

**UNIFICATION
OF SAUDI ARABIA:
A HISTORICAL NARRATIVE**





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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

*In The Name of Allah,
Most Gracious, Most Merciful*



ABDULAZIZ AT THE HELM

September 18, 1932.

King Abdulaziz Aal Saud now stands as the undisputed leader of the Arabian Peninsula. The sword he unsheathed in 1902 is put into the scabbard following three decades of continuous and bitter fighting. His ancestral patrimony is recovered in full. The Third Saudi State, with himself at the helm, has just been ushered in with promising signs of the good times lying ahead.

He has just affixed his signature to a Royal Decree giving his dominions of Hijaz and Najd-cum-Dependencies a name more in line with the popular demand for a stronger form of unity, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and declaring September 23, 1932, the Kingdom's day of unification. It is this particular day that is now observed as the Kingdom's National Day.

With the rising star of King Abdulaziz, the House of Saud proves once more its remarkable ability to throw up leaders of men who are charismatic, daring and above all highly pious - men like Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud, founder of the First Saudi



State in 1745; Imam Abdulaziz ibn Muhammad and his son Saud the Great during the reign of whom the first Saudi State reached the height of its power; Imam Turki ibn Abdullah, founder of the Second Saudi State, and his son, Imam Faisal, one of the shrewdest rulers ever produced by the House of Saud. Of the latter King Abdulaziz was particularly fond. When the goings got rough, Abdulaziz would often burst into a roaring shout: **“I’m son of Faisal”**¹ or **“I’m brother of Nurah”**² and, by so doing, help himself to an intensified dose of courage and stamina for the stupendous task lying ahead. It is not uncommon for an Arab to invoke the names of those dearest to him, usually a brother or a sister, whenever he finds himself in a situation that lays a valid claim on his sense of valour.

Abdulaziz was confronted with that very same situation towards the end of his stay in Kuwait in which he, together with his father Imam Abdulrahman and other members of the family, had taken refuge after Ibn Al-Rasheed, a former vassal of the House of Saud, marched against Najd from

(1) son is used instead of grandson by way of endearment.

(2) The sister he so much adored.



his power base in Hail and captured Riyadh in 1891. Living in exile was not exactly the kind of fate in which a dashing young man like Abdulaziz could be expected to acquiesce. This is said with all due respect for Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah, the Ameer of Kuwait, who treated the exiles as honoured guests and would always call Abdulaziz “**my son**” and show kindness to him in many other ways.



PENINSULA HAWK

Of all the titles of honour that came his way in later years (Lion of the Peninsula, Lord of Arabia, etc.), one in particular could succinctly capture the essence of his epic adventure in 1902 culminating in the recapture of Riyadh and marking the beginning of a new phase in the fortunes of the House of Saud. The title we have in mind is "Hawk of the Peninsula." It has a historical ring to it. It bears resemblance to "Hawk of Quraish", a title conferred on Abdulrahman I, the fugitive Umayyad Prince who, after the fall of the House of the Umayyads in Damascus, was forced to flee his homeland and travel thousands of miles incognito with the enemies of his House giving close chase until he reached Andalusia in southern Spain and in 756 founded an independent emirate in Cordoba. So striking are the similarities that they cannot possibly be missed.

Abdulaziz was hardly 17 years old when his family settled in Kuwait as political exiles. By the time he outgrew his teens, Abdulaziz was at least a head taller than most youths of the same age, strong in limb and handy in the use of sword, lance or rifle. Buttressed with physical fitness, his indomitable soul was to carry him through

King Abdulaziz in a picture taken by Captain W. Shakespear in 1911.





hardships lesser men would have found too harsh to endure.

Taking advantage of a major attack mounted in 1901 by Sheikh Mubarak against Ibn Al-Rasheed's territory, young Abdulaziz led a small force of his own with the professed objective of clinching Riyadh from the clutches of the usurper. No sooner had he reached his destination and started his assault on the city than he received news that Sheikh Mubarak had been defeated. Young and dashing indeed he was, yet he was never reckless. Sensing that the defeat of Mubarak had made it pointless for him to press ahead with his diversionary operation against Riyadh, he asked his men to return to Kuwait. Discretion, at any rate, is the best part of valour. This abortive attack against Riyadh did Abdulaziz a world of good. The raid must have served as a rehearsal for the highly successful attack he mounted in the following year.

Much has been said and written about Abdulaziz's heroic performance in 1902 when he scaled the walls of his ancestral capital with the help of few trusted companions and recaptured the city in a brief but dazzling show of courage pushed to the limits. The news of the encounter soon spread across the length and breadth of the desert heralding the rise of a new star in the firmament of the Arabian desert. Undaunted, his enemies con-



tinued to give battle for years and years to come: some fell by the road early on in the long - drawn confrontation, others fought to the bitter end. All, however, had one thing in common: they were licked in battle; outsmarted in political maneuvering and left completely mortified by the victor's splendid show of magnanimity as they went down to their knees begging for mercy.

RIYADH RECAPTURED

The way Abdulaziz captured his ancestral capital is one more proof of how the element of surprise, coupled with good military intelligence, can be crucial. Abdulaziz set out from Kuwait with a force of only 40 men joined by 20 others at a later stage in the long march across the desert. He had been waiting on tinterhooks for the day when he could avenge the loss of his ancestral patrimony and would have sallied out even earlier had he not been restrained by his father who, although proud of his son's ambition and military skill, was sceptical as to the possible outcome of his adventure. Ibn Al-Rasheed had been known to be a major military power in the Arabian Peninsula and could, at a flick of a finger, rally to his banner thousands of seasoned and well-equipped warriors. He was not to be beaten, so Imam Abdulrahman theorized, by a small band of 60 men. But in the lives of great men miraculous achievements are not a rare



occurrence, and King Abdulaziz was destined to snatch the Pearl of the Desert, as Riyadh is often called, fortify it in a race against time, and, with the help of its population, turn it into a military base for his future operations.

In four years' time his major adversary Ibn Al-Rasheed was destroyed but his successors went on fighting for another 15 years before being thoroughly subdued.



The bastion which King Abdulaziz and his men took by storm when they recaptured Riyadh.



King Abdulaziz on horseback.



MAJOR ADVERSARY DEFEATED

With the surrender of Ibn Al-Rasheed's clan and the capture of their stronghold Hail, a major stumbling block was removed, but the road was still far from being paved or safe. Abdulaziz had to fight for every inch of the land that is now modern Saudi Arabia. Britain and Turkey, even Russia and Germany, were at the time jockeying for strategic positions in the Arabian Peninsula. King Abdulaziz was able to avoid being trapped by any of these powers in their determined attempts to impose their hegemony on the region.

Until the capture of Al-Ahsa from the Turks in 1913 the territories under Saudi control were land-locked. Apart from the joy Abdulaziz would feel each time he reconquered another piece of land that had been part of his ancestral domains, his conquest of Al-Ahsa had special merits of its own. He was aware of his need for an access to the sea, and Al-Ahsa seemed to be the ideal place to provide him with one. The Hijaz, with its Red Sea ports had not been taken yet.

ACCESS TO SEA

In May 1913 Abdulaziz moved at the head of a force of 600 men and, exploiting the element of surprise to advantage, stormed his way through the fortifications of Hufuf. The Turkish garrison of 1200 men surrendered without putting up much of



a fight. Al-Qatif fell next and Abdulaziz was in full control of what is known now as the Eastern Province which has underneath its sands the largest oil reserves in the world. In his last years King Abdulaziz would wistfully reminisce on that eventful decade following the recapture of Riyadh, which he considered to be the best part of his life.

Cherishing the memory of hardship and danger is typical of all men of action. Abdulaziz is no exception in this respect. While still in his early teens he schooled himself to patience and endurance as he and members of his family spent months in the desert wandering from one place to another following the fall of Riyadh to Ibn Al-Rasheed with no proper means of sustenance.

The stories told about his endurance are amazing indeed. Once he was to be operated on for the removal of two spent bullets embedded in the lower abdomen. Noticing that the surgeon was preparing the anesthetic, Abdulaziz would have none of that. He took the scalpel, so we are told, cut away the flesh above the bullets and invited the surgeon to do his job. On another occasion he was wounded in the stomach while the battle was raging at a feverish pitch. He immediately retired to his camp nearby escorted on all sides by close aides so that his men might not see him walking with a limp and consequently get dispirited. A makeshift bandage was used in dressing his wound and in no time he was back into the fray.



OPENHANDEDNESS

Many are the endearing qualities which helped forge the strongest of bonds between Abdulaziz and his men. To begin with he once wrote a cheque for three thousand riyals. As a result of a slip of the pen a fourth zero was inadvertently added thus leaving the beneficiary ten times richer than originally intended. On coming to notice the error, Abdulaziz hesitated for few seconds, laughed the incident away and said: "**Abdulaziz is not going to be less generous than his pen!**" He continued throughout his life to derive much pleasure from the act of giving, keeping in mind that generosity never made anyone poor.

