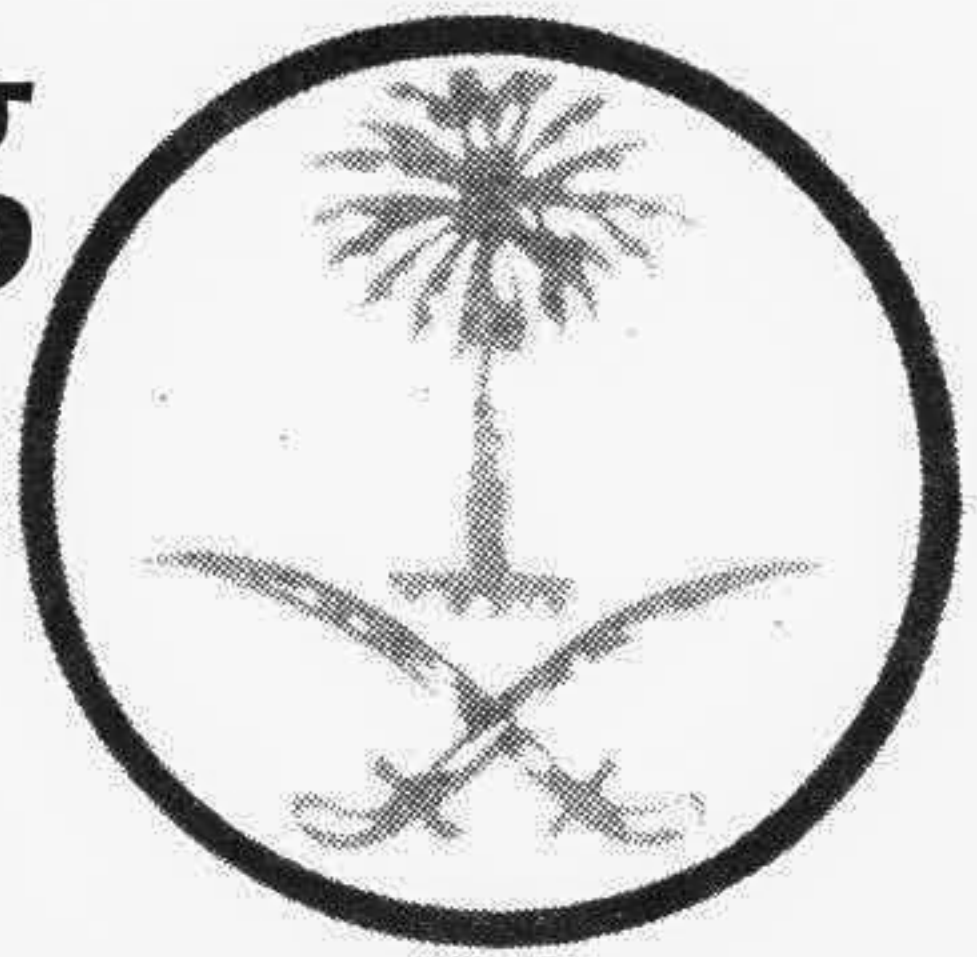




# Centenary of the Founding of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



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Late King Abdul Aziz

## A Remarkable Centenary

by Arshad-uz Zaman

*From its appearance on the map as a new state a hundred years ago, Saudi Arabia has taken remarkable strides and the landscape has changed beyond recognition. The Bedouin half asleep under date trees is only for children's folklore. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is definitely a modern, developed country and is continuously playing a responsible role in world affairs.*

ON 15 February 1999 the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia completes hundred years of her journey. By all accounts it has been a remarkable journey.

This desertic peninsula washed on either side by the Red Sea and the Gulf, has the aspect of a harsh country with sand dunes and rocky landscape. From a country of Bedouins it has now effectively joined the mainstream of civilization. It is a dramatic story.

In 1902 King Abdulaziz, the founder of the present Royal family captured Riyadh, which became the capital of the Kingdom. King Abdulaziz then spent 31 years of his reign in a single minded pursuit of bringing together a chaotic and divided land. He passed away in 1953 and the mantle fell on his son Saud. King Saud proceeded to modernise the state and give it all the institutions required of a modern state. King Saud was followed by King Faisal whose reign lasted from 1964 to 1975. He was assassinated in his bed in 1975 by a nephew. Yet the foundations of the new state

had been properly laid and nothing could stop the forward march of the Kingdom. King Faisal was followed by King Khalid and on his death was followed by the present King Fahd bin Abdulaziz. The Crown Prince is Prince Abdullah, who has wide powers. In fact during the recent illness of King Fahd, Crown Prince Abdullah has managed the affairs of the State. Thus throughout its century old history of the Saudi family, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has enjoyed remarkable stability.

