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A blast from the past

This Saudi National Day, we look back at how we used to be

National Day 2019

#WHATCHANGED

Rise and fall of the religious police

How the decision to limit the CPVPV's powers played a major role in bringing the Kingdom back to its moderate self

Aseel Bashraheel Jeddah



The role of the Saudi Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (CPVPV) — better known as the religious police — has always been to advise and guide society to become better Muslims.

However, after the Kingdom adopted a hard line religiously and socially during the post-1979 Sahwa (Islamic Awakening) era, the religious police strayed from their original intent. Fueled by an extreme ideology and with powers unchecked, this organized group of pious men turned from friend to foe of society. In recent years, Saudi Arabia has implemented a series of reforms under Vision 2030, which aims to better the lives of its people and, according to its architect Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, bring society back to moderate Islam.

Perhaps one of the least hyped but most significant reforms was the decision to strip the religious police of its unchecked power. This was an unprecedented, risky yet necessary move that the Saudi government had avoided for decades.

The role of the CPVPV, which was established in 1940, has always been to serve as society's spiritual guide. Back then, it — and society as a whole — happily saw religion and modernization coexist.

Sheikh Ahmad bin Qasim Al-Ghamdi, a cleric and former director of the religious police in Makkah, recalls the harmony that existed before 1979. "In those days, parents behaved in a pure and natural way. I don't recall hearing anyone inciting hatred and calling for the exclusion of others who practice different religions, doctrines or culture," he said. "In general, they were an example of tolerance, optimism and openness."

School curricula promoted openness, coexistence and independent thinking. The culture of fanaticism, extremism, hate, death, exclusion of the other, and fear of scientific and civic development had not yet infiltrated the education system, said Al-Ghamdi.

"Our parents and grandparents simply expressed that Saudi spirit through true and sincere religiosity, untainted by political views or ethical exaggeration," he added. "The culture of Saudi society prior to 1979 was moderately religious and into life."

Al-Ghamdi said Saudi women expressed their best character back then. They had strong and confident personalities, free from unreasonable restrictions in their dress and behavior.

But the spread of extremism led to a decline in their status and the disappearance of their role in Saudi society. Similarly, the creative arts, which had been flourishing, suffered from restrictions later on.

In 1976, the religious police started to expand and evolve when its branches in Hijazi and Najd merged into one body by Royal Decree 64, which appointed Sheikh Abdulaziz Al-Sheikh as its president. Four years later (and following the events of 1979), on Sept. 5, 1980, Royal Decree 37 was issued to establish a working system for the religious body.

It introduced four new sanctions: The formation of the general presidency of the religious police; setting the basis and authority of its president; the appointment, promotion and discipline of members and staff; and its duties in towns and villages. "This development was considered a quantum leap administratively and legally for the religious police," said Al-Ghamdi.

Extremists sought not only to make society's old ways look like sinful, but to promote this obscurantist image abroad in an attempt to create a vast civilizational gap between Saudi Arabia and the civilized world, he added.

In 1979, Juhayman Al-Otaibi and his followers threatened the sanctity and safety of the Grand Mosque in Makkah by attacking its guests with explosives and guns. In the aftermath, Saudi Arabia saw the rise of the Sahwa movement. Abdulaziz Al-Khedr, author of the book "Saudi: A History of a Country and Community," said media discretion was the only way to minimize the damage.

"The case was closed rapidly after their sentences were announced, and it wasn't even an option to point to the incident anymore. Juhayman's name was prohibited (from) mentioning in the papers," wrote Al-Khedr, who captured the palpable change that took place in TV programs and songs between 1980 and 1991, which was felt even by children.

Films were prohibited, music was played less, and female singers were banned from TV but not from radio. "There was a rise in extracurricular activities with a religious orientation," Al-Khedr wrote.

During the 1980s, Saudi society shifted markedly due to the role played by the religious police. Al-Ghamdi said: "Some influenced Saudis joined terrorist groups and followed organizations that had political motives, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Al-Qaeda, and later on Daesh." He added that the CPVPV was not aligned with the realistic requirements of modern society.

Al-Khedr described the cause of the friction between society and the religious police in an op-ed for Makkah Newspaper on Sept. 13, 2014. "What's problematic about their work is how they relate it to spaces that cover personal freedom in worship and conduct," he wrote.

The CPVPV's mission is meant to be that of advice and guidance based on kindness, far from friction with the public or obligating society with jurisprudentially controversial opinions, as well as uncorrected abuse that was sometimes carried out by some of its members, said Al-Ghamdi.

Although the religious police enjoyed the support of a large portion of society at one time, it was not like the danger it posed was not apparent to the Saudi leadership, intellectuals and concerned citizens.

One of those most concerned with the CPVPV's growing power was the late King Abdullah. His concerns proved correct when in 2002, a fire erupted in a girls' school in Makkah, and members of the religious police were reportedly accused of hindering the rescue because the girls weren't wearing abayas.

The result was 15 dead schoolgirls, an international scandal, and a fuming and incredibly frustrated King Abdullah. But because he was only crown prince at the time, and due to the poor health of King Fahd, he was unable to do anything himself or mobilize the ailing king to move forward with what he saw as necessary reform of the CPVPV.

Three years later, Abdullah became king. His approach was to try and replace the head of the religious police with a more moderate figure. Yet because of decades of bureaucracy and the nature of this body of overzealous men, moderate ideas did not travel far, and King Abdullah's solution did not solve the problem.

Members of the religious police continued to harass citizens and visitors, to the point where some died in car chases.

They destroyed musical instruments, raided beauty salons, shaved heads, whipped people, burnt books, and continued being unchecked — until an unexpected decision came out on April 11, 2016.

The Saudi Cabinet issued a royal decree that stripped the religious police of its privileges, banning its members from pursuing, questioning, asking for identification, arresting and detaining anyone suspected of a crime. They are now obliged to report back to the police and security forces if need be.

It seems as if Saudi Arabia has now regained contact with its pre-1979 self. "Major decisions are being made by the conscious political leadership today, such as allowing women to drive, reforming education, destroying the forces of extremism and violence, allowing Saudi art to return to its natural place, and starting huge economic projects such as NEOM, the Red Sea Project and others, indicating how life in Saudi Arabia is regaining its true spirit," said Al-Ghamdi.

Today's Saudi society is living in its best time, having recovered its social values, optimism and hope for the future. It is combating extremism adopted by Iran, Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood.

Saudi Arabia has also shifted its attitude toward women, allowing them into stadiums, giving them the right to obtain passports and travel without a male guardian's consent, and promoting them to leadership positions.