Simplicity is another of those fine qualities with which King Abdulaziz was richly endowed. His court never stood on ceremony or laid down rules for dealing with members of the Royal family. There were no rules for what men should or should not wear in the presence of royalty. In addressing the King, men would use a simple expression, *ya taweel-ul-umr*, (O Long Life!) or its other variation, *tawwal-al-laah umrak*, (Long be your life!) in preference to the more bombastic, Your Majesty, and were encouraged to do so. A man was not required to bow on meeting a prince, neither was a woman under any obligation to curtsy when meeting with a princess. Well-bred men and women, however, would always show their respect in any other way—usually one they came across on the spur of the



King Abdulaziz Wearing the sash and decorations presented to him by the British government.



moment.

His men had full confidence in his ability as a military commander. They often marched under his command from one end of the desert to another without the least complaint simply because they somehow sensed that such long marches across that vast and desolate expanse of sun-baked sands were bound to be well rewarded.

SECRECY OBSERVED

In spite of all his feats of military prowess, Abdulaziz was never inclined to play up his exploits. In his usual disarming honesty he would tell those in his *majlis* that he did not consider himself the bravest of the brave. He would, however, hasten to add that if the honour and future of the homeland were at stake he would achieve in the battlefield such exploits which no one else could match. Even in the battles he fought early on in his career, Abdulaziz would keep in check the inclination to impetuosity so common among young men. He would go to great lengths in his carefully drawn plans to mislead and outwit his adversaries. If he wanted to attack an enemy in the east he would give orders to move west. When his army had covered a reasonable distance, he would give fresh orders to change course and move in the direction which he had in mind all along. That was just a sample of the precautionary measures he would take to baffle undercover agents who might



have been implanted by the enemy into his camp to keep an eye on his movements and report back to their paymasters.

He kept his plans and real intentions for himself and even his close aides often would know of what he had in mind only at the last minute. His top generals were sworn to secrecy in much the same way. They would swoop on their unsuspecting enemies as a bolt from the blue and win the day by virtue of sheer surprise. The commando raid on Riyadh was a case in point, so was the battle of Turaba, the forerunner of the triumphant campaign for the conquest of Hijaz.

MILITANTS DEFEATED

His troops were more motivated and, in most cases, better equipped, than those which any of his enemies had ever been able to field. His acquisition of such products of modern technology as wireless sets, motorcars and rapid-firing machine-guns gave him a clear advantage. But in the final analysis one finds that the spirited zeal of his troops was the decisive factor that tipped the scales in his favour. The elite among his troops were the product of strict religious education and tough military exercise. Upon orders from King Abdulaziz, these men, all of bedouin stock, were prevailed on to change their nomadic lifestyle and settle down in paramilitary colonies devoting their time to prayers, the use of arms and farming. They



were intrepid fighters and masters of the art of military surprise. But unfortunately they had none of the broadness of vision which King Abdulaziz had in full measure, and this, in turn, set them later on a collision course with their patron. He tried to reason with them but to no avail. They had set their hearts fully against modernization which they suspected the King was trying to introduce by degrees. They would not countenance the use of such harmless gadgets as the wireless, the telephone and the motorcar thinking perhaps that these were tools of the devil. Cordial relations between the king and foreign powers were anathema to them. They wanted all dealings with the "infidels" to cease. Even the ruling passed by the leading Muslim Ulema of the realm in favour of uninhibited utilization of useful inventions irrespective of their countries of origin did not cut much ice with these militants. In the circumstances King Abdulaziz had no choice but to appeal to force. Without any real support from the ulemas or the masses the rebels' cause was doomed. They were easily defeated and the curtain was drawn for good over a chapter in the history of the Arabian Peninsula which saw the rise and fall of a group of fine warriors too xenophobic to appreciate the greater realities of the outside world of which, after all, they were a part.

Successive generations of Saudis will always feel grateful to King Abdulaziz for his courageous



A historical picture of King Abdulaziz with Sheikh Mubarak, Amir of Kuwait, sitting by his side.



stand in support of modernization. Were it not for his benevolent patronage of the forces of progress in his domains, Saudi Arabia would probably have missed the boat of modernization altogether. The multi-billion projects in the last two decades would have remained, to use a flowery turn of phrase, a foetus in the womb of the Unknown. Mercifully the forces of advancement and revival won the day and the wheel of modernization has kept rolling on ever since at an accelerating speed.

FIRST SAUDI STATE

Nations with roots striking into history can better be understood and judged if viewed against the backdrop of their rich historical heritage. Any evaluation, say of Greece, taken in isolation from the Hellenic civilization, would necessarily be grossly inadequate. By the same token, Saudi Arabia can be adequately understood only if its Islamic civilization and the historical compact between Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud, founder of the First Saudi State, and Sheikh Muhammad Ibn Abdulwahab, the exponent of religious revival, are taken into consideration.

To begin with let us explain that Islam recognizes no division between the secular and the religious. Thus when Sheikh Muhammad Ibn Abdulwahab arrived in Dir'iyah, the capital of the First Saudi State, he was warmly welcomed by



Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud and the two forged around the year 1744 the great alliance which in due course helped the Saudi State extend its influence from the Arabian Gulf to the Red Sea. By the year 1810 the First Saudi State had reached the height of its power. It was in firm control of almost the entire Arabian Peninsula including the holy cities of Makkah and Medina.

A TRAGIC END

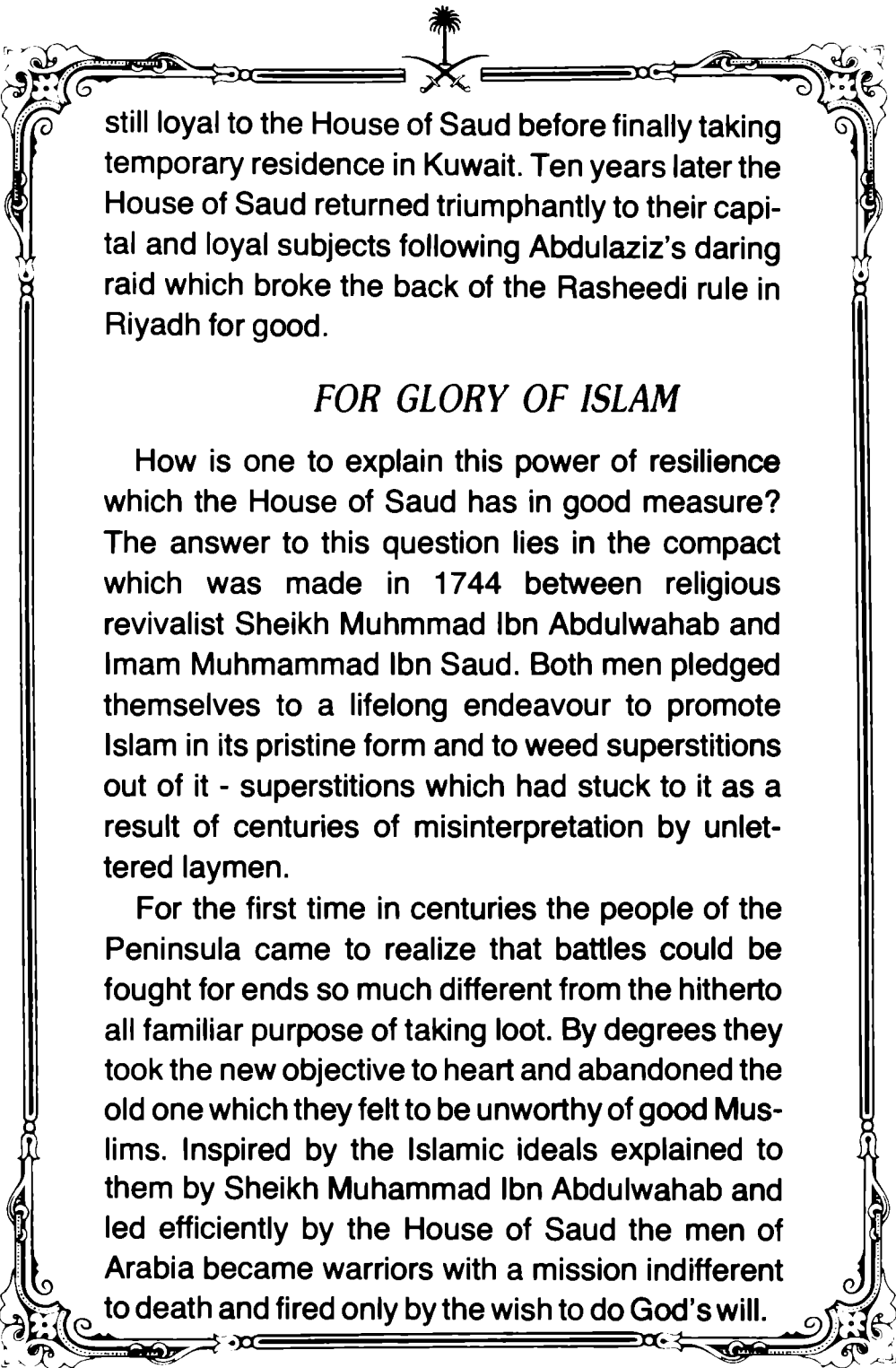
The rising power of the nascent Saudi State provoked a violent reaction from the Ottoman Turks who, among other things, considered themselves the guardians of the two holy cities. Therefore, they instructed Muhammad Ali, their governor in Egypt, to move against the Saudi State. Following a long-drawn campaign the Egyptian forces, under Ibrahim Pasha, Muhammad Ali's son, crossed the desert and, on their arrival in Najd, proceeded to lay siege to Dir'iyah. The inhabitants of the city resisted bravely in spite of the fact that the attackers were using field artillery. Bitter fighting went on for six months during which time the attackers cut down all the palm trees in the area in an attempt to starve the defenders into surrender. Finally, Imam Abdullah Ibn Saud decided to spare his people further suffering. He surrendered and was sent to Istanbul where his captors tried to talk him out of his beliefs, but the brave imam stood firm. Convinced that their prisoner would rather die than



disown his principles, they had him executed. The fate of Diri'yyah itself was no less bizarre. It was razed to the ground and every remaining palm tree was cut down.

