much money or fame they earn, but how good they are as people. They should be God-fearing and respect their elders,” said Aziza.

“I am proud that all my children can read, write and speak Arabic. They read the Quran and thank Allah for

their blessings always. I can say this without any doubt, that being in Saudi Arabia has played a huge part in making them the individuals they are.”

Aziza claims to have travelled the world before her marriage. Her father allowed her this in order to enhance her understanding of different cultures.

She worked first as a teacher and then in the national development office, where she again got the chance to travel.

“I went to China, India, all over the world. But I can

safely say that it was in Saudi Arabia that I felt most at home,” she says.

“I am glad of the progress the country is making. It will reach newer heights every day, I am sure of that.”

Aziza juggles her time these days between her public relations work and a flourishing catering business. While she says she tries to mix and match the cuisines she knows, like Chinese or Malay food with Arabic, it's her Saudi cuisine that's the favourite, not only among customers, but also at home. Amina and Affaf vouch for that! ■

2M **Congratulations and Best Wishes**
to the people and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on their 80th National Day

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Alsagoffs: Bridging Two Cultures

The Alsagoff family, a prominent Arab clan, has been an important, dynamic force in Singapore for well over 150 years. But one particular branch of this family has contributed much to the friendly relations between Saudi Arabia and Singapore starting in the second half of the last century and continuing right up through the present day.



▲ His Excellency Dr. Jamil M. Merdad planned a special celebration for a fellow Saudi, Ali Syed Alsagoff, who also celebrated his birthday on Saudi Arabia's National Day, September 23.

To get a good feel for the history and present status of Saudi-Singapore relations, one could probably not do better than to consult the Alsagoff family, especially that branch of the family that has its roots in Saudi Arabia.

The senior member of that branch is Ali Ibrahim Alsagoff, who was born in Makkah in 1923 and migrated to Singapore with his parents to join the branch of the family that was long established in Singapore.

Upon their arrival, they became British subjects. Ali remained a British subject until shortly after Singapore's independence, when he was given a Saudi passport.

Still today, he remains a Saudi citizen and a Singapore Permanent Resident. Most of the year, Mr Alsagoff lives with his loving wife in their large, comfortable apartment in the Bukit Timah section of Singapore.

More, as this Makkah native proudly declares in our interview conducted at the Bukit Timah residence, "I am a Saudi at heart." In fact, the family still owns properties back in the Holy City, and the majestic house where Ali Ibrahim Alsagoff himself was born is today the home of the Alsagoff Museum.

Recalling his earlier days, Ali Ibrahim Alsagoff recounted how he became good friends with then Crown Prince (later King) Faisal. He helped host and show him around when the Crown Prince attended the Afro-Asian Conference held in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955.

As a result of this important bridge-building, Ali's late father, Dato Syed Ibrahim bin Omar Alsagoff, was named the first Consul General of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Singapore.

Meanwhile, Mr Ali Alsagoff, now a young man, assisted his father by actively promoting the image and advantages of the Kingdom for the Saudi embassy here in Singapore



▲ Dr Jamil M. Merdad and Ali Syed Alsagoff.

The senior Mr Alsagoff today fondly recalls one noteworthy story highlighting the family's relationship to the Saudi monarchy. The friendship between King Faisal and Ali became so strong that once during the Hajj pilgrimage, he (Ali Alsagoff) admired a royal Cadillac. Right then and there, a gracious Faisal presented it to his friend. Mr Alsagoff goes on to relate how the car, a Cadillac Eldorado convertible, was packed onto the same ship carrying the Hajj pilgrims back to Singapore.

Mr Alsagoff and his son then went on to relate how the Singapore Alsagoffs

also profited from their good relations with the royal family. For many years under King Faisal's rule, the Alsagoffs had a profitable line transporting Hajj pilgrims from the entire region to Saudi Arabia on family-owned ships. In those years, when there were no direct flights between Singapore and Saudi Arabia, Singapore was the centre of the Hajj transportation service for this region. Which is why, the two Alsagoff men pointed out, the Alsagoff family service was so lucrative in that period.

Today, Ali Ibrahim's son Mohamad Alsagoff, a Singaporean citizen, is largely involved with running the family business. He is a consultant for people from the region hoping to do business in the Kingdom. As



▲ The Cadillac Eldorado, a gift from King Faisal to Ali Alsagoff, just about to be shipped to Singapore.

he himself admits, part of his success is due to the power of the Alsagoff family brand. The family is prominent in both countries, and thus they serve as a solid bridge between the two.

Mohamad sees important changes in Singaporean perceptions about the Kingdom in recent years. "Singaporeans are now more realistic about Saudi Arabia,"

He points out that Saudi Arabia is now engaged in very important expansion as it diversifies its economy from one overly dependent on the oil industry. Mohamed Alsagoff even says that savvy investors are now moving away from glitzy places and turning their sights to Saudi Arabia. Not only is the Saudi

development. As Alsagoff notes, the Saudis are building and expanding in a big way, especially for their own people. As one prime example, he points out that while government spending has contracted in some areas, it has expanded in the fields of health and education, benefitting the Saudi people themselves.



▲ **Syed Ali Ibrahim Alsagoff in traditional Arabian dress.**



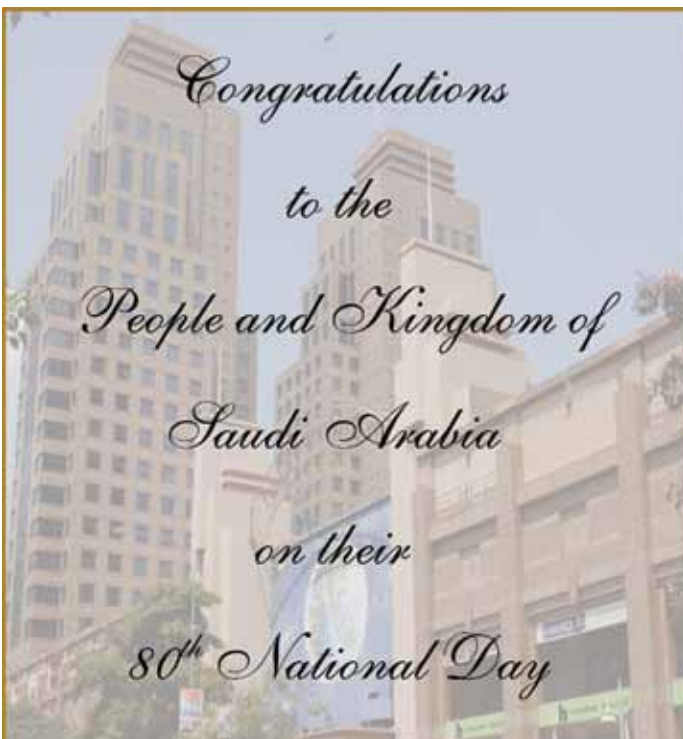
▲ **Syed Ali Alsagoff, his wife and their son, Mohamad.**

GDP so much larger than all the other Gulf States, but the Kingdom boasts strong and stable growth.

