

MARKS & SPENCER

Al Faridah

Al Faridah Trading Agencies Co.

After months of speculation, Marks & Spencer revealed their plans for Saudi Arabia at a press conference held at Riyadh's Inter-Continental Hotel early in June.

Nick Meyer, the General Manager for Saudi Arabia was accompanied on the panel by Clive Nickolds an M&S Divisional Director. Fawaz Al Hokair & Talal A Maiman, both part owners in the Al Faridah company which will hold the franchise for the Saudi Arabia were also in attendance. Apart from those present, Al Faridah is also part owned by Ahmed Al Shaikh and Kingdom Holdings, one of HRH Prince Waleed bin Talal's companies.

Marks & Spencer already has strong links in the Middle East with existing stores in the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar but their arrival in Saudi Arabia will be more than just a token presence. An investment level of over SR100 million is being talked about.

In addition to the store planned for Al Mamlaka on Olaya, Marks & Spencer will be opening at the Jamjoun Centre in Jeddah later this year as well as a second Riyadh store downtown at Galleria (the former Festival Mall). Plans for 2002 include a second store for Jeddah, on Tahlia Street, a third store for Riyadh on what will be an extension to the Sahara Shopping Mall. In addition and scheduled for early in 2003, their first Eastern Province store is already on the drawing board in Dammam.

Marks & Spencer appear to be going out of their way to recruit a local workforce and their first trawl for the Al Mamlaka store has resulted in a good percentage of Saudi applicants for both male and female positions.

Almost all the departments featured in a typical UK store will be available in Riyadh however when talking to Nick Meyer he obviously felt that they would do extremely well on Lingerie, Childrenswear and Beauty products. Individual products are all drawn from the M&S catalogue of over 10,000 product lines and although no food items are planned at this stage, if and when Saudi authorities ease their restrictions on food items from the UK it is hoped to add a foodhall later in the development.

Good news for UK account holders is that they will be able to use their M&S Chargecard in the store. Although new cards are unlikely to be issued in Saudi Arabia, Al Faridah executives are looking at some sort of loyalty card for local shoppers. Watch this space!

For the first time in Saudi Arabia, the Al Mamlaka Centre will include a ladies only floor staffed by ladies. Senior male management will be prevented from being on the floor during opening hours and visitors will be required to lift their veils as a security check. Construction and fitting out at the centre is currently on schedule and M&S expect to invite RGBB members and their wives to a pre-opening tour of the store in September.



Nick Meyer



Far Left:
Fawaz Al Hokair
being interviewed for
TV.



Left:
Nick Meyer answers
questions from a
local journalist