In this sad manner the First Saudi State came to an end. The House of Saud never attempted to rebuild Diri'yyah. They moved to nearby Riyadh and it was in Riyadh that the Second Saudi State was born in 1823 under the able leadership of Imam Turki Ibn Muhammad Ibn Saud.

The fall and total destruction of Dir'iyyah in 1818, shattering as it certainly was, did not give the invaders a firm foothold in Central Arabia. In a matter of four years it came home to them how shaky and untenable their position was, being stationed as they were a thousand miles away from their military base. For their part, the House of Saud provided yet one more example of their gift of resilience in the face of adversity. The moment the invaders turned their backs to leave in despair a scion of the House of Saud was back in the saddle. Towards the end of the century, the Arabian Peninsula again went through a similar debacle-then-recovery experience when family squabbles after the death of Imam Fasiyal Ibn Turki, the sixth in line of Saudi rulers, made it possible for Ibn Al-Rasheed, the strongman of Hail, to seize Riyadh forcing Imam Abdulrahman, father of King Abdulaziz, to leave his captial together with other members of his family and seek refuge with tribes



still loyal to the House of Saud before finally taking temporary residence in Kuwait. Ten years later the House of Saud returned triumphantly to their capital and loyal subjects following Abdulaziz's daring raid which broke the back of the Rasheedi rule in Riyadh for good.

FOR GLORY OF ISLAM

How is one to explain this power of resilience which the House of Saud has in good measure? The answer to this question lies in the compact which was made in 1744 between religious revivalist Sheikh Muhmmad Ibn Abdulwahab and Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud. Both men pledged themselves to a lifelong endeavour to promote Islam in its pristine form and to weed superstitions out of it - superstitions which had stuck to it as a result of centuries of misinterpretation by unlettered laymen.

For the first time in centuries the people of the Peninsula came to realize that battles could be fought for ends so much different from the hitherto all familiar purpose of taking loot. By degrees they took the new objective to heart and abandoned the old one which they felt to be unworthy of good Muslims. Inspired by the Islamic ideals explained to them by Sheikh Muhammad Ibn Abdulwahab and led efficiently by the House of Saud the men of Arabia became warriors with a mission indifferent to death and fired only by the wish to do God's will.



At the time Sheikh Muhammad Ibn Abdulwahab burst on the scene, people had fallen into the foolish habits of appealing to trees, stones and tombs for help; of offering sacrifices to the jinn so that they might help cure the sick; and showing more than a token interest in saint-worship. All this had to be washed away. Idolatrous objects that stood between man and God were purged. The worship of God, the One and the Only, was re-established. The laws of Islamic Shari'a as revealed by God to Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, were strictly enforced, and this is the secret of Saudi resilience. The House of Saud is Royalty with a message to work for, and a divine one at that. Elsewhere in the Peninsula local chieftains were engrossed, body and soul, in the scandalous practice of plunder and loot with little time to spare for anything else. Little wonder that the people remained indifferent to them. When one of them took the reins he would bring no joy to the hearts of the people he came to rule neither would he bring tears to their eyes if later killed or forced to step down by a more powerful rival. But it is different in the case of the House of Saud. Their situation following the capture of Riyadh by Ibn Al-Rasheed in 1891 brought genuine grief to the hearts of their loyal subjects in much the same manner as did the fall of Dir'iyyah to Ibrahim Pasha in 1818. In both cases the people did not waver in their staunch loyalty and were all the time waiting





anxiously for the banner of the House of Saud to fly aloft once again.

LOYALTY KEY TO VICTORY

Without this deep-seated loyalty Abdulaziz would not have been able to recapture Riyadh with a handful of men, hold out in the face of a threatened massive assault by the opposing camp and, in a matter of few months, even take the offensive. The same show of unflinching loyalty stood the House of Saud in good stead when their first capital, Dir'iyyah was demolished and their leader, Imam Abdullah Ibn Saud, taken prisoner and later put to death. With Dir'iyyah lying in rack and ruin, the foreign invader must have thought that the House of Saud was as good as finished. In that he was grossly wrong and it did not take the ruling family much time to prove it. Once again the unwavering loyalty and solid backing shown by the population, together with the determination of the House of Saud not to jeopardize their partimony, saved the day.

That same inseparable bond between the religious and the temporal laid down by Islam, and revived by Sheikh Muhammad Ibn Abdulwahab and Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud following centuries of neglect, has remained ever since the hallmark of Saudi rule.

A modern speech by the Custodian of the Two



King Abdulaziz's picture on the Cover of a special issue published on Saudi Arabia by Life magazine in 1943.



Holy Mosques King Fahd Ibn Abdulaziz will always lay emphasis on the all-important point that everything would turn well for the people of the Kingdom as long as they continued to hold to the Book of Allah and the Sunnat of the Prophet, peace be upon him. Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud must have said much the same thing to those in his audience 250 years ago. Time changes but the Message remains unchanged.

ISLAM AND TECHNOLOGY

A picture of Saudi Arabia presented in isolation from the impact Islam has on daily life of the Saudi people will certainly be grossly inaccurate. For Islam affects the fortunes of Saudi Arabia at every turn. In every aspect of its life, the Kingdom is directed by the tenets of Islam. Unlike other countries which have man-made constitutions to protect the rights of their citizens, Saudi Arabia has the Holy Quran as its constitution, and the happier she is for that. Its outlook on life is derived from the Holy Quran so are its laws as well as its entire social and economic systems. In this respect the Kingdom is quite unique. The question that is often put forward by foreign observers intrigued by the state of affairs is: "Can Saudi Arabia hold fast to its current way of life and at the same time keep pressing with its giant development plans and its untiring efforts to come into possession of ultra modern

tued) •



King Abdulaziz and a number of his sons in a picture carried by Life magazine in the special issue which it published on Saudi Arabia.



technology?" Of course it can, and quite easily, simply because there is nothing irreconcilable about Islamic piety existing side by side with the latest advances in technology. Anyone who may entertain some doubts as to the accuracy of this statement is counselled to remember that the first verse in the Holy Quran bids the Prophet, peace be upon him, to read. A Prophet's saying urges Muslims to seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave. A religion which places such great emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge will always accord technological wonders and useful inventions a very warm welcome. Being appreciative of this fact, King Abdulaziz proceeded to champion the cause of modernization although he expected that such a stand on his part would lead to a clash with the fanatics in his army, which it indeed did. Following the victory scored by King Abdulaziz in his armed showdown with the fanatics, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia moved forward along the road of modernization and never looked back.

The fact that the career of King Abdulaziz is the key to a better understanding of modern Saudi Arabia can hardly be overemphasized. His successors followed strictly in his footsteps with regard to both internal and external policies, and felt proud of carrying on with his message.



King Abdulaziz with a number of his sons on the roof of the Royal Palace in Riyadh. King Fahd is first from right.



King Abdulaziz on a visit to Bahrain during the reign of its former Amir.

King Abdulaziz and King Faisal of Iraq as they met aboard the British sloop lupin.

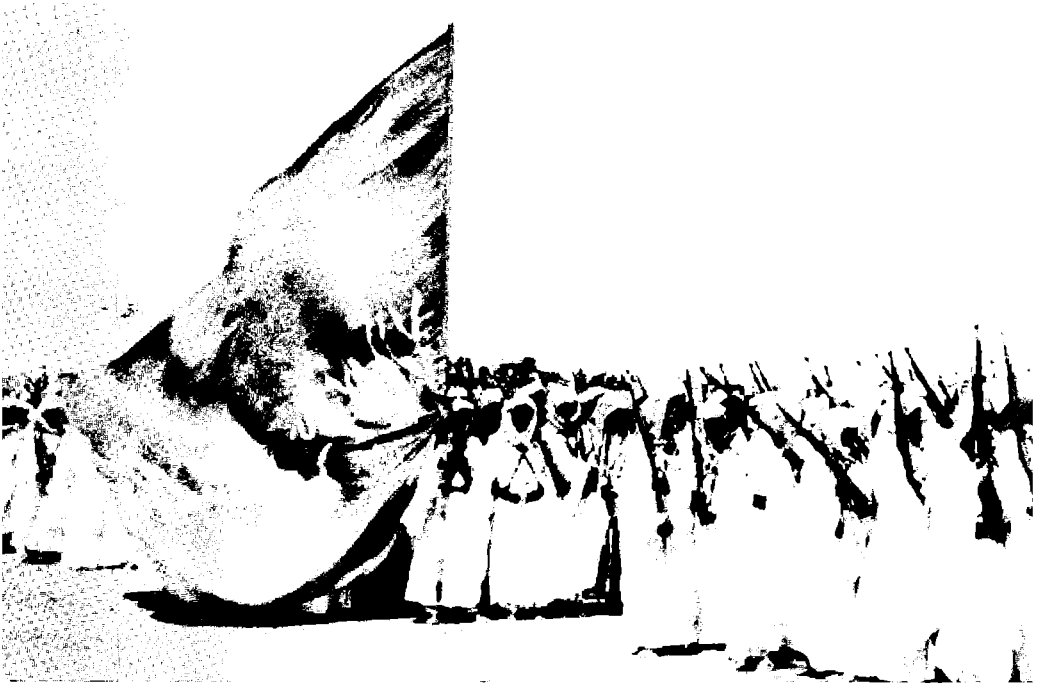




During the Royal visit to Egypt in the reign of King Farouq.

