



## Chairman's letter



After a busy first quarter of '98, I hope you and your families had the opportunity to enjoy a breather over the recent Eid Holidays.

During this first quarter we held two Embassy Briefings in addition to the third Saudi BBG's Inter - Regional meeting in February. The first was in January and another in March. At the latter we had a record attendance of 70, comprising 58 members and 12 guests, including Suresh Khanna, Director of Export Promotion, DTI Overseas Trade Services. Another guest was Robert Newell, Director General of the Royal Overseas League who gave a presentation on the ROSL. Despite his problems with an uncooperative slide projector (not British-made as someone remarked!!) Robert gave an entertaining presentation. The increasing attendance at the briefings, prompted the Executive Committee to reschedule the AGM to coincide with the next briefing on 2nd May, in order to attract a larger number of members to the AGM.

In March we also received Trade Missions from

the Northern Development Company and the Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland, and a seminar on Project Finance was also held at the Chamber of Commerce by the Export Credits Guarantee Department (E.C.G.D.), of the U.K. After the seminar, which I found most informative, I invited one of the speakers, Martin Crane, to speak at one of our functions later in the year and I am pleased to say that he accepted.

On a lighter note, in March I attended a race meeting at the Riyadh Horse Race Club courtesy of G.P.T. Special Project Management who sponsored the Ministry of Justice Cup and it was pleasing to see this British company's logo all around the stadium. However I could not find Ladbroke's or William Hill's!!

I have recently been informed by Jim Sillars of the Arab-British Chamber of Commerce (ABCC) that Michael Blandford, formerly the DTI Export Promoter for Saudi Arabia has joined the ABCC. Michael, whom many of you will remember from his frequent visits to Riyadh over recent years, is looking forward to building the ABCC's relationship with the BBGs. On our part the RGBB also look forward to playing our role in this process. A further indication of the ABCC's intentions in this direction can be seen in Jim Sillars' summary of the 6th Intergulf Conference proceedings which is published elsewhere in this Newsletter.

A notable occasion in March was the visit to Riyadh

of the Right Honourable George Robertson M.P., Secretary of State for Defence. The Minister was received separately by His Majesty King Fahd, Crown Prince Abdullah and HRH Prince Sultan who also hosted a lunch for him following their talks. The lunch with Prince Sultan was attended by a significant number of high-ranking Saudi ministers and princes which was seen as a positive signal from the Saudi Arabian government and augurs well for Saudi-British relations.

In April we had an even more notable occasion when our Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Tony Blair visited Jeddah to meet with the King and Crown Prince. Due to a very intensive program, which included several Middle Eastern countries, Riyadh was not included on the P.M.'s schedule on this occasion. However I and several other members of the community from Riyadh joined our Ambassador and his team at a reception held at the Consulate-General and also attended a Royal Diwan reception and a dinner at the Al-Salam Palace, hosted by Crown Prince Abdullah. The P.M. has subsequently stated that his visit was a positive and fruitful one, a view which was echoed by several Saudi Ministers with whom I had the opportunity to speak to during the visit.

By the time this Newsletter reaches you we will have held our A.G.M., so it was considered opportune for my Annual Report to be included in this edition (see page 4) -

I hope you will find it interesting reading.