As to the development of his father's birthplace, Makkah, he expressed wishes that the Holy City not modernise too quickly, as he does not wish to see it

lose any of its special character as the birthplace of Islam. But one recent development that he firmly salutes is the modernising of the train system in the Makkah region. He thinks this is one of the best things they've done — not only for Makkah, but for Muslims in general. ■

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Singaporean Amina Bibi first accompanied her husband, Ahmed Shah, to Saudi Arabia ten years ago, and the couple lived there happily with their three daughters from 2000 to 2004. In 2004, Ahmed took on another assignment in Russia, and the couple relocated there. However, in 2008, they returned to the Kingdom, to the Holy City of Madinah, where Ahmed took up his current post. "It is great to be back home again in Saudi Arabia," says Amina.

"Back Home" in Saudi Arabia



Another very happy Singapore transplant in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is Madam Amina Bibi. This native Singaporean is married to a fellow Singaporean, Ahmed Shah, who is the Managing Director of Manazeli Hotels, Resorts and Residents, which operates a number of hotels and furnished residences in the Kingdom.

Amina first accompanied her husband to his assignment ten years ago, and the couple lived there happily with their three daughters from 2000 to 2004. In 2004, Ahmed took on another assignment in Russia, and the couple relocated there. In 2008,

they returned to the Kingdom, to the Holy City of Madinah, where Ahmed took up his current post.

(The couple's three daughters are now studying in other countries: Amira Ahmed Shah is in Melbourne pursuing her doctorate, 18-year-old Arifah is studying graphic design in Melbourne, while Asilah Filzah (16) is back in Singapore, working towards her international baccalaureate.)

Mother Aminah is taking a number of classes herself in the Kingdom. Currently, she spends a good part of her time attending religious classes and taking Arabian cooking classes. She's also involved in learning and practicing various handcrafts.

In fact, Amina Bibi finds the quality of life good in the Kingdom. She has many friends there in Madinah. She even has a chauffeur provided by the company on call to take her about.

"We enjoy ourselves and have integrated very well with the Saudi environment," Amina reports. Being a Singaporean is actually an advantage there, especially for her husband. Ahmed has been welcomed by the

Saudis, who appreciate his work ethic along with his abilities to attract more guests to the hotels and hence bring in additional money for the company.

She points out that Saudi employers look after their employees well. If you're a good worker, you get rewarded well, she says.

Good career opportunities and good memories of the country from their first stay drew the couple back to Madinah. But he changes in the four years of her absence were amazing – new malls, many new buildings in parts of the Kingdom.

More significantly, career opportunities for women have increased over the last four years, she says, especially for divorcees or widows and those in the less fortunate economic strata.

To her Singaporean friends who did not know Saudi Arabia she would like to impart that the Kingdom is a beautiful country with a rich cultural heritage where people have a heart of gold. In fact, Amina stresses her love for the place by telling us that upon returning to Madinah for their second period of residence, she felt like she was returning home. ■

Equestrienne Dalma Rushdi Malhas Scores a First for Saudi Women



The first Saudi female equestrian competitor in the Youth Olympic Games in Singapore notched one for the Kingdom, scoring a bronze in the show jumping event.

Eighteen-year-old equestrienne Dalma Rushdi Malhas achieved a milestone for the women of Saudi Arabia when she won the bronze medal in the individual show jumping event at the inaugural Youth Olympic Games.

Dalma created history as the first female equestrian competitor from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the Youth Olympic Games. Her euphoria was understandable as she is also the first Saudi woman to win a medal in an Olympic competition.

"It is an honour to be the first woman to represent Saudi Arabia in the Youth Olympic Games because I'm hopeful that this is a step forward to opening doors for all Saudi women and girls," Dalma said proudly.

Riding on her horse, Flash Top Hat, Dalma showed considerable finesse, clocking 38.05 seconds during the jump-off at the Singapore Turf Club Riding Centre.

"Being on the podium is every athlete's dream. My goal for the Youth Olympic Games was firstly to enjoy my time, as simply being here is a wonderful opportunity. As always, I try my best to be competitive," she said.

The Games were held in Singapore from 14-26 August 2010 and saw the participation of approximately 3,500 youth athletes from 205 countries. Princess Haya Bint Al-Hussein, President of the International Equestrian Federation, congratulated Dalma on her performance and praised her steady handling of the horse.

Dalma was accompanied to Singapore by her grandfather, Hamed Mutabagani, and her mother, Ms Arwa Mutabagani. Ms Arwa is a member of the Saudi Equestrian Federation and is renowned

"It is an honour to be the first woman to represent Saudi Arabia in the Youth Olympic Games."

Dalma Rushdi Malhas

for her role as part of the national team in an international equestrian competition in Hong Kong.

"I've always had faith in her that she would become an Olympian medalist and I saw that when she competed against five other equestrians to win the bronze," Ms Arwa told the Arab News Service.

"Since her graduation from high school, Dalma has been training for a year and a half. Her medal shows it was not just a hobby: she took it seriously and with dedication and perseverance, it paid off very well," Ms Arwa added.

Dalma has been riding at her family's private stable since she was a child. "Since I was born, I was always

surrounded by horses. I started riding when I was four years old at my family's equestrian centre, Trio Ranch Country Club in Jeddah. I got my own private pony when I was eight and started competing by the time I was 12," she said.

Casting her mind back on her visit to Singapore, Dalma expressed her delight during the brief sojourn. "I enjoyed my stay in Singapore. I really like the country and I find the locals very welcoming, kind and helpful," she said with considerable joy.

During the tournament, she trained two to three hours in the morning as per the programme set by the committee supervising the competition. Dalma is pursuing her Bachelors in management and Oriental Studies in London. ■



Singapore Right Choice for Learning and Living: Saudi Students

Young Saudi students, both men and women, are venturing into international shores in a mission to actively develop and qualify Saudi human resource to be world-class, and they have made Singapore their home for last few years. We bring you their perceptions of the city-state.

In recent years, several students have been looking towards Singapore universities for graduate and post-graduate courses, citing preferences for the city-state's clean and friendly environment. To facilitate their stay, the government of Saudi Arabia has also created a special cultural office in Singapore. We spoke to many of them to know what it was to work, live and play here.