Receiving King Abdullah of Jordan.





King Abdulaziz given a hearty welcome on arrival at Riyadh airport from the men whom he had led to many spectacular victories.





LAW AND ORDER

At the home front King Abdulaziz's legacy to his people was impressively rich. Of its many gems the one that outshone all others was law and order. By the time the 19th century expired and the 20th was born, the Arabian Peninsula was, to be sure, no haven of peace, not by any stretch of the imagination. Nomadic raids and counter raids were the order of the day. Bands of robbers roamed the desert from one and to another. Even pilgrimage caravans were not spared. Each tribal chief had carved out for himself a chunk of land and treated it as his hereditary fiefdom. A stranger passing through it would have to pay a toll or risk being killed in cold blood. At the individual level, men were lawless and unruly. Banditry and brigandage were viewed not with raised eyebrows but as a normal fact of life. King Abdulaziz was not the type of leader who would keep a blind eye to that terrible state of affairs. Even when he had a full load of problems on hand, he could find time to devote to the fight against lawlessness. With all his too familiar efficiency, he systematically moved against lawlessness in areas brought under his rule and in no time was able to destroy it root and branch. Hypocrites raised a hue and cry against what they considered to be the heavy hand of the law. In fact all sentences passed against cutthroats, thieves and lawbreakers in general were based on the



rules of Islamic Shari'a.

In Saudi Arabia, criminals and lawbreakers are never romanticized. Their right to a fair trial is always respected, but no one ever sings their names or exploits. To treat a hardened criminal as though he were a celebrity would only encourage others to commit similar crimes in the hope that they too may receive their own share of attention. This tough stand explains why a person, man or woman, can walk after dark anywhere in Saudi Arabia with the full certainty of never being a target of attack by thugs and muggers.

CHARISMATIC LEADER

King Abdulaziz was a charismatic leader. All those who met him were impressed by his simplicity, modesty and charming manners. The much-travelled Lebanese writer, Amin Rihani, emerged from a meeting with Abdulaziz with the following impression:

"We first met on the sands under the stars in the light of many of the bonfires that blazed all around. A tall majestic figure in white and brown, overshadowing, overwhelming that was my first impression."

Later Rihani was to write in his diary:

"I have now met all the Kings of Arabia and I find no one among them bigger than this man. He is big in word and gesture and style as well as in purpose



and self-confidence."

In no less glowing terms, Captain William Shakespear, an Englishman, said in a report to the India Office:

"The Arabs have now found a leader who stands head and shoulders above any other chief and in whose star all have implicit faith. The other Sheikhs of the Arab alliance refer all kinds of matters to Ibn Saud for his advice, more especially those affecting the relations with the Porte (Ottoman Turkey)".

Gertrude Bell gave a similar impression:

"Ibn Saud is now barely forty though he looks some years older. He is a man with splendid physique, standing well over six feet and carrying himself with the air of one accustomed to command. As a (military) leader he is of proved daring and he combines with his qualities as a soldier that grasp of state-craft which is yet more highly prized by the tribesmen. Such men as he are the exception in any community but they are thrown up persistently by the Arab race."

All his biographers share the opinion that he had much charisma and that there was nothing that his men would not do to be in his good books.

MAGNANIMITY

In victory Abdulaziz was the true personification of valour and magnanimity. He was never vengeful in dealing with vanquished adversaries. When



Hail, the stronghold of the rival Rasheedi dynasty, fell to his army in 1921, several Rasheedis were taken to Riyadh where they have continued to live in dignity ever since. This show of clemency on the part of King Abdulaziz was to bind his former enemies to him for ever. But men, being what they are, one has to allow for exceptions. Faisal Al-Daweesh, a friend - turned - enemy, was a case in point. Wounded and helpless, the man was brought to Abdulaziz on a stretcher at the end of a battle in which he fought in the ranks of the rebels. He was immediately pardoned only to take to the field once again against his benefactor promptly after he had recovered from his wound. Captured again he was, this time, kept behind bars until he died.

ROOSEVELT AND CHURCHILL

Abdulaziz's brilliant career as a redoubtable desert warrior and leader of men must not overshadow his other strong points especially his political acumen. In the two world Wars, Abdulaziz's professed friendship to the Allies was duly and gratefully acknowledged. He was invited to a meeting with U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt aboard an American warship in Egypt's Great Bitter Lake on February 12, 1945. Within three days from that meeting, King Abdulaziz was having a meeting also in Egypt with British wartime Prime



Wartime meeting with American president Franklin Roosevelt in the waters of Ismailiyya, Egypt.





Wartime meeting with Winston Churchill in Fayum, Egypt.

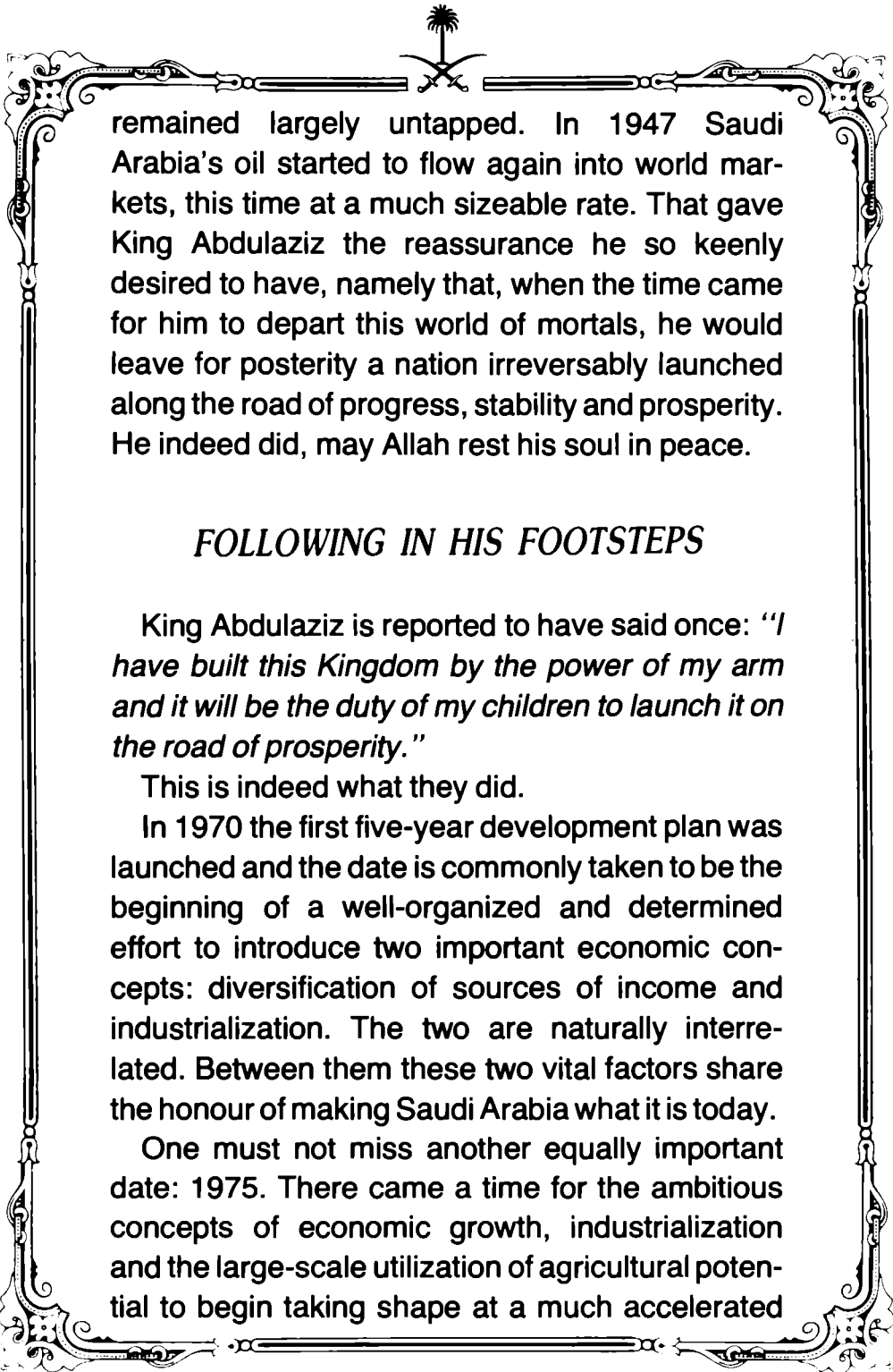


Minister, Winston Churchill. The two major leaders of the Allies were favourably impressed by King Abdulaziz's wisdom and courage. Roosevelt, in particular, was so much impressed that he promised his guest to deal fairly with the Palestine question once the war was over. Roosevelt, however, did not live long to redeem his promise. Two months from that historic meeting he was dead.

