

Saudi Arabia after Nine Eleven

Special Briefing

by Nigel Astbury

If we were to say that we had saved the best until last, we would be doing a disservice to our earlier Speakers. However, the final Special Briefing of the year, which took place at the Embassy on Monday, December 18, 2006, was a riveting occasion. Khaled Al Maeena, world acclaimed journalist and editor of the Arab News addressed 130 members and their guests for 20 minutes without notes and free from the cyber-seduction of PowerPoint. Then under Chatham House rules, he invited and received unrestricted questioning from the audience.

The central theme of the presentation was the way in which the tragic events of September 11, 2001, had firstly changed the world forever and secondly impacted Saudi society as a whole. The unexpected demonisation from the outside world seems to have had a surprisingly positive impact nationally in terms of encouraging society to examine itself, to redefine its values and to re-address its interaction with the outside world. The long-term consequence of these dynamics has been to support social changes already taking place in Saudi Arabia.

In response to questions from the floor Khaled regaled us with tales of locally famous saxophonists, jazz bands and stage play actors and an international skydiving champion from Saudi Arabia. On a more sombre note he dealt with the deliberate tactics that are on occasion, maliciously used to confuse politics with religion and illustrated his comments with examples known to the audience. At the same time he highlighted the common ground that "people of the book" enjoy in terms of tolerance and peace.

Somewhat surprisingly, from your reporter's point of view, no one asked when women were going to be able to drive. Everyone's minds must have been on loftier intellectual plains!

Khaled Al-Maeena is a well-known businessman, journalist, editor, PR consultant and media personality in Saudi Arabia. He received his education in several

countries including the United States, Britain and Pakistan.

Among many of his media and diplomatic achievements was that he represented Saudi Arabia at several important summit meetings in the Arab World including the Arab summits of Baghdad and Morocco. He was a member of diplomatic delegations to the People's Republic of China and Russia, after relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia were established with them.

He led the Arab News team throughout the Gulf crisis and is accredited with being the first person to bring newspapers back into liberated Kuwait. Al-Maeena is also well known as a regular political and social columnist for Asharq Al-Awsat, Arab News and Urdu News. He also is a columnist for several publications such as Gulf News, Dubai, Times of Oman and China Post.

Khaled Al-Maeena, the president and CEO of Saudi Public Relations Company (SPRC), is currently the editor-in-chief of Arab News, the largest English daily newspaper in the Middle East. Al-Maeena is no stranger to this post as he previously held it for eleven years, from 1982 until 1993. He was also an anchorman on Saudi Television and has hosted popular talk shows.



SPECIAL BRIEFINGS TO CONTINUE IN 2007

RGBB is planning to continue to arrange Special Briefings for the foreseeable future. A total of six are already planned for 2007. Special Briefings started in 2005 and SABB has sponsored a total of eight as follows:

September 2005 - Mutaq Al Morished SABIC
SABIC and the Petrochemical Industry in the Middle East

December 2005 - Mohammed Al Tuwaijr,
SABB-Market Trends

February 2006 - Muhammed Al Agil
Jarir -The Jarir Story

April 2006 - Lubna Hussain NBC Anchor & Journalist
Women Journalists in 21st Century Saudi Arabia

June 2006 - Saad bin Dhafer
STC Telecommunications in 21st Century Saudi Arabia

September 2006 - Mohammed Al Sarhan
Al Safi-Danone, The JV Story

November 2006 -
HH Prince Abdullah bin Faisal bin Turki Al Saud
Ennessi. The Investment Climate in Saudi Arabia

December 2006 - Khaled Al Maeena Arab News
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Historically SABB sponsored the buffet suppers at Special Briefings. As indicated above, with the period of SABB's sponsorship now complete, RGBB proposes to continue with the programme and to fund the cost of the related buffet suppers from members' subscriptions.