We discovered, contrary to media portrayal, Saudi women are now standing on their own feet, with equal opportunity to men and many of these women, under the King Abdullah Scholarship Program, have moved past familiar frontiers to hone the finest degrees and to make a name for themselves and Saudi Arabia in the international arena. In Singapore, we had the opportunity to interact with some of these students, who find the challenging and competitive learning environment in Singapore rewarding.

Despite the relatively great geographical distance from home and at times missing their families,

the students have adjusted to the Singapore environment, taken to liking some of the local delicacies and won many friends in the universities as well as among the local communities.

"It is always challenging to settle into a new environment. But when you are in the multi-racial Singapore, it becomes much easier to move around," remarks Hanan Fawzi Mukhtar Felemban, who is in the midst of a Master of Science Technopreneurship and Innovation course at the Nanyang Technological University.

Kholoud Almutairi is pursuing her Master in Physics course at the National University of Singapore, and has adjusted to the Singapore lifestyle. "Though somewhat costly, we are managing our courses with sponsorships and family supports," Kholoud commented.

"But Singapore was, surprisingly, my choice," adds Dr. Nada Al Sheikh, "I was searching for a well-established fellowship training program in rhinology and had applied in Canada, Germany,

Australia, and Switzerland. Some of the universities did not have readily available positions and others were not able to provide hands-on training."

"But a chance meeting with a Singapore female doctor at a conference in Oman introduced me to Singapore," said Nada, an ear-nose-throat surgeon currently doing fellowship training in a sub-speciality - rhinology endoscopic sinus and skull base surgery.

Despite the competitiveness of the Singapore education system, Nada manages to keep up, saying that the learning process is challenging.

"A great support comes from my family. My husband and children join me in Singapore during holidays," she says.

Hanan, Kholoud and Nada reflect the Saudi cultural depth, but with an immense understanding of international affairs and lifestyle. The young ladies have ambitious plans to take over the leadership of businesses in Saudi Arabia.



▲ Saudi students in Singapore with the Ambassador.

"In our country, we are given freedom and opportunities to study and do business," said Hanan, who has maternal roots in Indonesia.

Of course, it required a major adjustment in life-style to be in Singapore, a clean and green city. Commenting on getting Saudi students to do high-level specializing courses in Singapore, the Saudi Cultural Attache, Dr Abdulhaggar Saeed Bazuhair, said he understands the pains of being away from families and in a new

environment, but these students are determined to accomplish academic assignments and excel in their respective fields when they return home.

Generally, the Saudi students undergo an extensive English language course preceding the degrees that they intend to pursue. "They need to polish their English language before proceeding on to the main courses," Dr Bazuhair points out insightfully.

"But we see this as an advantage and not a disadvantage for we are building Saudi professionals of international standards," he underlines.

The enrolment of Saudi students is expected to increase significantly in the coming years as Singapore has steadily increased in popularity to become one of the more preferred places for further studies.

The Kingdom sponsors its best students to do international courses to support the fast expanding economy. Singapore's top institutions and universities will be participating in the Education Career Fair in Riyadh this year to build up links with the Saudis.

"This also shows the importance of Saudi Arabia as an education market for these institutes," he added. ■

Salutations to the people and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on their 80th National Day



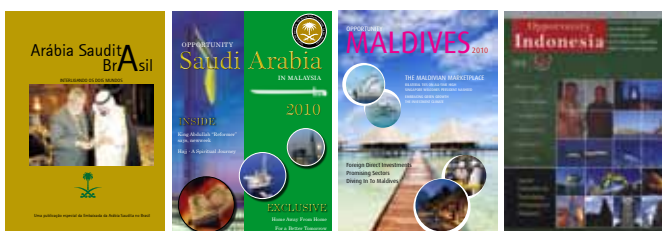
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Iftar Reception Honours Prince



Iftar, of course, is the breaking of the Ramadan fast with a typically bountiful, scrumptious meal. It takes place every evening during Ramadan, just after sunset. But one particular iftar here in Singapore recently was graced by the presence of some special guests – including a member of the Saudi royal family.

Held at Singapore on 17 August, iftar celebration saw Saudi Ambassador H.E. Dr Jamil M. Merdad and the Saudi embassy in Singapore playing host to Prince Nawaf bin Mohammed bin Abdullah bin Rahman al Saud.

While Prince Nawaf was the special guest of honour at this special iftar, he was not the only one; also present as guest of honour was Singapore's Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Zainul Abidin Rasheed.

At the time of the celebration, Prince Nawaf was here in the Lion City in his capacity as head of the Kingdom's Youth Olympics team. Of course, the Games, the world's first ever Youth Olympics, were very much on the Prince's mind in those days.

Sharing his experiences with other guests, the Prince enthused, "I loved the way the Games were organised and run and the professionalism involved in their operation."

The Shangri-La iftar was an elaborate feast, fitting the honoured guests of the evening. Also quite fittingly, the feast was broken, following tradition, with dates – these dates from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. ■

Singapore

a Model to Emulate



Dr. Osama Fadhul Al Bar
The mayor of Makkah



Abdulaziz A. Al-Husaiyen
The mayor of Madinah

Amongst the many distinguished guests in Singapore in late June to early July for the International Water Week were the mayors of Islam's two holy cities: Dr. Osama Fadhul Al Bar of Holy Makkah and Abdulaziz A. Al-Husaiyen of Madinah. Attendance at the Water Week conference was very important for both of these men as the wise use of water is essential for the continued growth of their municipalities.

Amongst the headline guests to visit the Lion City for International Water Week were the mayors of Islam's two holiest cities, both of whom were quite taken with Singapore during their short visits here. Mayor Fadhul Al Bar of Makkah was struck by how well structured and efficient Singapore was.

Realising the rapid changes the city-state has gone through in recent decades, Mayor Fadhul Al Bar was overwhelmed with how it had managed to remain so well structured and how smoothly everything ran here in the Lion City.

As Mayor Al-Husaiyen of Madinah said, "This is my first visit to Singapore. It is a very impressive,

beautiful and vibrant city. It not only matches my expectations, but surpasses them."

"The diversity in cultures in this nation, all living in harmony, is rather amazing. People are very friendly and work in harmony."

Mayor Al-Husaiyen spoke highly about the infrastructure success story here in Singapore and was already asking himself how his own city can learn from the example here.

"The planning here is of high standards. Careful thought has obviously been given to the social and cultural aspects while planning the city-state. They have come up with a new equation: beautiful but difficult."