The religious police's role has become more lenient. Al-Ghamdi said the changes have effectively corrected the imbalance of many of its procedures, restoring its work balance and semi-enabling it to return to be a source of moderation.

"The new CPVPV has managed to defuse the strife in the relationship between its past self and society," he added.

"It has prevented the distortion and weak confidence that the people had in the procedures that were followed in the past," he said.

Those procedures "damaged the reputation of the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice as a ritual, and the reputation of the Kingdom as a state that applies the provisions of Islam."

Saudi women are once again free from unreasonable restrictions, says Sheikh Ahmad bin Qasim Al-Ghamdi, above left.

The culture of Saudi society prior to 1979 was moderately religious and into life.

CHANGES SINCE THE DEMISE OF THE RELIGIOUS POLICE

- **Valentine's Day** Previously forbidden by the religious police, Saudis have been celebrating love since 2017.
- **Cinema** On April 18, 2018, the 35-year-old ban on cinemas was lifted with a screening of "Black Panther" in Riyadh.
- **Concerts** On Jan. 30, 2017, Mohammed Abdo performed the first large-scale concert in the Kingdom. Since then, many Arab and international artists have graced Saudi stages.
- **Women driving** On June 24, 2018, women were permitted to drive.
- **Women in stadiums** Women were first allowed to attend a football match in King Abdullah Sports City in Jeddah on Jan. 12, 2018.
- **Women in higher positions at work** Saudi women have been climbing the leadership ladder, including Princess Reema bint Bandar, who became the first female Saudi ambassador in 2019, and Sarah Al-Suhaimi, chairwoman of Tadawul's board of directors.
- **Women traveling without a guardian's consent** As of August 2019, Saudi women over the age of 21 do not require a guardian's permission to travel or have a passport.

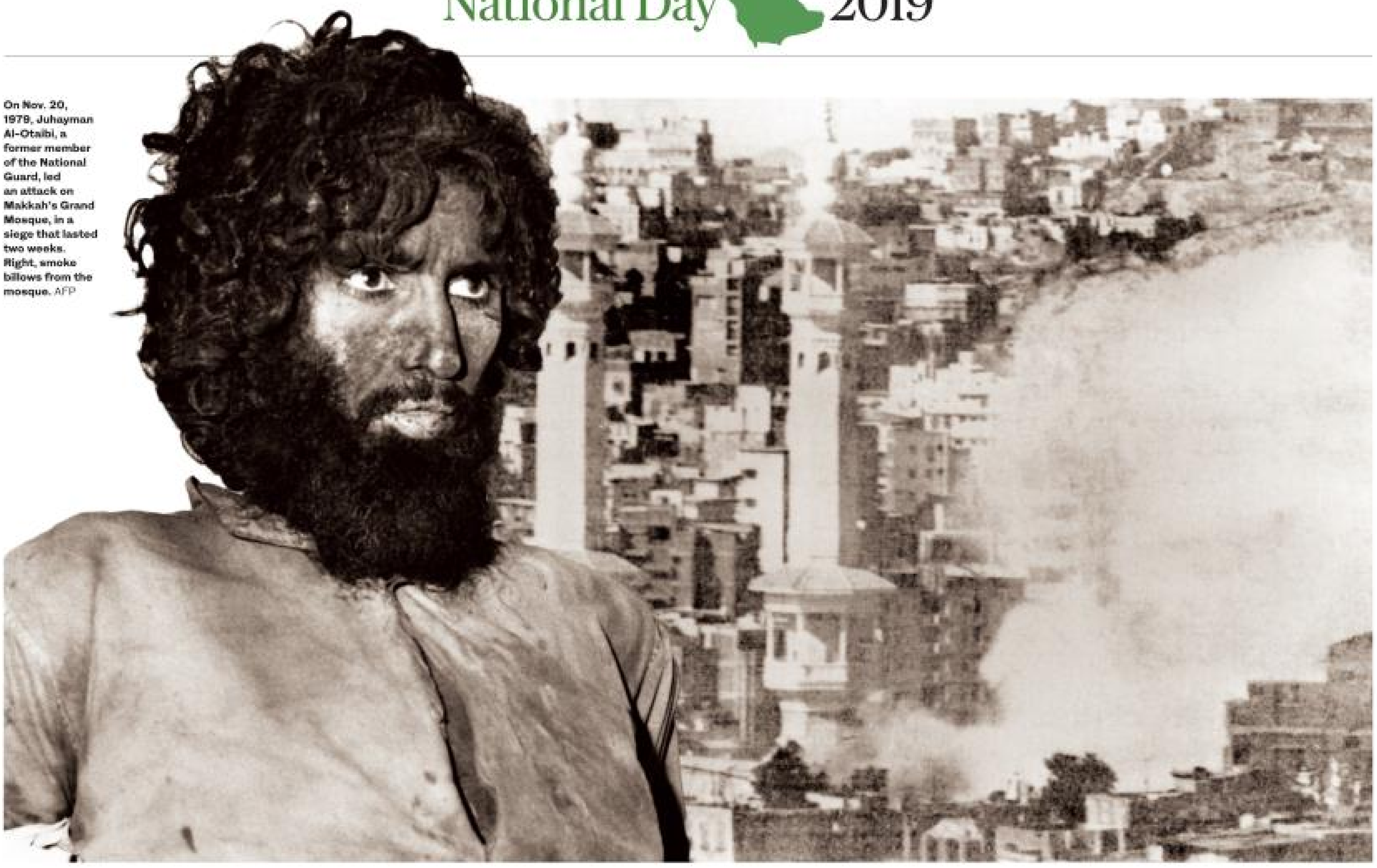
FAST FACT

37

The number of the royal decree, on Sept. 5, 1980, that granted the religious police more powers.



National Day 2019



On Nov. 20, 1979, Juhayman Al-Otaibi, a former member of the National Guard, led an attack on Makkah's Grand Mosque, in a siege that lasted two weeks. Right, smoke billows from the mosque. AFP

TERRORISM

The 'awful' siege that changed everything

In 1979, Juhayman Al-Otaibi and an armed group did the unthinkable: They took Makkah's Grand Mosque hostage

Rawan Radwan Jeddah

For decades, the infamous name Juhayman Al-Otaibi had been buried in the memories of Gen X Saudis.

On Nov. 20, 1979, a well-organized group of terrorists stormed Makkah's Grand Mosque, killing and wounding hundreds of worshippers and hostages in what came to be one of Saudi Arabia's darkest days. Al-Otaibi was the mastermind behind the terrorist attack.

Fast forward four decades, and in his first American TV interview — with CBS's "60 Minutes" — Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman vowed to bring back the Kingdom's pre-1979 moderation.

