

Notes from the Eastern Chair



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We are now in the final run in to year end – where on earth did the year go? As usual the latter part of the year has been hectic with Trade Missions, Conferences and Social events and I am sure everyone is looking forward to the Festive Season holidays. An early seasons greeting to you all.

On the business front we have continued with our successful series of monthly dinners. It was a pleasure to host HMA Sir William Patey who delivered a very interesting State of the Union talk covering a variety of topical issues. This was followed in July by a review of the agricultural sector in Saudi Arabia by John Lawton (Agricultural Technology Co.). The tendency is to focus on oil, gas and petrochemicals but John’s talk clearly highlighted the significance of the farming industry in Saudi Arabia.

In June all the British Business Groups in the Gulf signed a reciprocal agreement that allows members from each group to attend the events of the others at member rates. I personally believe that developing more cooperation between the groups is beneficial especially when you realize that the total membership across the Gulf is approximately 3000. The ultimate aim is to develop a more extensive business network that provides value to both members and UK plc.

The Gulf Commercial Officers Conference (GCOC) was held in late September in Muscat and was also attended by the Chairmen of British Business Groups in the Gulf. This provided an excellent forum for the Business Groups to meet to share ideas and identify areas where improved cooperation would be helpful. A subsequent joint meeting with the Commercial Officers also proved useful in understanding how we can better support each other in the greater interests of UK plc. All in all it was a worthwhile conference.

The annual MEA Opportunity Arabia (#6) was held in London in early October and it was the turn of Eastern Province to represent Saudi British Business Groups as a speaker. It was good to see a full lecture theatre with about 180 companies in attendance. Clearly there is considerable interest in the Saudi market so let’s hope there is follow-up and actual visits with future trade missions.

Finally, our flagship social event of the year – The Poppy Ball – will be held at the Crowne Plaza, Bahrain on 12 November. Once again, it is a joint venture with the Bahrain British Business Forum and a great night is expected. If you happen to be in Bahrain during this period why not join us?

If you need to contact us then feel free to call me directly, send an e-mail to our Secretary (Pamela) at bbakhobar@atheer.net.sa or via the website www.bbaep.com

Local News Round-Up

Several companies now offer regular email up-dates carrying news items from the region. Herewith a selection of items received by the RGBB News Editor in the two weeks before publishing.

Saudis need attitude adjustment

MENAFN.com reported late in October that Shoura Council Member Najeeb Al-Zamil has urged his fellow Saudis to open a channel of communication with expatriates in order to improve the image of Saudis.

“Now is the time to be honest about ourselves, Yes, we Saudis suffer as a result of media manipulation and Western stereotypes, but then, why is it that we are misunderstood and hated by people living among us?” he asked during an interview with the Arab News.

“What Al-Zamil says about Saudis can also be true of expatriates.” says the reporter “Many of them have been living in Saudi Arabia for a long time and have made no effort to reach out to Saudis or to speak their language.”

Al-Zamil has recently announced the creation of an informal forum called the Saudi-Expat Forum. He has offered the facilities of Al-Zamil House, which has previously hosted many debates and discussions, as the staging centre for the Forum.

Saudi woman journalist sentenced to 60 lashes

The Saudi woman accused of being an accomplice to Abdul Jawad, the Saudi youth who boasted on TV about his sexual exploits was sentenced by the Jeddah Summary Court in October.

Anti-Smoking regulations fail to see the light of day

Dr Majid Al-Munif, Head of the Anti-smoking program at the Ministry of Health said that regulations approved by the Cabinet in 2003 have yet to be implemented and there is, as yet, no date fixed to implement them. Under the regulations People who smoke in public may face a fine of SR200 whilst people or companies who plant tobacco in the Kingdom could be fined SR20,000.

Helen Smith to be buried at last

For three decades the body of Helen Smith has lain in a mortuary in a Leeds hospital, The British nurse, who fell from a sixth floor balcony to her death in Jeddah in 1979 has been kept as ‘evidence’ at the insistence of her father, Ron, who continues to maintain that his daughter was murdered and that there had been a cover-up by British and Saudi officials.

Ron who is now 81 and reportedly in ill health was reportedly prompted to organise Helen’s funeral after his ex-wife, Jeryl-now 71, insisted that they should deal with it while they were still alive.