"The Singapore transportation system is very elaborate and well-designed." He went on to mention that there is already a joint commission with Saudi Arabia working on building mass transport and much consultation between the two nations on the problem of water declination. He said that "the model of Singapore is a good model we use in some of our projects."

Madinah's mayor then added, "I think that today the world is a small village and more ties, especially economic ties, are being made all the time." The mayor believes these ties will bring prosperity and reduce risks for much of the world. He also feels that "the human being is the same everywhere. We must leave our differences and build on our similarities and our strengths." ■

Parliamentarian Visit Setting New Pace



Abdalmohsen M. Al-Zakary, Member of the Majlis Ash Shura and Chairman of the Saudi-Singapore Parliamentary Friendship Committee, was on visit to Singapore and he spoke about Saudi Arabia's interest in continued partnership with Singapore.



This parliamentary committee or Members of the Majlis Ash Shura will work with all sectors of Singaporeans – businessmen, politicians, academicians.

“This friendship will be building bridges between Saudi Arabia and Singapore,” said Committee chairman Abdalmohsen M. Al-Zakary, who is also member of the Majlis Ash Shura.

The committee has been inviting Singaporeans to participate in Saudi Arabia’s 9th Development Plan, which has been approved by the King. The government has allocated US\$400 billion for the plan, which runs through the year of 2015.

“We are looking for companies to participate in this plan as part of our ‘East Policy’,” he said. “We are heading East,” especially Singapore, China, Japan, India, he stressed. The people and companies in these countries have the know-how and they can do help us to implement the Development Plan cost-effectively.

“We are looking for more companies from these countries to participate in the Development Plan. We also want to make sure that we get a good quality jobs from these companies,” Abdalmohsen underlined.

“We have multi-billion dollar projects in Saudi Arabia, such as economic cities and industrial zones”

“We have confidence that companies, with expertise and experience of having built a first world country, as is the case of Singapore, will be able to deliver.”

After Singapore, the parliamentary committee visited Japan, also seeking Japanese companies’ participation in the Development plan.

Elaborating on the East Asian expertise and efficiencies, Abdalmohsen observed that the usually small- and medium-size East Asian companies are globally competitive and would provide the cost management skill for the implementation of the Development Plan.

There is flexibility of working in Saudi Arabia. “We have a business-friendly environment in the Kingdom, and we are willing to accommodate international businesses and enterprises that provide value-added services and

will contribute to the development of the Saudi economy.”

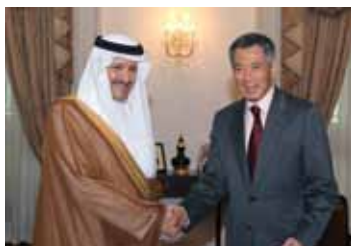
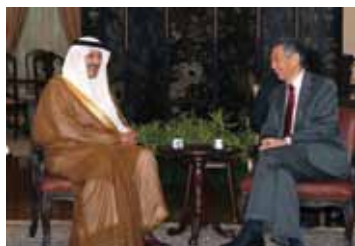
Abdalmohsen backed his assurances of working in Saudi Arabia by citing the excellence in performance achieved by corporations and technology-savvy South Koreans, who have been involved in some of the multi-billion dollar development for the past several decades.

“The South Koreans are the shining examples of working successfully in Saudi Arabia and we want to see companies from Singapore, along with the Japanese, India and Chinese, in our economy,” he impressed.

But he also called on the East Asian businessmen and entrepreneurs to be bold in venturing into Saudi Arabia.

“We have multi-billion dollar projects in Saudi Arabia, such as economic cities and industrial zones,” he said. ■

Prominent Saudis Visit Singapore



▲ Glimpse of the Saudi visits with Singapore leaders.

This has been a particularly busy year for Singapore on the high-end hosting front, as a number of prominent Saudi Arabian guests have honored the Lion City with a visit.

Amongst the eminent guests was His Royal Highness Prince Sultan bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, who visited Singapore from 4th to the 7th of May this year. The Prince spent much of his visit observing Singapore's Changi Airport and several of its key operations centres along with a tour of the Aviation Institute, in particular, the flight simulator there. He was greeted at the start of the tour by the Deputy Director of Singapore's Aviation Authority. Later that same day, the Prince managed a visit to the headquarters of the movement of intellectual disability in Singapore.

A few weeks after Prince Sultan's visit, the Island Republic was host to His Highness Prince Nawaf bin Mohammed bin Abdullah bin Abdulrahman Al Saud, who was here between 22-25 May. Four days later, another important Saudi visitor paid Singapore a visit: H.E. Minister of State Dr. Nizar bin Obaid Madani, who stayed in Singapore from the tail end of May to early June.

Also visiting the Lion City were H.E. Minister of Communications and Information Technology Eng. Mohamed Jamil bin Ahmed Mulla, in mid-May; H.E. Mr. Abdulrahman Aldahmash, General Supervisor of the Office of the Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs, who was here from the 17 – 21 June for the World Cities Summit. Other eminent Saudi visitors for the World Cities Summit were H.E. Dr. Osama AL-Bar, Mayor of the Holy City of Makkah, from 28 June through the first of July; and H.E. Mr. Abdul Aziz Al-Hussaiyen (Mayor of Madinah). ■

Saudi Patients Seeking Treatment in Singapore

As Singapore continues to burnish its image as a medical hub, more and more patients flock here for specialised treatments. Prominent amongst these many visitors seeking treatment are Saudis. And the healthcare provider quite often sought by these patients is ParkwayHealth, one of Singapore's most respected names in medical care and treatment.



ParkwayHealth is one of Singapore's leading healthcare providers. It runs three of the Republic's leading private hospitals – Gleneagles, Mount Elizabeth and Parkway East. The high quality care and treatments, along with the very affordable costs, has made Parkway's healthcare something that draws many patients from abroad.

ParkwayHealth today receives overseas patients primarily from Indonesia, the Middle East, Malaysia, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Eastern Europe and the United States/Canada. However, as Mr Kamaljeet Singh Gill, Parkways' Chief Marketing Officer for Marketing & Services reports, "the number of patients from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been growing gradually and we are encouraged with the current trend."

As Mr Gill goes on to say, ParkwayHealth has been receiving many patients from the Kingdom, and these patients come to Singapore to

seek all kinds of treatment. Medical services more commonly sought by Saudi nationals include cancer treatments, stem cell transplantations and neurosurgery/gamma knife surgery.

Besides the excellence of the healthcare services Parkway offers, one reason why it draws so many patients from abroad is the special care that these visitors to Singapore receive. As Mr Gill notes, because ParkwayHealth "has been receiving international patients from many countries for decades, we know how to make them feel comfortable and welcome."

