

The spell between summer and Ramadan is always busy, but this autumn has been particularly active. Early in September, HRH Prince Saud Al Faisal visited London to meet the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, reflecting the continuing close consultation between our two governments on matters such as the search for a just peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

The common commercial and economic interests of UK and Saudi Arabia are clear. Our annual bilateral trade in goods and services is worth over \$7.5 billion. The United Kingdom has much to offer as Saudi Arabia tackles the challenges of population growth, diversification and reform. During October, British companies and experts are holding seminars in Saudi Arabia on development of the water sector, regulation of privatised power and the encouragement of SMEs. The First Minister of Wales, Rhodri Morgan, made a presentation to senior Saudi officials and businessmen - under the chairmanship of HH Prince Abdullah bin Faisal bin Turki - explaining how Wales has successfully transformed itself by attracting foreign investment.



The Saudi-British Joint Business Council met in Riyadh on 19 October, and discussed these and other areas where the two Kingdoms' private sectors can work more closely together.

In September a mission of British universities visited Jeddah, Riyadh and Eastern Province: the prospects for cooperation in the education field, supported by the British Council, are strong and Saudi student numbers in the UK are rising. Five more British trade and investment missions will have visited Saudi Arabia by the end of October: one each from Wales (led by Rhodri Morgan), Northern Ireland and Scotland – the latter concentrated on oil and gas; one led by the Middle East Association; and one focussed specifically on telecommunications and information technology, led by the former UK telecoms regulator Sir Bryan Carsberg. Members of the Scottish mission held a workshop at the Eastern Province Chamber of Commerce on training for the oil and gas sector. A delegation of UK companies exhibited at Saudi Build in Riyadh.

As well as the Welsh trade mission and his presentation on foreign investment, Rhodri Morgan



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had a full visit to Riyadh. He called on HRH Prince Salman, the Minister of Commerce, the Minister of Planning and PTT, the Investment Authority, and Sheikh Abdul Rahman al-Jeraisy. The Ambassador held a dinner for him with senior Saudi businessmen and officials, and a reception for as many Welsh people as we could find in Riyadh. Rhodri Morgan also had an interesting lunchtime discussion with Saudi alumni of Welsh universities. (Did you know that there are 200 Saudis studying in Wales this academic year alone?) His final act, as reported elsewhere in this issue, was to tee off the hugely successful British Community Golf Tournament in aid of the Saudi Disabled Children's Association.

UK goods exports to Saudi Arabia have been holding up well: £860m in the first seven months of this year, roughly level with the same period of 2001.



Pictures From the top:

1, A delegate from the Invest Northern Ireland Trade Mission meets with local businessmen; Hazem Midani & Bassem Al Agha.

2, Rhodri Morgan AM First Minister for Wales, meets Missioners and visitors at a reception in Riyadh.

3, Paul Gent from Saudi Pan Gulf with Tom Beasley, from Exitile at SaudiBuild in October.

4, Mike Hurley, BTO Alkhobar with Andrew Jones from Setten & Durward at the WTI Mission briefing.