

MA'ASALAMA



In December, I shall be leaving Saudi Arabia having spent six very happy years in the "Magic Kingdom". Unfortunately, Lisa and the boys are already back in the UK, but like me, they will miss Saudi and the friends we have made here. At the same time, we are also looking forward to a home posting, and seeing family and friends there more regularly.

sometimes very difficult circumstances; they should be commended for this.

On the commercial front, there is still much more we can do to help attract UK businesspeople to Saudi. It is a fascinating market, with great prospects for Britain. My successor, Peter Millman will have a challenging job and I wish him every success. He is fortunate to have the support of a very well organised commercial team across the Kingdom.

During my time here, I have also been very grateful for the enormous support, which I have received from the local British business community, in particular from members of the RGBB and BBG to whom I say "shukran jazeelan". I am sure that Peter will receive similar support.

To many people in the western world, Saudi Arabia is known only as an oil producing country located somewhere in the Middle East. Even the term "Arabia" is sufficient in some quarters to conjure up images of bearded strangers (I wasn't referring to Stuart Sadler!) swathed in unfamiliar clothing, riding camels through vast areas of barren sand. As we all know, there is rather more to this remarkable Kingdom than just sand and oil.

Lisa and I have many fond memories of Saudi Arabia. Jeddah and Riyadh are quite different postings, but we have enjoyed them both very much. We have much to be thankful for - our youngest son Ewan was born in Jeddah in 1999. The Vice Governor of Al Jouf (a Prince) was fascinated to hear this when I called on him during a visit to the region. In fact, he wondered if Ewan would get a Saudi passport. Unfortunately children of resident diplomats are ineligible!

When we arrived in Jeddah in December 1998 we thought that we were coming to one of the safest countries in the world. Saudi still has a very low crime rate, but as we all know, the scourge of international terrorism has reared its ugly head here in recent years and regrettably this has changed the way we lead our lives. Despite this, the staff at our diplomatic missions in the Kingdom along with the British community have continued to soldier on in

Finally, I shall certainly be sad to leave. The last 3 years in Riyadh have flown by. I would like to have completed the treble and been posted to Al Khobar too, but maybe another day inshallah ma'asalama.

Gareth O'Brien



And finally we get to say cheerio to someone who was going for the record in diplomatic time in the Kingdom. Known for his enthusiasm for all things sporting, Gareth made the front cover of the last RGBB News when he played in the Charity Cricket Match earlier his year.

AND FINALLY

Called lots of things during his time here, in recent weeks he has acquired the nickname "Gazza" after watching Arsenal's lack lustre performance. Things have got so bad, he was secretly filmed 'dancing' in a Liverpool shirt! Extensive research through archived images also threw-up this pose of the day he nearly 'went local' and his time as a Welsh rugby supporter... (That's one Stuart won't believe!)

Joking aside, I can think of many individuals whose time in the Kingdom has been improved with Gareth's business assistance and social company. I'm sure that all readers will want to join me in wishing him & Lisa all the best for the future. It's been great getting to know you, Good Luck in your next posting.

How long, I wonder, will we need to wait for the 'Where are they now shot'?...Ed