Mr Gill then elaborates on the personal attention that overseas patients can receive: "For patients who are admitting directly to our hospitals upon arriving in Singapore, they and their families will be met by the Guest Relations Officers (GRO) at the aero-bridge upon arrival at Singapore

Changi Airport. They will be driven by electric buggy and escorted to the Immigration counters whilst the airport personnel retrieve their baggage.

"Thereafter, they will be chauffeured to hospital in a limousine. These services are provided to patients at no cost."

These are services provided for all patients flying into Singapore from abroad. But for Saudi nationals, Parkway even has a special team dedicated to their particular needs and sensibilities.

As Mr Gill explains, "Yes, we have a dedicated team of staff serving patients from the Kingdom. Our staff are trained to understand the cultural needs of our KSA patients. Besides offering interpreters to help with translation for patients and their families, we also assist patients with services such as travel arrangements for their companions or visa renewals, hotel or even accommodations, shopping for their families, as well as making arrangements for their Friday prayers and other needs."

Such extra attention to the inner needs of the patients as well as their physical needs explains why many discerning foreign patients, including more and more Saudis, turn to Singapore and ParkwayHealth when they need top-level medical treatment. ■

A Strong Alliance for Healthcare

On October 6, 2010, Parkway Healthcare on one side and the General Department of Medical Commission & Health Attaché, Saudi Ministry of Health signed a landmark Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This MOU underscored and solidified the commitment of the Saudi and Singapore sides "to provide healthcare services of the highest quality to their patients, improve the quality of their health resources and financial viability." (excerpt taken from the MOU)

As a result of this MOU, Parkway and the Ministry of Health will engage in clinical trainings, including physician exchange programmes, medical seminars and medical education along with a training programme in haematopoietic stem cell transplant.

The two sides will also engage in a shared care programme of patient referrals. Further, Parkway will provide consultancy to the Saudi Ministry of Health to set up a call centre for the purpose of enhancing communication in patient referral process.

Finally, the alliance between these two sides assures preferential and exclusive services for all patients from the Ministry of Health as well as full transparency in price listing, finance and billings and payment schedules. A healthy arrangement indeed.

A Major Bridge for Understanding: Singapore's Middle East Institute

By: Gurdip Singh

As a widely recognised expert on the Middle East takes the reins at Singapore's Middle East Institute (a part of the National University of Singapore), the young institute looks like it will soon achieve major status as a learned voice in the dialogue between the peoples of the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

The Middle East Institute in Singapore is set to become a major bridge in learning and understanding the Middle East region, both economically and politically.

The importance of the Middle East cannot be overlooked, given its huge oil and gas reserves which play a major role in supporting the global economies.

More significantly for both companies and nations, increasing opportunities now abound as large-scale further development of this key region is already planned. Thus the importance of Singapore's Middle East Institute.

MEI was established in 2007 as an autonomous research organization within the National University of Singapore. Its mission is to generate scholarly and policy research on the broader Middle East, with a particular emphasis on the growing interactions between the region and Singapore/Southeast Asia.

An important task of this Institute will be to fine-tune perceptions and correct misconceptions about the Middle East that one might find in Southeast Asia and other important regions outside the Middle East itself. To this end, the Institute is currently planning a number of programmes, which will come largely in the form of lectures by

visiting academics and eminent speakers, as well as visits to the region by Singapore students.

As Institute Director, Professor Michael C. Hudson, says, "It is one of its kind in the region, and we see its importance in relation to further strengthening the Asian and Singapore relationships with Middle Eastern countries. The Institute will facilitate a number of plans and programmes."

Professor Hudson himself can call upon some four decades of experience with in-depth studies on the Middle East region even before his recent appointment as Director at the Institute.



"There has not been a single significant institute providing insight into the Middle East region, including the mega-economy of Saudi Arabia," notes Professor Hudson, who comes to Singapore from a long stint at the renowned Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

The Singapore government-funded Middle East Institute, which is part of the National University of Singapore, is now working to arrange a major conference on the Arab countries covering the Gulf Council of Cooperation, including Iran.

This conference is tentatively scheduled for this coming May, 2011.

The institute will be sending 26 students to Riyadh and Abu Dhabi in early December on a study programme to learn and understand the region and its people. "It will put them in touch with the people of the region and give them the understanding at ground level," Professor Hudson points out.

Recent programmes by the Institute included an overview of the Middle East's economic and political scenarios by Dr Malik R. Dahlan, President of the Harvard Law School Association of Arabia and Principal & Chief Lawyer of Institution Quraysh for Law & Policy.

Dr Dahlan was recently a visiting academic at the Institute engaged in studying the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation model for a similar Middle East multi-lateral grouping to promote joint economic plans.

"I believe the Middle East Institute is going to be the heart of the West Asia and Southeast Asia engagement," predicted Dr Dahlan, who was completing his month-long visit to the institute in October.

As Professor Hudson points out, more international experts on the Middle East of Dr Dahlan's calibre will be visiting the Institute in future, giving lectures on how the region is managed, its economic performances, and the sensitive geopolitical issues connected to the region. ■

About the Institute's Director



Professor Michael C. Hudson, 72, took his Bachelor's degree at Swarthmore College (Pennsylvania, USA) and then went on to take his M.A. and Ph.D. at Yale University in the 1960s, where he studied political modernization. He is a recognised world authority on Lebanese politics as well as other hot button issues in the Middle East region, including the Arab-Israeli conflict and inter-Arab politics.

He founded Georgetown University's Centre for Contemporary Arab Studies in Washington and headed it for 35 years. His appointment as Director at the Middle East Institute comes with a mandate to develop MEI's research capabilities and activities.

About Dr Malik Dahlan



Dr Dahlan earned his Civil Law and Jurisprudence studies degree in Jordan, before continuing onto his legal training in Anglo-American jurisprudence at Harvard Law School.

He also received degrees in Government and Middle East Studies from Harvard University. Following this, Dr Dahlan studied for his Doctorate in Public Policy at the renowned Al-Azhar University in Cairo.

Dr Dahlan is a highly respected figure both inside academia and in the rough-and-tumble of the "real world". Dr Dahlan has written and advised on matters regarding legislative affairs, defence, energy policies, and foreign relations, and is also one of the 10 United Nations Regional Experts in Constitutional Affairs, Oil and Gas selected by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq.



Hajj

An Immense Challenge Beautifully Met

Being the home of the Two Holy Mosques, Saudi Arabia holds a very special significance to every Muslim, religiously and spiritually. In fact, all able, well-bodied Muslims are required to make one major pilgrimage to Makkah in their lives. This journey, known as the Hajj, is one of the five pillars of Islam. Here we look at how Singapore's Muslims embrace the Hajj.