"We were living a very normal life like the rest of the Gulf countries," he said. "Women were driving cars. There were movie theaters in Saudi Arabia. Women worked everywhere. We were just normal people developing like any other country in the world until the events of 1979."

Al-Otaibi committed an atrocity in the name of religion, seizing the Grand Mosque for two weeks in a standoff with Saudi special forces.

Photos taken from fighter jets above the mosque showed the floor surrounding the Kaaba empty of worshippers, an image never witnessed before.

In a video published by the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives, the late Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al-Subayil, the imam who performed fajr (early morning) prayers on the day of the siege, recalled what he described as "one of the most significant events" of his life.



Arrested gunmen belonging to the group led by Juhayman Al-Otaibi that stormed Makkah's Grand Mosque. AFP

He said he arrived at the mosque 30 minutes before prayers but did not sense anything untoward.

"But after concluding fajr prayers ... a number of militiamen with weapons stormed the area heading toward the Kaaba," he added.

"I headed to one of the rooms, where I immediately called Sheikh Nasser bin Hamad Al-Rashed, the chief of the Presidency of the Two Holy Mosques at the time. I told him of the situation, and I had him listen to the bullets being fired. I found out a while later that they (the terrorists) were allowing pilgrims to leave the mosque's grounds."

Al-Subayil decided to leave after about four hours. He removed his mishlah (a traditional flowing outer cloak worn in the Gulf), went down to the basement, lowered his head and left with a group of Indonesian pilgrims just as two militants stood at the gates that lead outside the basement.

Soon after, the gates were chained shut, and snipers took positions in the high minarets and shot innocent worshippers.

Al-Otaibi's followers, who had taken positions in the minarets, shot at bystanders and Saudi special forces if they came too close to the mosque's grounds. An estimated 100,000 worshippers were in the mosque that morning.

The air was heavy with fear, no one knew what was happening and we were shocked to the core.

The siege shocked Saudi society, which had been living a normal life, and whose country was transforming itself from a desert nation to a sophisticated state.

Born and raised in Makkah, housewife Fajr Al-Mohandis recalled the day she heard the news, and the dreadful atmosphere in the city during "those awful two weeks."

She told Arab News: "I was a student in middle school, and just like every other day, I went to school just like all the school children did. Everyone went to their jobs, including those who worked in the Grand Mosque."

She said: "We heard gunshots during the day, and that would've been the first sign something was wrong. But we were still oblivious to the fact that a terrorist attack was taking place until our parents came to pick us up." She added: "Makkah was a very small city at that time ... and news spread fast."

Al-Mohandis recalled how schools were shut for the next two weeks. "The air was heavy with fear, no one knew what was happening and we were shocked to the core," she said.

"This was the holy city. This was the Grand Mosque. How was this even possible? As I was young it was too much to process, but residents of the city who grew up here took the responsibility of keeping it safe, assuring young ones like me that it'll be OK and Saudi special forces will free the mosque from the blasphemous group."

A former member of the National Guard, Al-Otaibi was a member of the Salafist group Jama'a Al-Salafiya Al-Muhtasibah.

He was angered by Western influence in Saudi society, and had been recruiting followers from various nationalities for years under the guise of piety.

It was later discovered that his followers smuggled ammunition by hiding it in barrels disguised as construction equipment, and in the mosque's basement and minarets, taking advantage of its expansion.

Saudi forces stormed the mosque, and the ensuing battle killed most of the terrorists, including Al-Qahtani. Sixty-seven of them were captured, including Al-Otaibi.

The siege ended on Dec. 4, 1979. On Jan. 9, 1980, well-known news presenter Hussain Najjar announced Al-Otaibi's execution.

IN NUMBERS

200

About 200 of Juhayman Al-Otaibi's followers stormed the Holy Mosque in Makkah, from various nationalities: Egypt, Kuwait, Yemen and Iraq, with the majority from Saudi Arabia.

12

soldiers killed

115

Non-comissioned officers killed

26

civilians killed

117

Al-Otaibi's followers killed

61

executed

19

imprisoned

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AFTERMATH

How an MBC drama shed light on the Makkah attack

Reckoning with a hard-line past, 'Al-Asoof' explores the aftermath of one of Saudi Arabia's most tumultuous events



Yaqoub Al-Farrhan as Juhayman Al-Otaibi in the MBC historical drama 'Al-Asoof.' Supplied

Rawan Radwan Jeddah

As with any Arab drama series, a good storyline will always be the talk of majlis, or social gatherings. These days, the conversation might take place via Twitter or Instagram, but, nevertheless, it will remain a hot topic.

That was certainly the case with MBC's "Al-Asoof" ("Winds of Change"), a historical drama that explored Saudi Arabia's transition from its desert past to the regional powerhouse it has become today.

It was a story that all Saudis wanted to hear, with lingering questions many were asking: What changed in the Kingdom and why?

The series returned to television during Ramadan, with its second season debut depicting a watershed moment in Saudi history — the shift from a moderate to ultra-conservative ideology that followed Juhayman Al-Otaibi's 1979 attack on Makkah's Holy Mosque.

The show focused on a Riyadh family during a time of social upheaval as it delved into the events surrounding the siege and its aftermath, including the infamous Awakening movement.

"Al-Asoof" was written by Abdulrahman Al-Wabil and directed by Muthanna Sobh. The cast included Naser Al-Gasabi, Abdul-Ellah Al-Sanani, Habib Al-Habib, Reem Abdullah and Yaqoub Al-Farrhan.

The Dubai-based MBC Group is committed to providing content that "discusses important events and issues," Ali Jaber, its director, told Arab News recently. "The second series of 'Al-Asoof' tackles a major historical event in Saudi Arabia ... an important process in the formation of the present society," he said.

"The MBC Group wants to explore the reality of the audience's life leading up to Al-Otaibi, who turned life in Saudi Arabia upside down, pushing the country and society to a more conservative way of life."

"Al-Asoof" deals with major intellectual changes that took place in the Saudi capital during the past five decades, including some of the most controversial events in Saudi history. The series has drawn criticism mainly from conservatives, as veteran columnist Abdulrahman Al-Rashed pointed out in a 2018 column, entitled "Why the fight against Al-Asoof?"

"Extremists are against it because they believe it is an attempt to destroy what they built during the following two decades, which they refer to as "the Awakening" — and they are right."

University professor Fatma Zain told Arab News: "I've never been too keen on following shows during Ramadan, but 'Al-Asoof' told me a story I never lived through but felt the aftermath of when I returned from my studies in the US.

> **I was asked about a character I wanted to play in a biography film. Funnily enough, I said Al-Otaibi.**

"I left Jeddah in the mid-1970s to pursue my university studies, just like many Saudis of my generation, and we never lived through the time when Al-Otaibi attacked the mosque. We heard the news on American news outlets, but never more than a few minutes on the subject. It was a confusing time for many of us," she recalled.