OIL AND PROSPERITY

King Abdulaziz lived long enough to witness much of the good things which Saudi Arabia now enjoys. Before his death in 1953, Saudi Arabia had already become one of the leading countries in the Arab world. From the date of unification of his domains and until his death two decades later, King Abdulaziz remained fully absorbed in his mission to strengthen and modernize the newborn state. Towards the end of his career he saw oil flowing from the Eastern Province to world markets bringing in much needed cash to finance the ambitious development plans he had in mind. Earlier he had seen an equally important development: the transformation of desert nomads from a chaotic medley of feuding tribes to a closeknit peaceful society where law and order was much valued by all.

Oil was discovered during his reign, but because of the circumstances of the Second World War it



remained largely untapped. In 1947 Saudi Arabia's oil started to flow again into world markets, this time at a much sizeable rate. That gave King Abdulaziz the reassurance he so keenly desired to have, namely that, when the time came for him to depart this world of mortals, he would leave for posterity a nation irreversibly launched along the road of progress, stability and prosperity. He indeed did, may Allah rest his soul in peace.

FOLLOWING IN HIS FOOTSTEPS

King Abdulaziz is reported to have said once: *"I have built this Kingdom by the power of my arm and it will be the duty of my children to launch it on the road of prosperity."*

This is indeed what they did.

In 1970 the first five-year development plan was launched and the date is commonly taken to be the beginning of a well-organized and determined effort to introduce two important economic concepts: diversification of sources of income and industrialization. The two are naturally interrelated. Between them these two vital factors share the honour of making Saudi Arabia what it is today.

One must not miss another equally important date: 1975. There came a time for the ambitious concepts of economic growth, industrialization and the large-scale utilization of agricultural potential to begin taking shape at a much accelerated





rate. In this respect the year 1975 is a significant landmark.

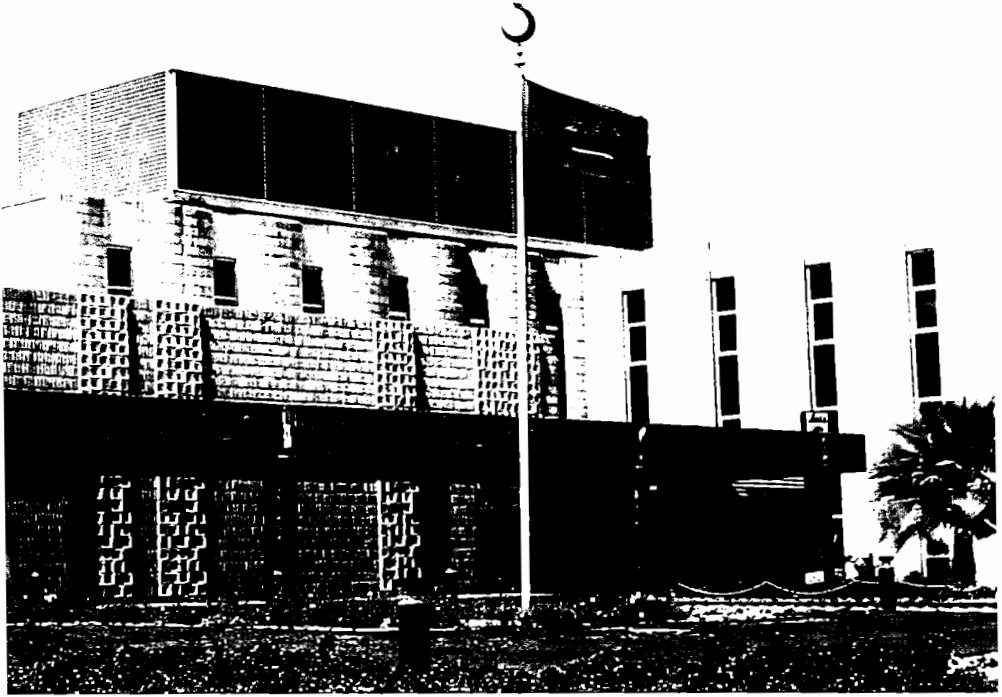
From 1975 on Saudi economy has been growing by leaps and bounds, so much so that Saudi Arabia of 1953 must by comparison appear to have been no more than a miniaturized version of what it is now.

It may not be out of place to cite few examples just to drive the point home.

PUBLIC HEALTH FACILITIES

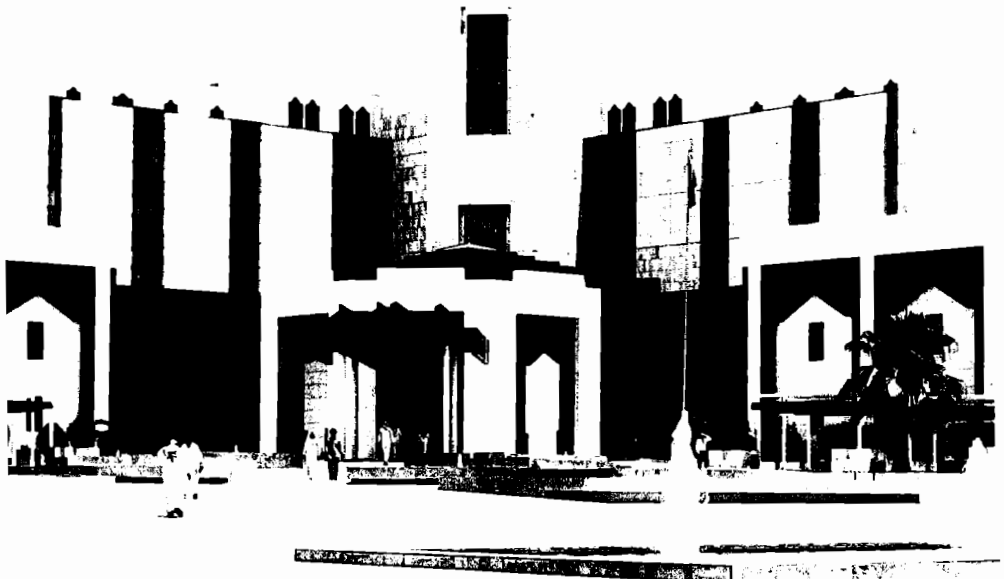
Saudi Arabia takes pride in the fact that it has now some of the best hospitals in the Middle East. When Christian Branard, the pioneer of heart transplant surgery, visited King Faisal Specialist Hospital in Riyadh he told reporters how amazed he was to find in the Saudi capital a medical facility with "few parallels in the world." That medical authority of world renown was most likely unaware of the fact that a decade before his visit Saudi patients had to face the trouble of seeking medical treatment in places thousands of miles away from home: in Europe, the United States and some Arab countries.

Both King Faisal Specialist Hospital and King Khaled Eye Hospital are the last word in the medical profession even when judged by world standards. Their services are offered to patients suffering from chronic diseases and desperately in need



King Faisal Specialist Hospital

King Khaled Specialist Eye Hospital.

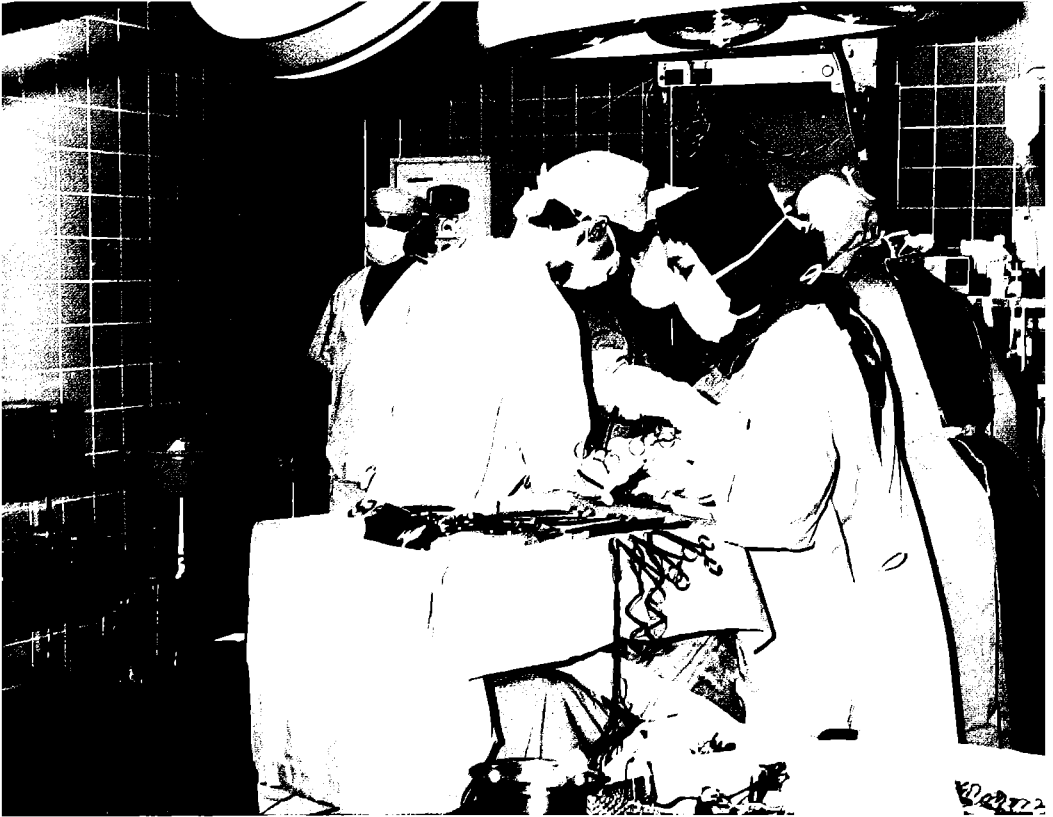




of the kind of medical expertise available only at elite hospitals. The trend of sending Saudi patients for treatment abroad, which marked the 50s and 60s has now been reversed with patients from different countries, especially those of the Arab world, coming over to seek a cure at the hands of worldclass physicians and surgeons on the staff not only of the above-mentioned hospitals but also at the Armed Forces and National Guard hospitals which offer their medical services to patients free of charge.