Saudi Arabia is a very special place indeed, especially for Muslims. Not only is it the home of the Kaabah (located in Makkah), the site to which Muslim orient themselves during their daily prayers, as well as the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah, but it is the birthplace of Islam.

As Hairanah Ahmad, editor of *Iris*, a leading Muslim woman's magazine, puts it, "The country houses the central nerve system to the very soul of every Muslims. Therefore, as Muslims, we feel connected and whatever is happening in Saudi Arabia is a concern to us as Muslims."

Haffidz Abdul Hamid, Honorary Secretary of the Association of Muslim Travel Agents in Singapore (AMTAS), focuses his attention on another important feature of the country. "Saudi Arabia has done a splendid job in managing the Hajj pilgrimage over the years," he says. "It is an immense challenge to manage 2.5 million to 3 million people who visit Makkah and Madinah for the Hajj. Managing such a large pilgrimage, requires detailed planning and is indeed a mammoth task," observes Haffidz, whose organization helps Singapore Muslims prepare for this great pilgrimage.

"We admire the way the Saudis have managed the logistics, transportation, accommodations and meals

requirements of pilgrims. The scale and scope of work involved must be a world record," Mr Haffidz stresses.

But Singapore's Hajj system and the profile of its Hajj pilgrims have also been positively appraised by many quarters, Haffidz adds. Indeed, Singapore's Hajj administration and management and performance have been acknowledged and widely recognized as a useful template for others to emulate.

Still, Mr Haffidz does not think they can rest on their laurels. As he puts it, "Nonetheless, we must strive for continuous improvements. In this regard, Singapore, too, can learn from the useful and vast experiences of other countries to improve the management of Hajj pilgrims."

Preparing for the Journey

The Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) likewise plays a key role in preparing Muslims for the Hajj. Along with AMTAS, MUIS has performed admirably in regulating as well as managing Hajj services in Singapore. They see to it that Hajj service providers, or GSAs, fulfill certain stringent requirements, have

their products, services and portfolios scrutinized and approved by MUIS in a transparent annual tender process before they are permitted to sell and provide their Hajj services to the public.

As most pilgrims view the pilgrimage as an important religious rite and passage, they will devote their time and efforts to preparing for the pilgrimage, especially in terms of acquiring the "Hajj *manasik*" (or 'accurate picture of the Hajj') by diligently attending Hajj preparatory courses, some of which can run from three to seven months. Accredited *mutawwifs*, or qualified instructors, are engaged to teach the Hajj *manasik*.

Here in Singapore, Hajj preparatory courses are usually conducted by travel agents selling Hajj services. These agents are also known as General Sales Agents (GSAs).

Other than being taught the rites, rituals and supplications of the Hajj, pilgrims are also briefed on other pertinent matters, such as health and safety issues and what to expect during the Hajj.

Ideally, all these lessons and briefings will adequately prepare pilgrims for



the rigours of the Hajj because, as Mr Haffidz points out, a substantial number of Singaporeans lead sedentary lives and are used to many material comforts that pilgrims are called upon to give up during the Hajj.

But that does not at all mean that Hajj pilgrims must take substantial risks during their life-enriching pilgrimage. A Hajj Mission comprising a head of delegation, pilgrim officers and a medical team of doctors and nurses is assembled to accompany the Singaporean Hajj pilgrims. Over the years, the Hajj Mission has proven to be an indispensable force in ensuring that the welfare and needs of the Singaporean pilgrims are not compromised.

The Hajj GSAs are Singapore Tourism Board (STB) licensed and regulated travel agents. A good number of these agents were already engaged in the Hajj business as Hajj brokers for a number of years, but then set up their travel agencies to meet statutory requirements in 1990 which required that Hajj service providers be registered with the STB as licensed travel agents.

Recent years have seen a steady growth in the number of Muslim travel agents offering Hajj and Umrah packages. Many of these agents are family-owned businesses, often with both spouses running the business. Lately, a substantial number of these agents are

also engaged in air-ticketing and other tour products that especially cater for the travel needs of Muslims.

The Hajj packages offered by the GSAs are usually tailored to the needs of pilgrims, and can range in terms of price and duration of stay. Due to the broad market and pro-consumer environment, Hajj packages sold in Singapore are competitively priced, notes Mr Haffidz of AMTAS.

In the face of rising costs, many GSAs have also offered their clients cheaper options. Pilgrims can opt for a no-frills or back-to-basics type of package – what the industry has dubbed the “back-packer” package. Hence, pilgrims in Singapore today

have a range of packages to choose from, depending on their needs, preferences and financial means. Singapore Muslims are fortunate as they typically have the financial resources to perform Hajj, he notes.

Mr Haffidz of AMTAS highlights the fact that Hajj is not tourism. It is a painstakingly prepared pilgrimage, one that offers Muslims a life-time opportunity to complete this key journey, both physical and spiritual in nature.

“This pilgrimage and the visit to Makkah and Madinah cannot be replicated. We are going back to the roots of monotheism and the Abrahamic tradition” he stresses.

The Changing Face of Singapore's Pilgrims

Ten years ago, the average age of Singapore Muslims performing Hajj was approximately 60 years. But today, the average age has dipped slightly, to approximately between 50 and 55 years. More, many of the local pilgrims are accompanied by spouses and/or other family members. Almost all these pilgrims are literate, and many have at least secondary school education. Indeed, a growing number are young professionals.

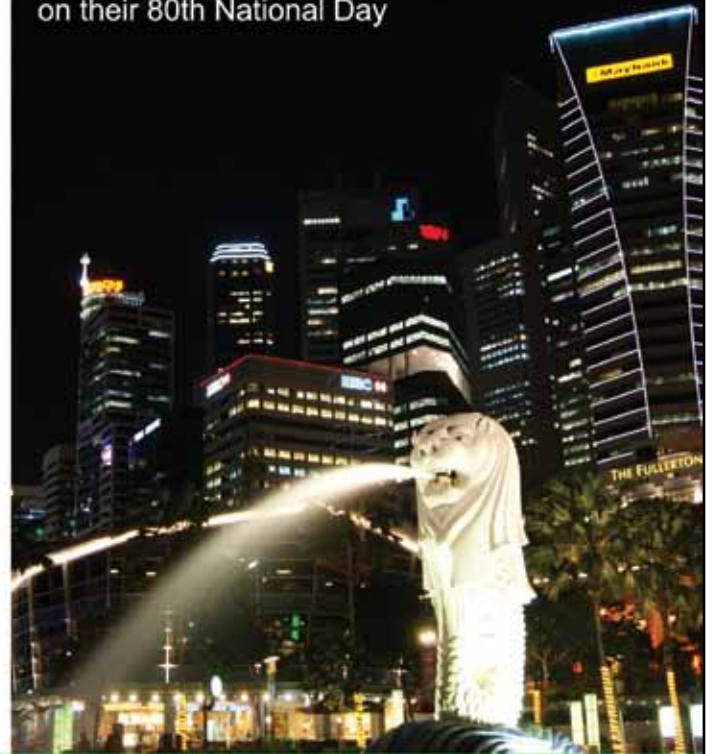
While the ever growing numbers and lowered average age of pilgrims reflect an increasing interest here in this “Apex of Life of a Muslim”, Mr Haffidz would like to see both expand further. “We want to see more and more young Singapore Muslims complete their Hajj,” he says. Indeed, as Hajj is regarded by many as a physically strenuous journey, it makes a lot of sense to undertake this journey while still young. ■