"I saw the change after returning in the early 1980s. Though Jeddah was less conservative than the capital, we still felt it and saw hints of it. The religious police presence was more prominent than before and more women were covered up. After watching the show's two seasons, I now know the story. I can make sense of it all. The mere name (Juhayman Al-Otaibi) was taboo, and with time it was forgotten. But questions surrounding the terrorist attack still lingered. 'Al-Asoof' provided answers that my generation needed and that the next generation can learn from."



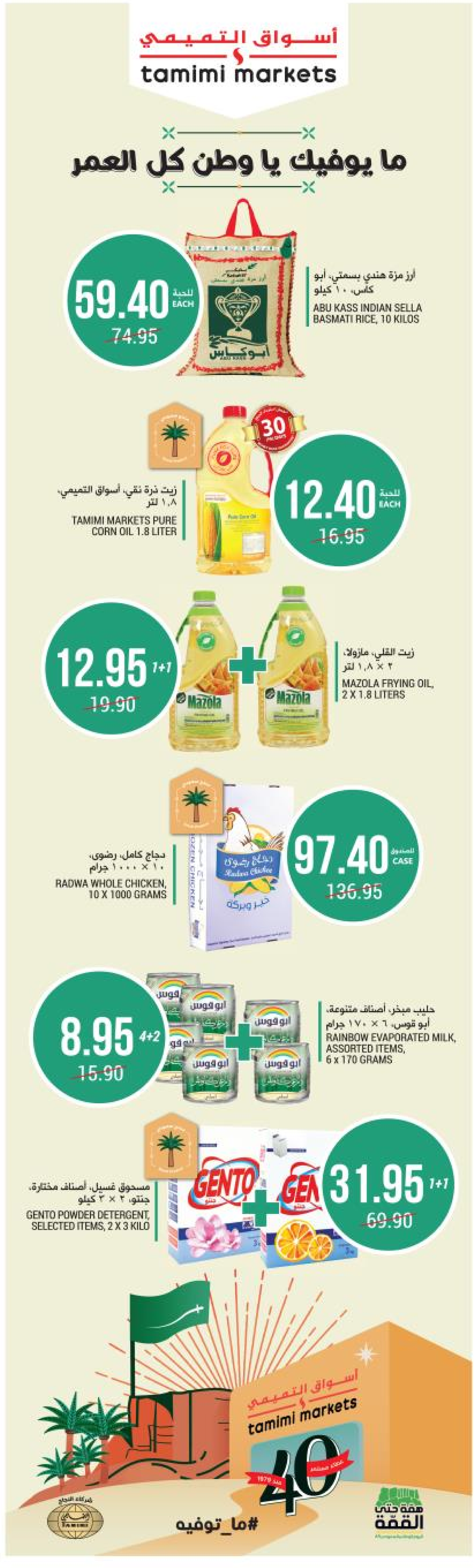
Saudi actor and producer Yaqoub Al-Farrhan, who played Al-Otaibi in the show's second season, told Arab News that the series was relevant not only to his generation, but also to future generations.

"In an interview three years ago, I was asked about a character I wanted to play in a biography film. Funnily enough, I said Al-Otaibi," said Al-Farrhan. "I gathered as much information as I could about his character and mindset, and tried to understand the mentality of someone prepared to commit such an act. That is something all extremists groups have in common, not to mention the narcissistic characteristics and similarities their leaders share."

Al-Farrhan said that in his portrayal of Al-Otaibi he tried to show the fake religious charisma common among militants. He said that the absence of detailed information about the Makkah siege was a problem. But with help of memoirs written by Nasser Al-Hizaimi, a former member of the extremist group, along with videos and reports, he reached a point where he felt comfortable in the role.

"Al-Asoof" not only told the story of a major event that took place amid a difficult geopolitical climate, but also offered viewers an insight into the Kingdom's changing society.

"It felt as if we were on a mission," Al-Farrhan said. "We had many discussions along the way and ended up with all this love for those lost in this incident and other similar incidents, yet grateful for this amazing new era we live in now."



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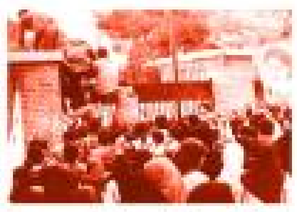
IRAN: REVOLUTION & AFTERMATH

1979

Feb. 1 — Ayatollah Khomeini returns to Iran from exile in France



Nov. 2 — US embassy in Tehran stormed and 52 Americans taken hostages



1980

January — Abolhasan Bani-Sadr appointed first president of the Islamic republic



Sep. 22 — Beginning of Iran-Iraq war, which lasts for eight years

1981

January — American hostages released, ending 444-day captivity ordeal

1988

Cease-fire declared in Iran-Iraq war

1989

Jun. 3 — Ayatollah Khomeini dies; Ali Khamenei appointed new supreme leader

August — Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani sworn in as president



1997

May — Mohammad Khatami, a reformist, wins presidential election

1999

July — Tehran witnesses pro-democracy student protests



2000

February — Conservatives lose control of parliament to moderates and Khatami supporters

2001

June — Khatami re-elected president



2003

Students stage protests against clerical establishment

2004

February — Conservatives win back control of parliament

2005

June — Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Tehran's hardline mayor, wins presidential election



2008

January — President Ahmadinejad demands US apology for past "crimes"

March — Conservatives storm back, winning more than two-thirds of seats in parliamentary election

2009

June — Presidential election pitting Ahmadinejad against Mir Hossein Mousavi marred by protests



Uranium treatment resumed

Source: Wires

Why Iran's 'Awakening' created a nightmare for the Gulf

DR. MOHAMMED AL-SULAMI



Dr. Mohammed Al-Sulami is an expert in Iranian affairs. He received his Ph.D. from Leiden University in 2014. He is the founder and chairman of Rasanah: International Institute for Iranian Studies.

To weigh the consequences of the Iranian revolution on the Gulf region, one needs to investigate Iran's relations with its Arab neighbors before the overthrow, specifically during the second era of the Pahlavi dynasty in the 1960s and 1970s when some Gulf states gained independence from Britain.

While relations in that period were not as amicable as some suggest, they were certainly not as bleak as they have been since 1979.

During this era, there was political and national rivalry as well as differences of opinion between Iran and its Arab neighbors, such as over the Arab identity of Bahrain, and the three Emirati islands.

These disagreements extended to the subject of relations with Israel, especially during the Arab-Israeli wars. However, all these differences were resolved through direct diplomatic channels and handled within a political framework, separately from any other factors.