Good private hospitals proliferated at a remarkable speed on the eve of and during the boom years giving further muscle to the medical services in the Kingdom. Taken as an example, the city of Jeddah did not have more than one small, modestly-equipped private hospital in the 50s and most of the 60s whereas it now has more than twenty firstclass hospitals owned mainly by individuals who are either practising physicians themselves or are linked to the medical profession. Some of the present-day hospitals in the city stand six stories high, a far cry from that flat, diminutive ill-equipped hospital which had dominated the medical scene for the best part of two decades.

In the 50s and early 60s blood samples would be flown for analysis to laboratories in France, Britain and Germany because local facilities were unqualified to do the job especially in cases which required the use of advanced technology. At pre-



One of the operating theatre.

King Khaled Specialist Eye Hospital.





sent heart and lung transplants by Saudi surgeons are commonplace. The latest medical equipment is put in use at Saudi hospitals only few months after being introduced for the first time to hospitals in Europe and the United States. This striking contrast between past and present is no doubt the motive behind the globe-trotting exhibition launched few years ago under the name "Saudi Arabia: Yesterday and Today" to project the advances made by the Kingdom in true perspective.

The same story of this amazing breakthrough in the field of health is repeated all over with regard to other sectors: education, agriculture, industry and communications, to name but a few.

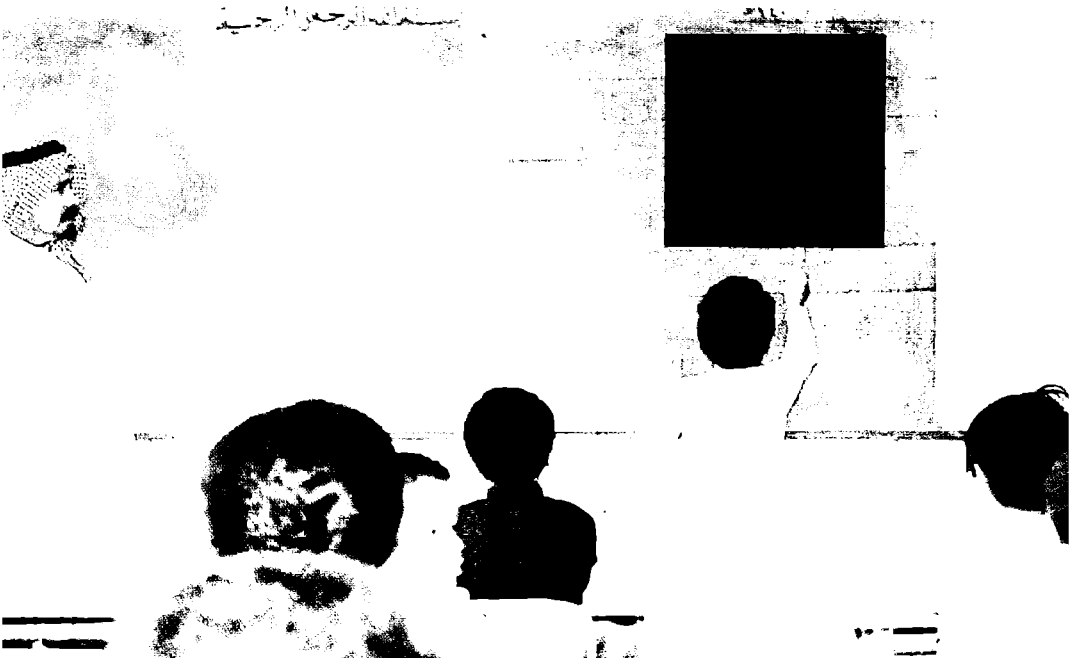
EDUCATION AND AGRICULTURE

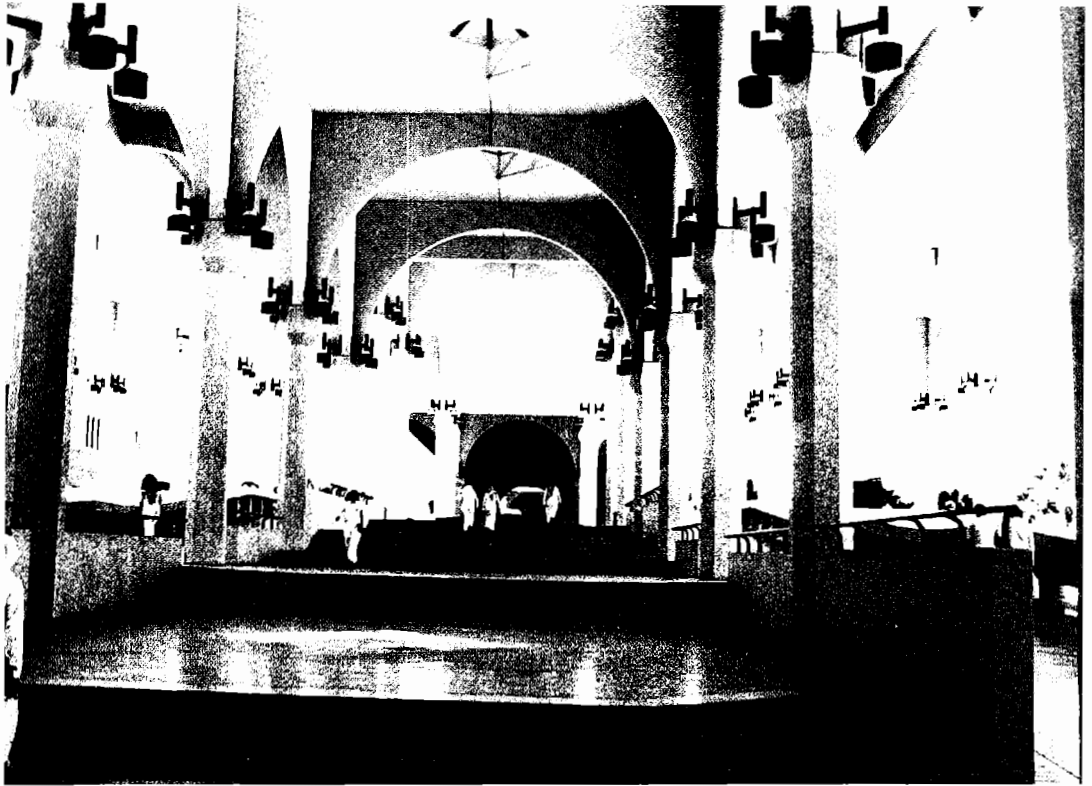
The striking contrast between past and present is naturally not confined to public health. In most other sectors: education, agriculture, communications, to name but a few, conditions now are a far cry from conditions of old ruled as they were by inadequate State funds. At present there are seven full-fledged universities, one of which addresses itself mainly to students from Arab and Muslim countries, scores of secondary schools and thousands of intermediate and primary schools. Schools have an enrolment of more than



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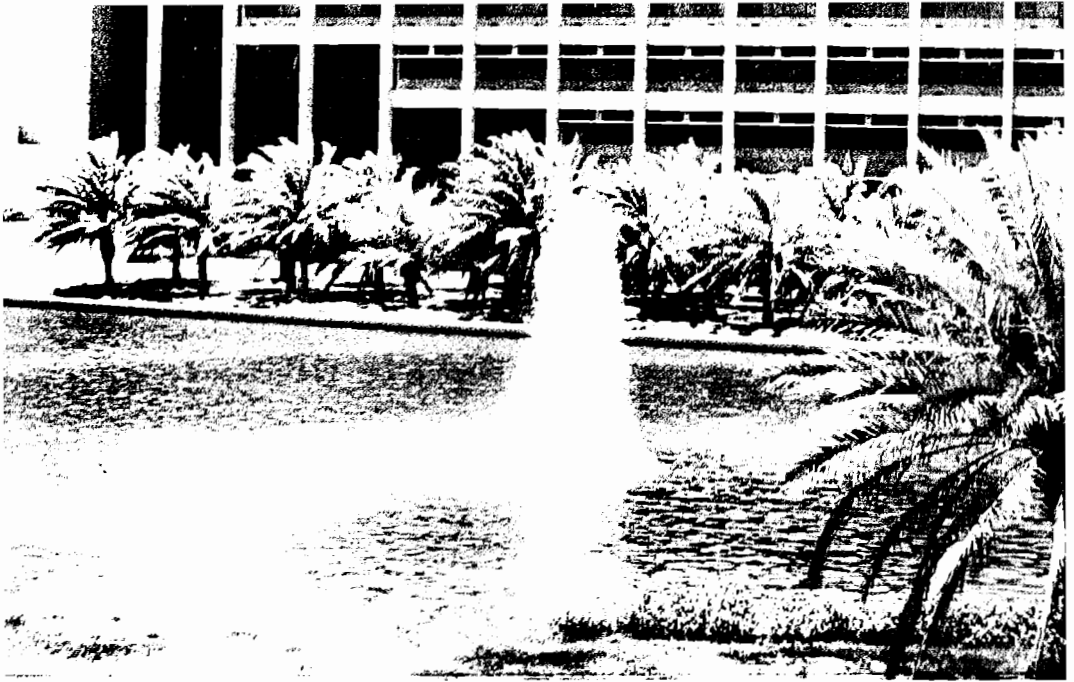




King Saud University in Riyadh

Graduates of Medical School.