Saudi Arabia is nearly 2.25 million sq. kilometres in area and has a coastline of 1900km on the Red Sea and 549km on the Gulf. Saudi Arabia occupies most of the Arabian peninsula in the south western corner of Asia. The census of 1992 recorded a total population of nearly 17 million of whom nearly 5 million were foreigners.

Oil was discovered in the Eastern province during King Abdulaziz's reign in 1938. If there is one single event that has transformed the desert

humming with modern life, it was the discovery of oil. The reserve of oil is so great that it is mind boggling. Of all the OPEC (Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries) member states Saudi Arabia is by far the largest producer and her attitude while fixing oil prices is liable to tilt the scale.

The extraction and marketing of oil of Saudi Arabia has been the exclusive privilege of giant US oil companies. The oil price remained pegged at a low level around 3 US Dollars a barrel. There was a dramatic change in the situation with the Ramadan War of 1973 followed by oil embargo by the Arab oil exporters. This plunged oil hungry West in total darkness and the oil price sky rocketed. The US, the leader of the world, has since taken the situation in hand and oil has once again become a commodity whose price is dictated more by the buyers than the sellers.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has used its immense wealth from oil to nation building activities. Nowhere it is more evident than the field of

education. From nomadic Bedouins they have been put into class rooms. The illiteracy rate of the Kingdom has come down to 25.1 per cent. The UNESCO was so impressed by the performance of the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that it awarded the eradication of illiteracy prize for 1996 to Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia boasts of seven universities which is campus facilities, equipment and staffing are to match the best anywhere. The picture in the field of health is equally spectacular. Health services in Saudi Arabia are free to citizens and foreign residents alike. Up to 1996 the number of hospitals in the country reached 285 and there are 2315 health care centres. The number of hospital beds has reached 40,000 a ratio of 1.5 beds per 1000 population. There are a number of specialized hospitals notable among which is King Faisal specialist hospital in Riyadh. Indeed development of modern medical facilities is so spectacular that Saudi Arabia should be in the category

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King Fahd Bin Abdul Aziz



### MESSAGE

By the Grace of Almighty Allah, the people of Saudi Arabia, at home and abroad, are observing to-day the centenary celebrations, commemorating the founding of the kingdom amidst pomp and grandeur. It is still fascinating to recall that one hundred years ago King Abdul Aziz, led by an unshakable spirit and a noble objective, reconquered Riyadh with a handful of men and re-established the Saudi State to serve Islam, for that matter the whole of mankind. Thanks to those illustrious persons who ruled over the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with singular devotion to make it a land of peace and prosperity, and the 'heartland' of Islam. As we are celebrating the happy Day, it is befitting the occa-

sion to recall the contributions of the founder of the state King Abdul Aziz and his able sons, including the present Monarch, The Custodian of The Two Holy Mosques King Fahd Bin Abdul Aziz. While inaugurating the centenary celebrations, The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, has, in keeping with the spirit of the occasion, declared that the Kingdom would maintain brotherly ties with other Arab and Islamic countries and pursue policies founded on Sharia.

To recall the historical significance of the Day, it is worthwhile to mention that it was on the 5th of the month of Shawal 1319 H that King Abdul Aziz succeeded in regaining his heritage by re-capturing the capital Riyadh. Thus, restoring the rule of Al-Saud to a region where the family had ruled two kingdoms, stretching over vast areas of the Arabian Peninsula and beyond: the first of which arose more than 250 years ago. The Founder of the Kingdom King Abdul Aziz spent thirtyone years in a single-minded devotion towards unification of an erstwhile divided, chaotic and troublesome peninsula. He passed away on 2 Rabi Al-Awwal 1373 H, corresponding 9 November, 1953 AD. After his death, the responsibility of running the state passed on to his sons, who faithfully trod the golden path that was chalked out by their illustrious father, King Saud Bin Abdul Aziz was the first in line holding the reins from 1953 to 1964 AD. He was followed by King Faisal Bin Abdul Aziz who reigned from 1964 to 1975 AD. He was succeeded by King Khalid Bin Abdul Aziz who passed away in 1982 AD. Upon the death of King Khalid the then Crown Prince Fahd Bin Abdul Aziz was proclaimed as the King and Prince Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz as the Crown Prince.

King Fahd Bin Abdul Aziz has been at the helm of many of the Kingdom's achievements. His unique leadership qualities, political acumen, farsightedness and tireless efforts of development of the country have endeared him to the people. The landmarks of his rule include, expansion of the two holy mosques and promulgation of four important laws, namely, the basic law of the government, the Shura Council Statute, Regional Administration Statute and the Statute of the Council of Ministers.