After the 1979 revolution, there was initial optimism among Arab states since many believed that Iran's new political system would consolidate relations, given the slogans of unity that the revolutionaries had used. However, within two years this optimism had faded. The regime's policies in the region proved to be a far greater threat to Arab national security than those of any of Iran's previous leaders. The hard-line theocratic regime brought unwelcome factors to the fore and has tried tirelessly to exploit them ever since.

Political Islam was given the limelight as a result of the revolution, with religion being manipulated to serve political objectives and initiatives. The new ruling elites in Iran, especially the most senior figures, were inspired to a large extent by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and worked for decades to build bridges with the movement. The Muslim Brotherhood also promoted its political platform among Iranians through translated works, with Iranian regime figures citing many of its political slogans.

After 1979, supporters of political Islam in Arab countries felt jealous of their peers in Iran who had climbed to the highest positions of power.

As a result, they worked on implementing a similar project in Arab countries to change the political systems and to install new governments that would maintain harmony with Iran's "revolutionary" theocracy. As a result, their media rhetoric, like Iran, focused on denouncing global imperialism and the West, with the aim of wooing the masses and impassioned young people.

This fusion of political Islam with revolutionary tendencies gave rise to unwelcome developments in Arab society. The first of these was the attempt by a politically and religiously motivated extremist group led by the unpopular Juhayman Al-Otaibi to seize control of the Grand Mosque in Makkah in 1979. The link between this incident and developments in Iran at the time shows how religious devotion was exploited for political ends.

Before the 1979 revolution, sectarianism was not an issue in Gulf communities, all of which have a mixture of sects, and there were no transnational tensions or problems of a sectarian nature. All that changed after 1979, with sectarian conflicts and factional standoffs becoming a hallmark of many regional societies where Sunnis and Shiite had coexisted harmoniously for centuries, particularly in societies such as Syria and Iraq that were prone to instability due to sectarian faultlines.

An inevitable consequence of sectarianism was the rise of terrorism and the formation of terror cells along sectarian lines. Since the beginning of the 1980s, the Iranian regime has worked to support and establish extremist militias, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hezbollah Al-Hejaz in Saudi Arabia, and Hezbollah in Bahrain, as well as the Zainabiyoun Brigade, the Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade, the Popular Mobilization Units in Iraq and the global Shiite army.

In an October 1979 report issued by the CIA's Near East Department, analysts stressed that Iran's regime was working to recruit Shiite minorities in predominantly Sunni Arab countries to serve Iran's objective of undermining the security and stability of its neighbors.

While the Tehran regime focused its efforts initially on Shiite minorities in Bahrain and Kuwait, it later expanded this policy across the region to devastating effect.

The formation of such organizations had a significant impact on some young people in the Arab region, with many joining various Tehran-backed organizations during the phase known as the "Awakening," or what the regime still praises, even now, as the "Islamic Awakening."

While it is true that the war in Afghanistan contributed to the emergence of this "Awakening," the roots of this phenomena and the excessive religious zeal that the Iranian regime attempted to foment and exploit were connected with the Iranian revolution and the Muslim Brotherhood under the umbrella of political Islam.

The Iranian regime continues to use similar tools in its expansionist drive to "export the revolution." Beneath the religious extremist exterior, however, the primary force driving this expansionism is colonialist anti-Arab Persian ethno-nationalism, which twists history and geography, as well as dehumanizing and demonizing Arabs as culturally and racially inferior, as a way of justifying Iran's conquests.

Unfortunately, the regime's success in recent years is encouraging its efforts to occupy much of the region through military force, and by using these "soft" and "hard power" approaches.



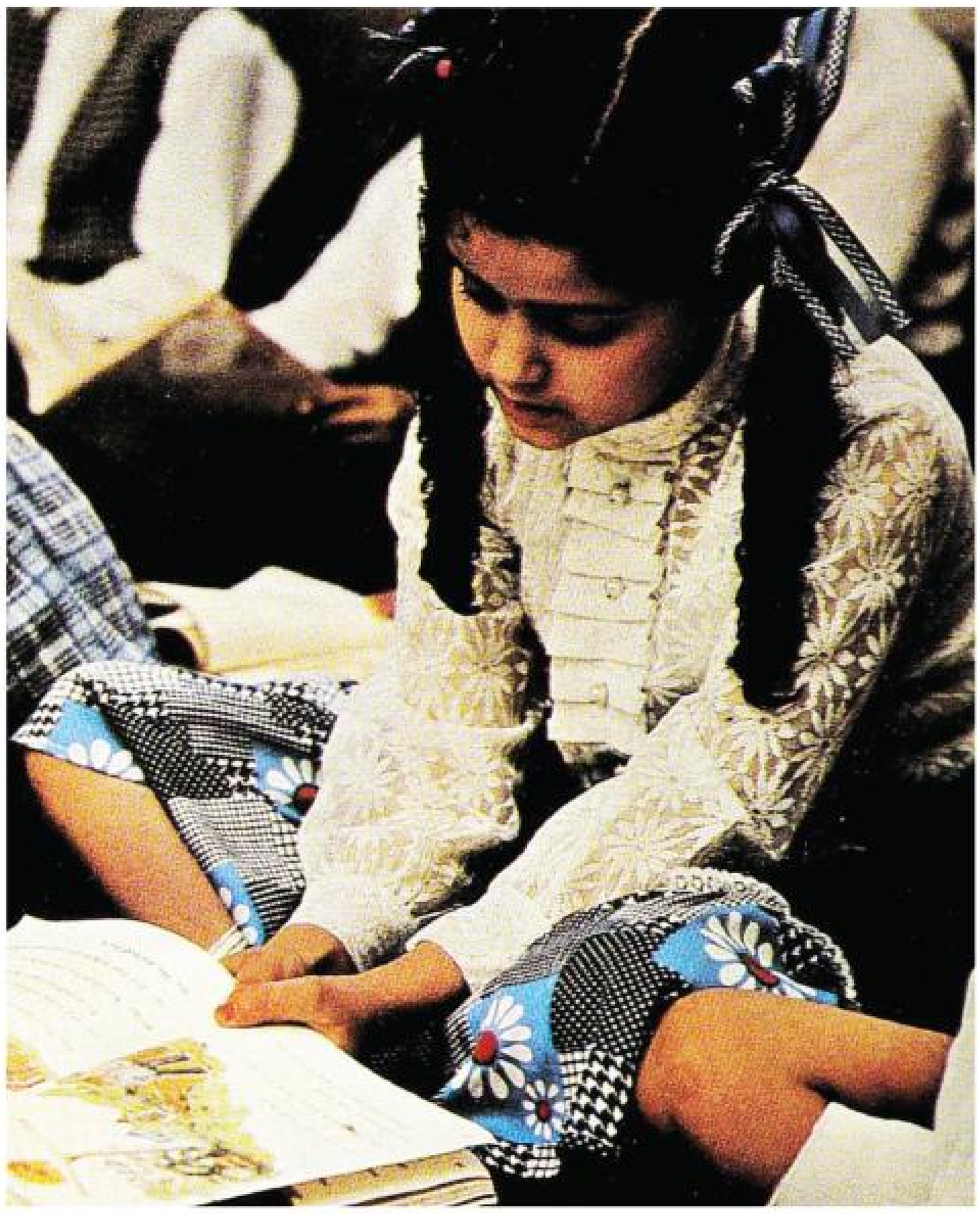
Ayatollah Khomeini greets crowds who gathered in the streets of Tehran upon his return from exile in Paris on Feb. 1, 1979, AFP