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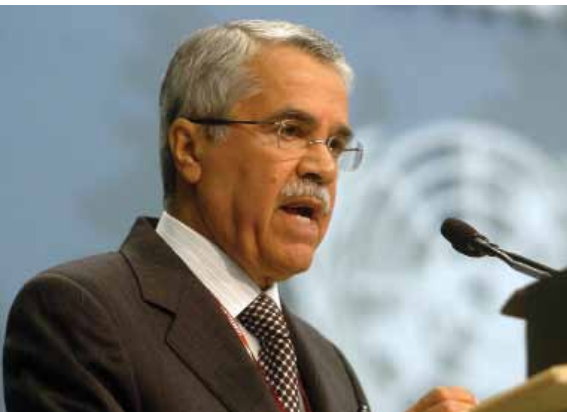
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Saudi Minister's Keynote Address at Singapore International Energy Week

As one of the highlights of the Singapore Energy Week, 2010, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, H.E. Ali I. Al-Naimi, delivered the keynote address at the Summit Dinner event on 1 November.



As the theme of this year's Energy Week was "Fuelling The Smart Energy Economy", Minister Al-Naimi tailored his speech to this key issue: his address was "The Role of Petroleum in the True Smart Energy Economy".

As the Minister noted towards the beginning of his talk, the conference provided the opportunity for "timely exploration of best practices, policies and solutions for a smart energy platform, bringing economic development, energy security, and environmental and financial sustainability into balance."

As the Petroleum Minister outlined his vision, oil and other fossil fuels will remain an indispensable part of the energy mix over the next several decades. The two biggest reasons for this, according to the Minister, are the core issues of economic development and energy security. Indeed, these two issues are intrinsically connected, the Minister noted.

Minister Al-Naimi pointed out that world energy demand is projected to grow by 40 percent within the next two decades. Not only is the earth's population expected to grow by two billion in the next 20 years, but as more and more people across the globe attain higher levels of prosperity, they will need more energy to power their improving lifestyles.

Much of this growth, he noted, will come in Asia, where most of the world's economic growth is today. (Asia will account for 60% of global energy growth through 2030, he asserted.) Nor is it just the mammoth economic powers such as China and India which spur this growth; many of Asia's medium-sized and smaller countries are also part of this exciting development. The Minister then gave a laudatory nod to the host country, calling Singapore itself "a cosmopolitan emblem of the dawning Asian Century." He also praised the Lion City as "a representative of Asia's increasing clout."

The Minister then went on to argue that in pursuit of a smart energy policy, "every kind of energy has a role to play." He offered support for the rapid development of new, green energy sources, pointing out that Saudi Arabia itself was engaged in an ambitious programme for developing solar power and adding that to the Kingdom's energy mix.

But the newer energy sources will not be enough to power that 40% growth in world energy demand over

the next two decades, the Minister argued. Fossil fuels must remain a major part of the picture. As he said, "Simply put, an either-or approach (either new, renewable energy or the traditional energy sources) will catch us short-handed." This is where rapid and broad-based economic development and the need for energy security accentuate each other. If the world moves away from traditional fossil fuels too quickly, according to the Minister, it risks endangering the world's energy security and or sharply stunting economic growth and development throughout the planet, but especially in those countries that are growing rapidly and embracing middle-class lifestyles associated with the advanced economies.

Still, Minister Al-Naimi said, oil-producing nations such as Saudi Arabia cannot simply continue to cruise along the old paths in providing the world with most of its energy needs. As he said, the Kingdom is working alongside other petroleum producers to make their product more efficient and cleaner. "Making the footprint of petroleum operations lighter is a major industry thrust," he declared, adding that "the cornerstone of smart energy is R&D; the same is true for oil."

In the Minister's vision, as oil and the other fossil fuels move to cleaner, more efficient forms, they will continue to loom large in the energy picture, amply serving economic development, energy security, and financial and even environmental sustainability. ■



National Day Celebrations

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia recently celebrated its 80th National Day, and, according to news agency reports, it was the most boisterous celebration to date.

Although the National Day commemorates the 1932 victory of King Abdul Aziz bin Saud and his allies in uniting most of the Arabian Peninsula under the banner of one nation, it was not actually declared a national holiday until 2005.

King Abdullah, a younger son of the nation's founder, established the holiday shortly after his own ascension to the throne. It has a special character for Saudis, as it is the only public holiday which is not religious in nature. As such, it celebrates the country as one and the Saudi people as loyal citizens of this country and its ideals.

The celebrations are becoming more popular if the increased numbers of people on the streets and the evident enthusiasm and joy of those celebrants is any measure. This has always been a holiday that sparked the positive emotions of Saudi youth, but this year they seemed especially exuberant and hopeful.

This is probably a reflection of many of the changes and developments initiated over the last several years. This year's celebrations saw activities

arranged for all Saudis, from the very young to the elderly.

Young children posed on camels as parents and grandparents watched proudly, clicking photos. For older residents of the Kingdom, including both Saudi citizens and millions of foreign workers, there was a spate of late-night events to keep the enthusiasm going well into the evening.

Girls and women attended the festivities in their traditional black abayas, in a proud display of their modesty. But Saudi males, from teenagers to young men, left their traditional outfits at home and donned T-shirts and jeans for this holiday.

Most of the shirts sported splashes of green, the colour of the national flag. Not only that, but large numbers of the young male celebrants adorned their cheeks and foreheads with green face paint.

Some even dyed their beards green in honour of the holiday. Some of the Kingdom's young women also added little streaks of green make-up to the parts of their faces still visible above the modest veils. As the news agency

reports testified, both Saudis and foreign observers were taken by the outpouring of patriotic fervor in this year's celebrations.