On this great occasion we share our joys and aspirations with the brotherly people of Bangladesh with whom the people of Saudi Arabia have established historical, religious and cultural bonds through ages.

**Abdullah Omar Barry**  
Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Bangladesh

## Serving the Global Islamic Community

"WE shall make every effort to strengthen our relations with our brothers in Muslim and Arab countries, and we shall do our utmost for the Muslim community". This statement, made by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Fahd Bin Abdul Aziz, reflects the depth of Saudi Arabia's dedication to Islam and to the service of Muslims worldwide.

Saudi Arabia's commitment to serve the Muslim community takes many forms. The Kingdom has provided tens of billions of dollars in aid throughout the world. To allow Muslims to make the annual pilgrimage to the Holy Mosque in Mecca in safety and comfort, it has built a vast network of airports, seaports, roads and other facilities, and it has invested huge sums on the expansion of the Holy Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah. It is active in ventures to promote the interests of Muslims everywhere.

Saudi Arabia has also undertaken a range of other, albeit less visible, programmes. One of these is the effort to serve Muslim minority communities in non-Muslim countries. Tens of millions of Muslims have settled outside the historic Islamic world. Over time, their communities have prospered and grown and have been supplemented by the conversion to Islam of large numbers of people. As the birthplace of Islam and its heartland, Saudi Arabia feels a special responsibility not only to the Islamic world, but also to Muslims living outside of it. To fulfill that responsibility, Saudi Arabia has over the past few decades undertaken to meet the spiritual needs of this vast and growing community of believers and to strengthen its ties with the Islamic world.

To best realize this objective the Kingdom has approached it from several angles. The primary channel has been to establish mosques and Islamic centers in areas with large Muslim communities. Although begun much earlier, this effort was accelerated in the 1980s and 1990s, with the result that today 210 Islamic centers have been built throughout the world with funds from Saudi Arabia.

These centers are complexes designed to meet not only the spiritual requirements, but also the cultural and social needs of Muslim communities. Generally, they include a large mosque, classrooms for students a library and auditoriums and halls for conferences exhibitions and cultural seminars.

Once established, these centers attract Muslims from miles around who gather to pray, especially on the Muslim Sabbath, Friday. The centers also perform important educational, social and cultural functions. They provide courses in Islamic studies, extremely popular offerings for Muslim families who want their children to receive proper religious training. Additionally, these complexes are important gathering places where Muslims of different backgrounds get together for exhibitions and cultural events, thus bridging cultural differences for Muslims of varying origins.

These centers range in size from vast complexes capable of accommodating thousands of visitors to those designed for small groups of Muslims. The most significant are located in Washington DC, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Madrid, London, Rome, Paris, Bonn, Brussels.

Geneva, Tokyo, Toronto, Vienna, Lisbon, Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro.

The two newest of these complexes were opened in July in suburban Los Angeles and Edinburgh, Scotland both gifts of King Fahd to the Muslim communities in these two cities. The focal point of each of the new facilities is a large mosque built according to traditional Islamic architectural designs. Standing out as attractive landmarks, these mosques are designed in a way to ensure that they are in harmony with their neighborhoods. Both of these complexes have large Islamic centers equipped with all

the necessary modern facilities.

In areas where the Muslim community is not as large, yet still in need of a spiritual center smaller mosques have been built with Saudi Arabian funds. Such mosques have been established at 1,500 locations in Asia, Europe, Africa, Australia and North and South America.

In addition to directly funding the establishment of Islamic centers and mosques throughout the world, Saudi Arabia has either formed or supports the activities of a large number of specialized organizations dedicated to serving Muslims inside and outside the Islamic world. These include the

Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the Muslim World League, the King Faisal Foundation, the World Assembly of Muslim Youth and other entities dedicated to serving Muslims throughout the world. The Kingdom has also formed special organizations, such as the International Islamic Relief Organization and the Higher Committee for the Collection of Donations for Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as numerous social and cultural institutions.

These bodies are active throughout the world, supporting religious, political and social causes that impact the Muslim community. They were in the forefront of the international effort to condemn and then halt the Serbian atrocities committed against Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina and are working to do the same for the Muslims of Kosovo. They collect funds to alleviate the sufferings of disaster victims worldwide, both Muslim and non-Muslim, and to rehabilitate societies hurt by manmade and natural calamities.

These organizations are dedicated to serving the needy throughout the world, regardless of their religion. They provide funding and technical as-

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## Heartiest Felicitations on the occasion of the Centenary Celebrations of the Founding of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



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