National Day 2019

SCHOOLS

Science, math and moderation





Many Saudis recall the 1970s as 'the good old days,' a time when education for both girls and boys was at its peak

Lojien Ben Gassem Riyadh

Saudi Arabia may have embarked on an ambitious program of social and religious modernization, but in many ways the reforms hark back to the 1960s and 1970s — an era when people were culturally conservative, but also tolerant of different religions and cultures.

Despite the traditional nature of Saudi society at that time, the country was progressing and evolving smoothly in line with much of the world.

However, a series of events in the 1970s brought progress in the Kingdom to a halt, with major social changes threatening tolerance and a moderate religious stance, and even overturning core teachings in schools and higher learning institutions.

The Iranian revolution in February 1979 and subsequent establishment of a hard-line Islamic government in Tehran, as well as militant Juhayman Al-Otaibi's failed uprising against the Saudi government in November that year, were key factors in the change.

Rising conservative sentiment in the region and fears of further unrest in the Kingdom had a dramatic effect on Saudi society, especially on women and education, as Amani Hamdan, an associate professor at Al-Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, in Dammam, outlined in a 2005 study, "Women and Education in Saudi Arabia: Challenges and Achievements."

Saudi Arabia was "a complex society eager to discover and enjoy the fruits of advancement, but at the same time determined to preserve its religious and cultural traditions," she wrote.

"The balance between the two has been difficult to maintain, especially with regards to women's professional space."

Education for girls was introduced six decades after it began for boys. In the 1960s, King Faisal and his wife Princess Effat encouraged female education and women's right to achieve their goals.

Saudi Arabia focused on higher education when the country entered a new era of rapid development in the early 1970's. Universities established and libraries equipped with a diverse number of books covering subjects from mechanical scions to social studies. One of Saudi Arabia's main goals was to eliminate adult illiteracy and placed a major focus on supported reading programs for young children.

Yet King Faisal struggled initially to convince conservative elements in society which opposed women's education.

Fayga Redwan, a retired school principal, recalls teaching in the 1960s and 1970s, and said that the school curriculum encouraged tolerance and moderation, especially on Islamic topics.

"General subjects such as math, science and social studies were taught by foreign teachers from Syria, Palestine, Iraq and Egypt along with Islamic subjects such as Qur'an, fiqh (jurisprudence) and hadith (collections of the Prophet's sayings)," she told Arab News.

"They were lenient in the sense that lessons were intended to offer a better understanding of our religion and the way it could enhance our lives. Teachers were never overbearing and didn't veer off-track to apply their beliefs (if they were ultra-conservative)."

"We weren't forced to memorize hundreds of the Prophet's sayings. Instead, we were expected to comprehend the messages. Comprehension was a key factor in all our subjects, but that changed in later years when curriculums were reformed," she said.

However, the growing influence of ultra-conservative clerics on daily life was quickly felt in schools, where religion became the main focus, dominating the education system at the expense of other subjects. Science, math and language teachers became religious preachers in their own classrooms.

Lessons were intended to offer a better understanding of our religion. Teachers were never overbearing.

The school system was divided along gender lines with the General Presidency for Girls' Education heavily influenced by conservative religious scholars, and the Ministry of Education for boys focusing on science subjects.

This was to ensure that women's education did not deviate from its original purpose "of making women good wives and mothers, and preparing them for 'acceptable' jobs such as teaching and nursing," Hamdan wrote.

Meanwhile, teachers began intimidating young female students, using fear to warn them of the consequences of failing to perform religious rituals.

"Girls' schools were surrounded by high walls and security screens. Each school, college or university was assigned at least two men, usually in their 50s or 60s, who were responsible for checking the identity of those who entered the school, and generally watched over the girls inside the school until they were picked up by their fathers or brothers," she said.



Saudi students reap the benefits of institutions specializing in technical and administrative studies, below left.

Former student Reema Alwshaiqer said that she had been a victim of this fear. "My religion teacher used to tell stories about hell and torture, telling us that if we didn't cover our hands with gloves and our feet with socks when we went out, we would burn in hell from our toes to our heads," she said.

By contrast, in the 1970s, many private boys' schools had language classes, physical education, swimming, football, tennis, music and theater, while private girls' schools also offered physical education, and French and English language classes.

Families in the 1960s and 1970s understood the importance of education and sent their daughters to school despite criticism from religious clerics.

Manal Al-Harbi, a former high school teacher, said: "The school system was different from one city to another. I experienced first grade in Riyadh, where wearing a hijab was mandatory for older students. I was so afraid of the 50-year-old guard who told older students to cover their hair that I started to wear a hijab even inside the school."

Al-Harbi later attended elementary school in Madinah and loved her school uniform. "Students used to wear a light gray two-piece uniform, pants and a long top with a belt. It was so comfortable. However, intermediate and secondary students used to wear long dresses with sleeves."

"Most of the teachers were Saudi, but we also had foreign teachers, mainly from Egypt, Syria and Iraq," she added.

During the 1970s there were no women's universities in Madinah. "Most girls used to enrol in King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah and stay in the female dorms. The university used to entertain the girls who lived on campus by taking them to the beach with their female friends, professors and supervisors."

Saudi graduates could also enrol in local universities or apply for government scholarships abroad, mainly to the US, which had more than 11,000 Saudi scholarship students at one time.

Many Saudis today look back on the 1970s as "the good old days."

Boys had more options when choosing college majors, and more job opportunities in both the private and public sectors.

Saud Al-Shalhoub, former general assistant auditor at the Saudi Electricity Company, told Arab News that teaching standards at Saudi universities at that time were advanced.

"I graduated from King Saud University, which was called Riyadh University, with a double major in accounting and business management. When I decided to pursue my master's degree, a lot of universities that I applied for abroad waived many courses, and I completed my master's within a year."