As Second Deputy Prime Minister Prince Naif put it, "We are proud of this day, not only because it is an anniversary of the nation, but because it is for a state established on the basis of fear of God." ■



▲ National Day celebration in Singapore.

Hands Reaching Out Across the Skies



A six-year deal to manage one of Saudi's Arabia's biggest airports by Singapore's award-winning company specialising in world-wide airport investment and management is already looking like a thoroughgoing success. Here we take a close look at how this strong relationship took flight.

Singapore's Changi Airport has repeatedly topped the lists as the world's best airport in polls of international air travellers.

So it should come as no surprise that the Saudi Civil Aviation authorities should come to Changi Airports International (CAI), the company responsible for managing Singapore's facilities, to be the consultant in managing the King Fahd International Airport in Dammam.

The solid relationship between King Fahd Airport and CAI goes back some two years when the Saudi Civil Aviation Authority and Changi signed a six-year, \$65 contract. This contract is the biggest to date for CAI, the foreign investment wing of the Changi Airport Group. CAI has already been involved in developing and/or running over 40 airports world-wide.

However, the Singapore firm views this deal as a centrepiece project, and CAI's chief executive, Wong Woon Liong, describes it as a "key opportunity for us to showcase our 'Changi expertise'."

The King Fahd Airport is one of three international airports in the Kingdom (the other two are in Riyadh, the capital and

largest city, and in Jeddah, the second largest city and main business hub). Dammam itself is the closest big city to the Kingdom's major oil fields as well as the headquarters of Aramco, the world's biggest oil company.

After just two years of the six-year contract, Dammam Airport's Director-General, Khalid K. Almz'el, has expressed deep satisfaction with the relationship. Mr Almz'el sees the decision to select Changi Airports International for the project as the "right choice".

Mr Khalid points out that since CAI took over management duties at King Fahd, the airport has attracted more airlines; increased revenues; introduced new services at the facility for passengers; and successfully trained many staff members, including officials from other government agencies, such as those responsible for security and immigration.

CAI is undoubtedly a big part of all of these advances. For example, with regard to training staff, Changi has recently chalked up a total of 545 training days for airport employees in passenger management and overall service quality.

And it's probably no coincidence that King Fahd's International Airport's total passenger traffic last year increased an impressive 4.5 percent to 4.92 million.

And this was during a period of downturn for the airline industry in general, when many airports around the world actually experienced slight contractions.

As the volume of global air travel now begins to pick up again, King Fahd's Director-General Mr Khalid sees bright skies ahead.

He already indicates plans for expansion at King Fahd (a modern airport city is already on the drawing board) and looks forward to the remaining years of the management contract with CAI – and then perhaps a renewal.

Perceptions are often almost as important as results in the business sphere, and in this successful business relationship, the positive perceptions on both sides – the Saudi perceptions regarding Changi Airports International and the Changi perceptions of Saudi Arabia, its people and its growth potential – have helped propel the very positive results. ■

fast facts

KNOWING SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia is a large Kingdom with great potential for industrial advancement and economic growth. With a large domestic market, it offers great opportunities for investment. Here is Saudi Arabia at a glance:



Geography

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia lies at the tip of south-western Asia. It is bordered to the west by the Red Sea, the east by the Arabian Gulf, United Arab Emirates and Qatar, the north by Kuwait, Iraq and Jordan, and the south by Yemen and Oman. The Kingdom occupies about 80 per cent of the Arabian Peninsula, with a total area exceeding 2,250,000 square kilometres. Along the Red Sea lies the Tihama Coastal plain. To the east of this plain lies a chain of mountains called Sarawat. Several large valleys slope from Sarawat, such as Najran Valley, Tathleeth Valley and Fatima Valley. To the east of the chain stands the Najid Plateau. The Plateau stretches northward from the Najid Plains to the borders of Iraq and Jordan. The Empty Quarter, the southeastern part of the Kingdom, is composed of sand hills and lava fields. The eastern coastal plain consists of large sand areas.

Key Facts

OFFICIAL NAME: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

POLITICAL SYSTEM: Monarchy

HEAD OF STATE: King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz, The Custodian of The Two Holy Mosques

NATIONAL DAY: 23 September

TERRITORIAL ORGANISATION: The Kingdom is divided into 13 administrative regions. Each region is composed of "Mohafaza". There are 43 Level A Mohafaza and 61 Level B Mohafaza.

CAPITAL: Riyadh

MAIN CITIES: Riyadh, Makkah, Madinah, Jeddah, Damman and Taif.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE: Arabic, but English is commonly used.

CURRENCY & BANKING: The currency of the Kingdom is the Saudi Riyal (SR), divided into 100 halas. There is no restriction on the amount of currency which travellers may take into or out of Saudi Arabia.



Calendar

There are two calendars in use in the Kingdom, the Hijra and the Gregorian or lunar calendar, the official one, which dates from the migration (Hijra) of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers from Makkah to Madinah in AD 622, has 12 lunar months of almost equal length. A sighting of the new moon marks the beginning of each month. There is a difference of about 11 days between the Gregorian and Hijra.

Working Time

The working week in Saudi Arabia runs from Saturday to Wednesday. Government and other offices are closed all day Thursday and Friday. But most private businesses operate on a five-and-a-half day week, closing after Thursday lunchtime. During Ramadan, most enterprises open in the evening after sunset. The working hours are **GOVERNMENT OFFICES:** 7:30 am - 2:30 pm;

BANKS: 9:00 am - 5:00 pm (Saturdays to Wednesdays). The Kingdom is three hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time.



Travel Info

CURRENCY CONVERSION RATE: 1.00 Singapore Dollar (SGD) \approx 2.893 Saudi Riyal (SAR)

DISTANCE BETWEEN SINGAPORE AND RIYADH: 6,633.85 KM

APPROXIMATE TRAVEL TIME FROM THE KING KHALED INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (RIYADH) TO THE CITY BY TAXI: 30 minutes

NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL AIRPORTS: 4

NUMBER OF REGIONAL AIRPORTS: 6

BUSIEST PERIODS OF THE YEAR:

The periods of Hajj and Ramadan



اتحاد شركات السياحة للمسلمين في سنغافورة
PERSATUAN AGensi PELANCONGAN ISLAM SINGAPURA
ASSOCIATION OF MUSLIM TRAVEL AGENTS (SINGAPORE)

*The President, Executive Committee
and all Amtas members
extend our Best Wishes to
the People and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
on the auspicious occasion of their
80th National Day.*

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