King Fahd University of petroleum and Minerals in Dhahran.

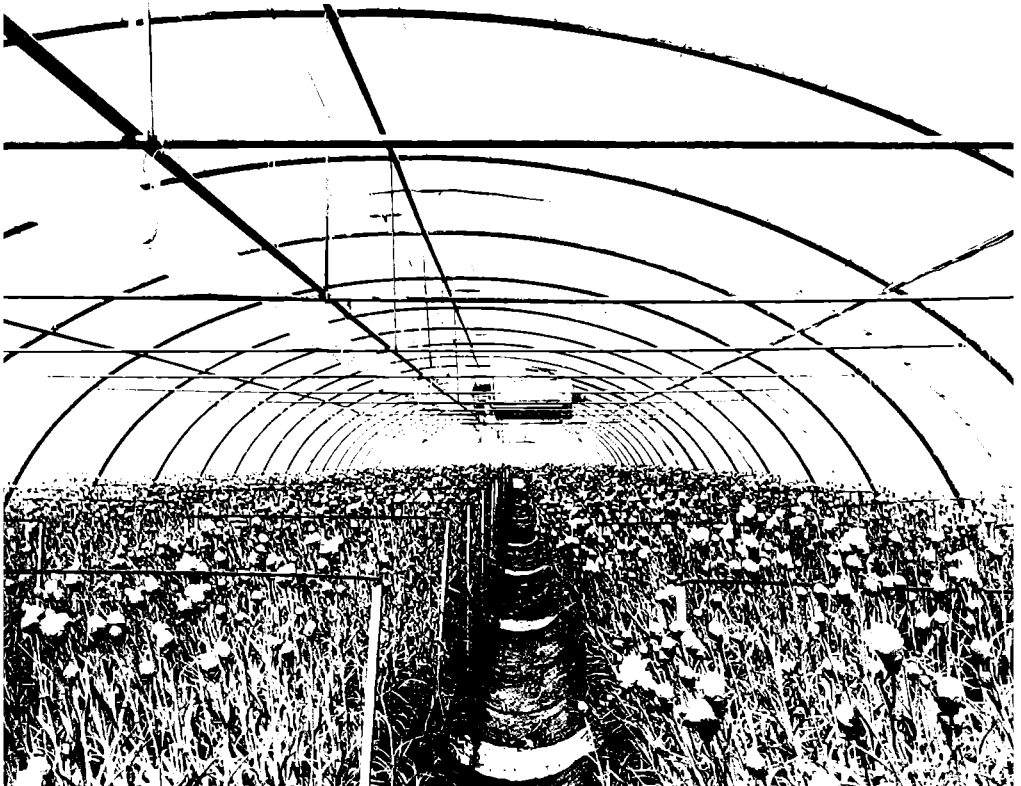




two million. To Saudis in the thirties, forties and early fifties these figures would have sounded astronomical and not without good reason. During that period the first university in the land had not yet been born; only a couple of secondary schools existed in the Kingdom and bright students who had the ambition to carry on with their higher studies had to be sent to neighbouring Arab countries.

To move on to the agricultural sector we come face to face with the same old story, the miracle of revival and achievement, repeated all over. Who could ever have thought that a country like Saudi Arabia would be singled out by no lesser an authority than the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) as an agricultural model with a rich farming experience which other developing countries are advised to copy? Yet this is indeed what that worthy organization did.

Impressed by the Kingdom's success in raising its annual wheat production from a paltry harvest of no more than 3,000 tons to a staggering two million, FAO thought that behind such success there must have been good planning, efficient management, skilled utilization of modern technology - in short the very ingredients which developing countries need to increase their agricultural output.





INDUSTRY

Saudi planners are fully convinced that the Kingdom will have to depend more and more on industry to ensure continued prosperity for the coming generations. Tracing back the origins of the current industrial revival in the Kingdom, one often comes across the year 1977 which many observers consider a turning point in the Kingdom's efforts to make a real headway in the industrialization field.

The local industrial chronicler will always remember the 29th of November, 1977, with much reverence, for it was on that day that four major projects were launched. All four were in the fast-growing city of Al-Jubail on the Gulf. One of them was a giant steel and petrochemical complex; another was a desalination plant which provides the city as well as the capital Riyadh with their water supply and is thought to be the largest in the world; the third was a gas extraction plant; and the fourth was a multi-billion scheme for the conversion of Al-Jubail into a fine commercial and industrial seaport.

Yenbu on the Red Sea received similar attention and was turned into an industrial base. At present both Al-Jubail and Yenbu are the backbone of Saudi industry which has of late become so self-confident that it launched on June 21, 1993, a



The cities of Jubail (above) and Yanbu (below) the backbone of industry in Saudi Arabia.



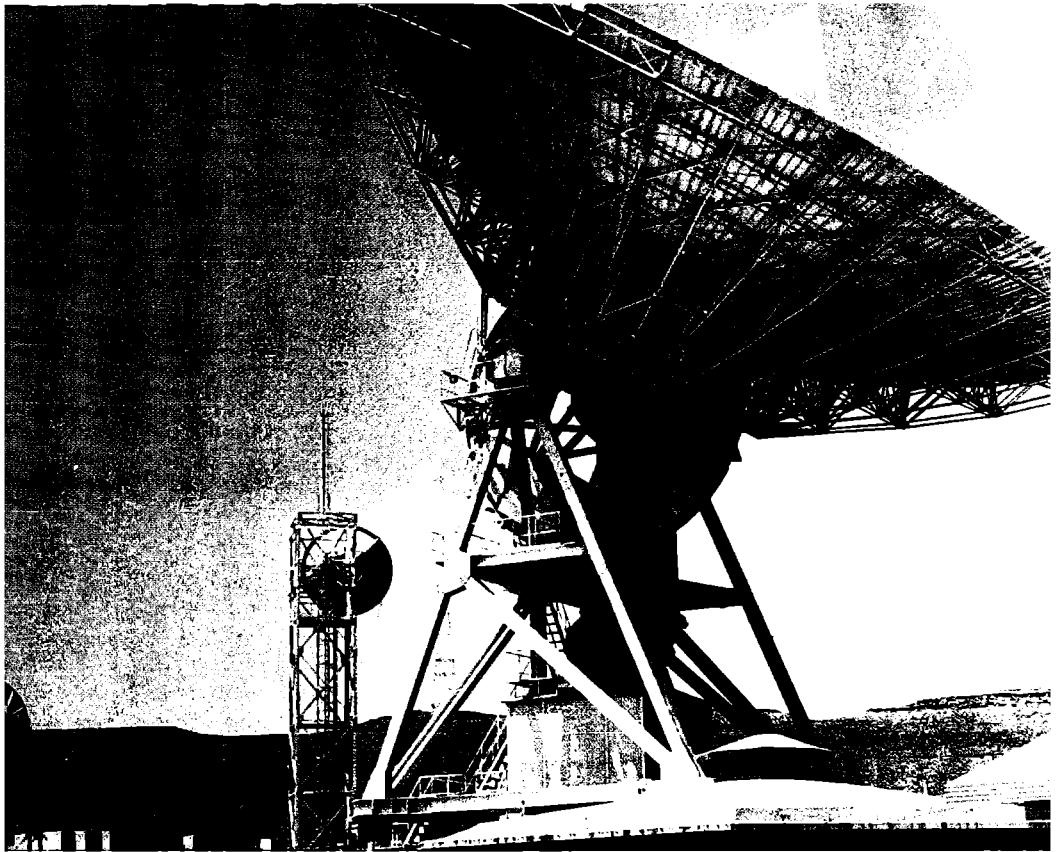


“Made in Saudi Arabia” exhibition in London to promote exports.

Similar progress has been made in other sectors as well. In a statement made on July 18, 1993, the Minister of Telegraphs, Posts and Telephones mentioned that there were plans prompted by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Fahd ibn Abdulaziz to install a telephone in every home. The Royal directives also call for at least one million telephone lines to be placed in service.