After graduating, Al-Shalhoub found many job opportunities in Saudi Arabia. "That would be difficult nowadays," he said.



National Day 2019

WOMEN

‘Life has changed so much. We are getting our freedoms back’

As the Kingdom’s ‘dark days’ recede into the past, Saudi women are looking to the future with renewed optimism

Noor Nugali Riyadh

Life for many young women in Saudi Arabia in the 1970s was an enjoyable mix of study, watching movies and looking forward to a normal, peaceful future in a growing society.



Traditions run deep in Saudi society, with many families in the 1970s, left, and today integrating their cultural and religious beliefs in search of a moderate way of life. Below, Sara Murad, host of MBC’s “Good Morning Ya Arab,” represents a new wave of Saudi women.

But as the decade drew to a close, an attempted terrorist overthrow and attack on the Holy Mosque in Makkah changed the lives of women and Saudi society as a whole.

Manal Aqeel, who later became an arts and crafts teacher in a government school, recalled: “We lived in peace, our children lived in peace. We knew our religion, we prayed, fasted, preformed Hajj and were kind to one another. I was in middle school when the attack happened on our Holy Kaaba and the aftermath was disastrous.

“Before the attack we would go out and live our daily lives normally. Our attire would consist of lightweight silk abayas wrapped around our waists to show off our colored skirts underneath.”

However, the seizure of the Holy Mosque by Juhayman Al-Otaibi and his militant followers in November 1979 sparked paranoia and fear among the Saudi population, and in the aftermath of the uprising people found themselves facing a rising tide of ultra-conservative restrictions in their daily lives.

“Our family gatherings before the attack consisted of all the family having dinner and enjoying our time like everyone else. But the incident changed our lives. An air of tension lingered in the air as there was surveillance. People started saying, this is halal, this is haram,” Aqeel said.

We lived in security and safety, and enjoyed our lives without complications. We didn’t even lock our doors.

Within two years, her lightweight abaya was replaced by a full-length black garment that covered her head.

“I don’t know what it was that made women resort to this? Influence? Fear? But one thing for sure was even niqabs (clothing covering the face with slits for the eyes) weren’t acceptable.”

After the events of 1979, conservatism intensified in Saudi Arabia as people adapted to a life filled with restraint and fear.

“The days before Al-Otaibi were the best. We lived in security and safety, and enjoyed our lives without complications. We didn’t even lock our doors. It was a simple life,” Aqeel remembers.

Women were TV anchors, radio presenters, actresses, teachers and more. With the oil boom, the country was flourishing. Before the terror attack, segregation was done out politeness and choice, not by force.

However, after 1979, Saudis adopted a more conservative approach to female clothing, with heavy, black abayas considered the only acceptable form of attire.

“My sister, beware of men wolves; cover yourself and you will not be harassed” was a familiar saying in the 1990s, leaving young women in fear of normal life.

Religious police encouraged the notion that women should be “hidden,” and neither heard nor seen in case their presence evoked deep desires which men could not control.

Saudi men also were left in a state of confusion, forced to look down on women as lesser beings, and with the right to control every aspect of their lives.

Fayga Redwan, a former school principal, recalls how her extended family stopped gathering on the beachfronts of Jeddah to relax with their children around, for fear of being confronted by the religious police.

“We all lived together in our big family home, my brothers and their wives and children. We would pack separate lunches as we had to segregate our picnics. Women would sit together, while our husbands and brothers sat nearby. We weren’t afraid, but there was still a sense of uncertainty,” she said.

“People’s views changed, they were skeptical at all times. They were dark days, indeed.”

Mother-of-three Haya Saeed said that the 1990s were the toughest time for women. “By then the mutawa, or religious police, had greater influence and power. I remember how frightening it was just going to a shopping mall was because they would stop us and harass us,” she said.

“We couldn’t even go to a restaurant without a male guardian, and the religious police would go from table to table to make sure that there was no indecent mingling and that the male was either father or brother.”

However, over time, the restricted freedoms young women faced after the 1979 attack began to ease. Women were given more rights to hold higher managerial positions, education was a tool, and society began to realize that their role is vital to ensure progress.

The “dark days” began to fade, ushering in a new chapter in the nation’s history.

In 2005, the late King Abdullah launched the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) for both men and women.

The initiative was welcomed by many Saudi families, who encouraged their young daughters, sisters and wives to apply — a blow to the extremists who opposed the program.

In 2010, King Abdullah appointed women to the Shoura Council, a groundbreaking move that highlighted the importance of having women in high positions.

Then, on Sept. 26, 2017, King Salman ordered that women be allowed to drive cars, another major blow to the ultra-conservatives.

In light of Vision 2030, a strict anti-harassment law was introduced in June 2018 to protect women and allow them to enjoy their newly won freedoms.

Times have changed, indeed.

Under the leadership of King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the Kingdom is regaining its former tolerance and moving ahead with lightning speed.

On Aug. 1, 2019 a decree signed by King Salman declared that Saudi women no longer require permission from a “male guardian” to travel or obtain a passport.

Saudis have always loved their country, but now their loyalty shines through. It is our duty to celebrate this day.



Young Saudi women joined social clubs throughout the Kingdom in the 1960s and 1970s, with some clubs still in operation today.

The 1970s opened new horizons for women in Saudi Arabia, allowing them to follow traditional roles or choose different career paths.

“Life has changed so much now. This change is amazing and the new generation has more confidence,” said Latifa Al-Bazeay, a travel agent.

“There was a loss of nationalism after 1979, people wouldn’t even celebrate National Saudi Day. Now we see the difference,” she said.

“Saudis have always loved their country, but now their loyalty shines through. It is our duty to celebrate this day for its greatness,” she said.

The militant extremism of 1979 left an open wound that has only healed with the reign of King Salman and the crown prince.

“We will return to what we were,” the crown prince said — famous words that have been put into action, whether by eradicating extremism, fighting terrorism or empowering women.

National Day 2019



A sampling of what Saudis would see on their TV sets in the 1970s: Clockwise from main image, a Saudi TV channel list; 'The Incredible Hulk;' Qahtah, one of the most beloved characters in 'Darb Al-Zalag;' and the Saudi TV opener.

TELEVISION AND RADIO

When Saudis turned on and tuned in

The advent of TV signalled a new era of freedom that even the fallout from the Grand Mosque siege couldn't destroy

Deema Al-Khudair Jeddah

When television came to Saudi Arabia in 1965, it was rejected by some as the "devil's handiwork."

But far from being in shock, Saudis generally were keen to embrace the new mass medium and learn what was going on in the world.