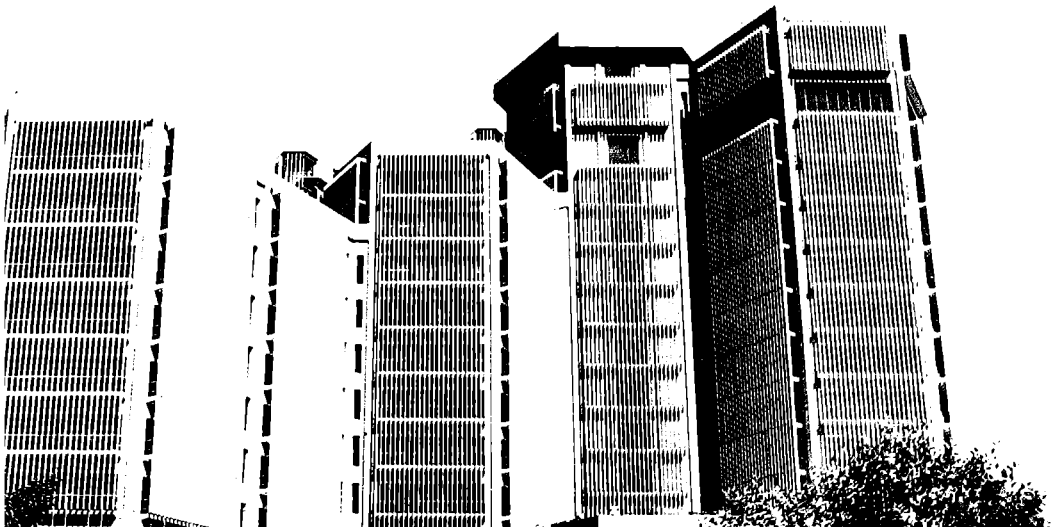
Now you can make long distance calls to most countries of the world. All you need is to pick up the phone, dial the number and you are immediately connected. Three decades ago, for a call to a neighbouring Arab capital, you had to file an application and wait for your turn to come which used to be anything from a couple of hours to one full day.

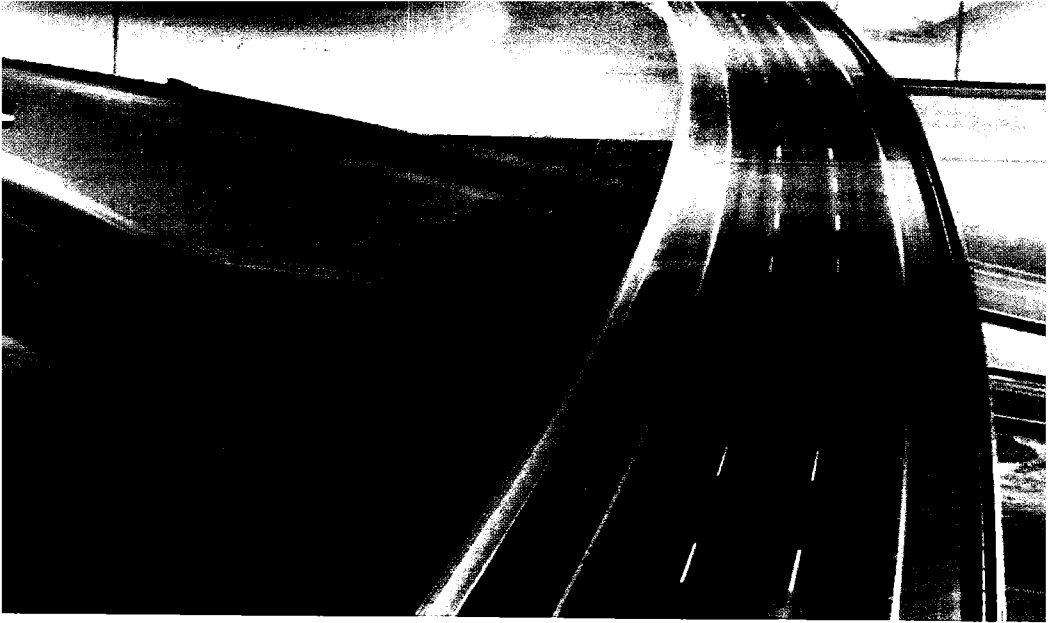
Statistics recently released with a direct bearing on communication show that there is now in the Kingdom a total of 51,165 kilometers of asphalted roads in addition to a network of 80,965 kilometers of agricultural roads. New roads are supplemented by a series of tunnels. These facilities gave birth to a thriving road haulage industry and made it possible for men and goods to move easily to and from remote areas which had remained inaccessible for ages.



A ground station for telecommunications through satellites.

PTT office buildings.





Roads

Tunnels and bridges.





AID TO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Although King Abdulaziz ruled over a country which was without ample economic resources and did not know any semblance of abundance except during the last few years of his life, his openhandedness was proverbial. He enjoyed to the full the act of giving freely to whoever came to him for help. He stood by other fellow Arabs in their struggle for freedom and independence. No one ever came to him seeking help and returned empty-handed. He always managed to find something to give.

With this fact in mind, one must not be taken by surprise if told by international authorities that Saudi Arabia ranks now first among the nations of the world with regard to the size of foreign aid it gives compared to its general national product. In the period 1973-1992 Saudi Arabia gave US\$ 66.7 billion or 5.45% of its General National Product (GNP) much more than the 0.7% fixed by the United Nations to be the minimum rate the aid-giving nations are recommended to offer.

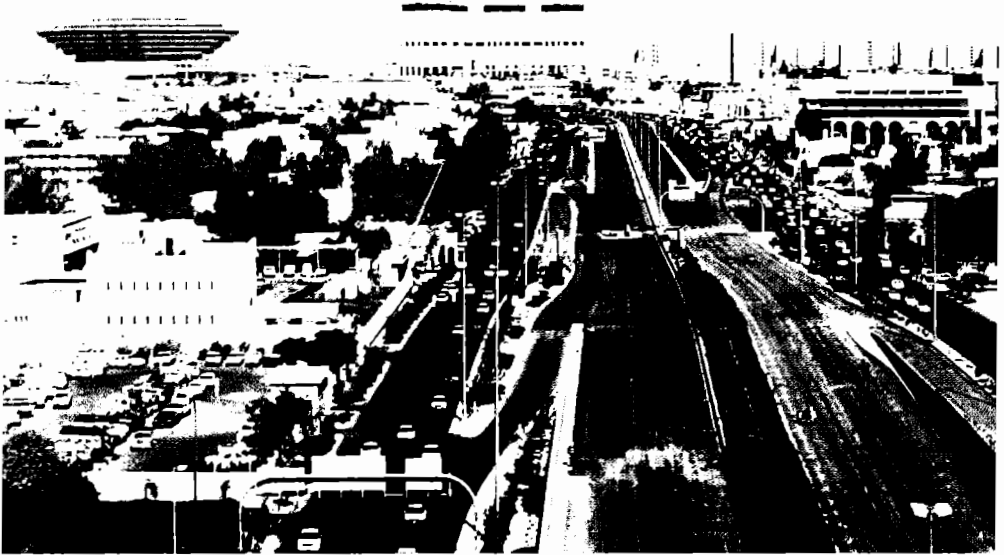
Aid given by Saudi Arabia is given without any strings attached. The beneficiaries are some 70 countries from different continents: Africa (38), Asia (22) and miscellaneous (10). Saudi aid is channelled mainly through the Saudi Development Fund which financed 273 projects in 60 countries in 1975-1992.



In its 1988 report entitled "Development Cooperation," the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) mentioned that Saudi Arabia was the second largest aid giver in the world with regard to total aid value throughout most of 1973-1987. It ranked fourth in the intervening period from 1982 to 1986. Of the contributions made by the member states of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Saudi Arabia's share is the largest accounting for 69 per cent of the total throughout the period from 1980 to 1987. In 1988 Saudi Arabia's contribution to the total aid given by OPEC member states amounted to 89 per cent of the total, according to OECD 1989 report.

Viewed in terms of its proportion to the General National Product, Saudi aid is the largest given by any country in the world. In 1973-1981 Saudi foreign aid was running at an average rate of 7.7 per cent of the Kingdom's GNP and at 3.2 per cent in 1981-1989. Even when it stood at 2.7 per cent in 1988 it was still more than seven times as high as the 2.7 per cent given by the industrial members of the Development Aid Commission (DAC) in the same year.

The OECD 1990 report mentioned that aid given by Saudi Arabia in 1989 amounted to US\$1,171 million, or 1.46 per cent of the Kingdom's GNP. The following year (1990) Saudi aid amounted to US\$3,693 million, or 3.89 per cent of Saudi



Riyadh, Capital of Saudi Arabia.

Holy Makkah - the spirtual capital.





Arabia's GNP, but eleven times more than the average aid rate given by the industrial countries in terms of their GNP. Saudi Arabia ranked fifth with regard to its absolute aid turnover in 1990 with the first four places going to the United States, Japan, France, and Germany.

For its part the World Bank mentioned in a 1988 report dealing with Saudi Arabia's national aid that the proportion of development aid given by the Kingdom to its GNP was among the highest in the world and that Saudi Arabia had maintained its foreign aid programme at a high level in spite of the drop in oil revenues in the first part of the eighties. The report further mentioned that the rate of official development aid by Saudi Arabia to the Kingdom's oil revenues rose to 15 per cent in 1986-1987 from 10 per cent in 1983-1985.

The report also mentioned that one of the distinctive features of Saudi aid was its being unconditional and free from procedural complications.

The rich legacy of King Abdulaziz entails a debt of gratitude which a faithful nation will continue to acknowledge for ever and ever.

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