One TV station with a variety of programs was all it took to ensure that a Kingdom on the cusp of unprecedented prosperity and power also became home to an intellectually curious and informed society.

Saudis who commuted between Riyadh and the Eastern Province had known about the electronic device with moving images since the first TV broadcast from the US consulate in Dhahran in 1955.

"The Eye of the Desert" channel broadcast in English. Two years later, Aramco TV's wider broadcasting range reached Al-Hofuf and other areas across the Gulf, with content in Arabic and English.

Speaking in front of a large crowd in 1962, then Crown Prince Faisal bin Abdul Aziz announced the Kingdom's determination to bring television to the public.

"The responsibility of this facility is to serve our religion, our country and our nation," he said. "It will be in the service of religion, the nation and the people in all necessary efforts and work in these regards."

Under the banner "Channel of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," the single official outlet went live in 1965 with a recitation of the Qur'an the first program to be broadcast.

However, as with almost any new development, the decision to launch the TV station offended Saudi religious conservatives, some of whom staged a demonstration where a number of protesters were killed when police responded to an assault on one of the TV facilities in 1965.

Saudi TV initially broadcast in Riyadh and Jeddah with modest technology and a broadcast time that did not exceed five hours a day. Hooked on the new source of entertainment, Saudi families gathered in front of a TV set every day and waited patiently for the signature tune that announced the beginning of the daily broadcast.

Talal Adham, 61, chairman of engineering consultancy Talal Adham & Partners, recalled those early days. "At first, broadcast was limited to only a few hours every day, but later it was extended to two shifts per day. The first was from 10 a.m. to noon and then there was an evening shift that ended at around midnight," he told Arab News. "I remember the broadcast was continuous during the weekends, but would end around midnight or early morning time."

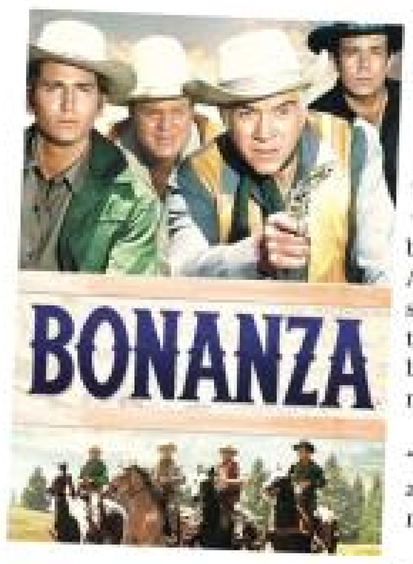
Among the programs that aired in the 1970s were entertainment talk shows featuring Arab celebrities, studio musical performances by famous Saudi singers such as Talal Maddah and Mohammed Abdo, and American westerns.

Adham said that his two favorite TV shows from that period were "Fakir wa irhah" ("Think and Win") and "Baba Ameen." For many families, television was the only available entertainment source, "and viewership was at its highest during Ramadan," he said.

SAUDI '70s TV

- American series "Bonanza" and "Fury" (both Westerns) and "The Incredible Hulk"
- Syrian comedy series "Sah Al-Nawm"
- "Ala Ma'idat Al-Iftar" (On the Iftar Table) with Sheikh Ali Al-Tantawi
- "Al-Ilm wa Al-Eman" (Knowledge and Faith) with Dr. Mustafa Mahmoud
- "Hadith Al-Asdekaa," a talk show on everyday social issues that first aired in 1965, hosting a number of government officials
- Kuwaiti comedy series "Darb Al-Zalag"
- "Sahrah Saudia," a celebrity talk show produced by Talal Maddah





Thuraya Arafah, 70, a retired instructor from the General Administration of Girls Education in Jeddah, said that TV programs in the 1970s were diverse. "There were religious programs, with the most famous being 'Ala Ma'idat Al-Iftaar' ('On the Iftaar Table') with Sheikh Ali Tantawi in Ramadan, and 'Al-Ilm wa Al-Eman' ('Knowledge and Faith') by Mustafa Mahmoud," she said. "Then there were game shows such as 'Huroof' ('Letters') and historical Arabic series such as 'Juha' and the Lebanese 'Al-Hareb' ('The Fugitive'). Then there were foreign TV serials such as 'Mighty Mouse' and 'Fury.'"

Arafah said some of the best-known TV presenters at the time were Majid Al-Shibl and Hussain Najjar. "Gathering in front of the TV set to watch a film or a show was a way to spend quality time with family."

In 1979, in a watershed moment in modern Saudi history, Juhayman Al-Otaibi seized the Grand Mosque in Makkah with a group of ultra-conservative loyalists, demanding that the Kingdom "be cleansed of all evils."

Adham and Arafah both recall that TV changed dramatically after the Grand Mosque siege. "It became overly conservative," said Arafah. "The concerts of Egyptian singer Um Kalthoum, and Egyptian and Lebanese series were banished. Women were not seen much on television afterwards."

Adham agreed, saying that "women started appearing less and Islamic programs appeared more. Songs almost disappeared."

Many Saudis remember veteran TV and radio presenter Hussain Najjar relaying news of the assault on the Grand Mosque to viewers. Najjar also announced the news of Al-Otaibi's execution.

One of the leading female Saudi TV presenters of the 1970s was Dunia Bakr Younis, known to audiences as "Mama Dunia" for her children's program of the same name. Her father, a TV and radio presenter, was one of the founders of Saudi Radio, and she often accompanied him to the studio as a young girl. "I entered the media field with a strong foundation," Younis told Arab News. "I have never had any difficulties. Neither of my parents prevented me from entering this field. My mother always said: 'He who doesn't get good grades won't go to the studio.' We were very serious about our studies and did not neglect them."

Younis was living in the Eastern Province with her producer husband when the Grand Mosque siege unfolded. She was a presenter on her own shows, "Studio No. 5" and "Shati Nisf Al-Qamar" ("Half Moon Bay"), as well as on children's programs on Dammam TV. "I decided to withdraw from TV appearances for a while," she said. "I was mindful of the situation and as it was a confusing time for many. It was a good decision to make at the time."

The Saudi Ministry of Information did not stop women presenters from appearing on screen, Younis said. However, she decided to take time out to look after her twins, Badr and Bakr, as well as her daughter Dalia, whom she used to take to the TV studio.

Younis said Saudi women played an important role in media despite the period's social upheaval. "There was a misconception after the events of 1979 where Saudi women were viewed as if they had no rights," she said.

"On the contrary, Saudi women were in their abayas and hosting shows on television. My sisters and I were like this, the pioneers. Some other contemporary female presenters were Dalal Aziz Diya, Salwa Shakir and Mariam Al-Ghamdi."

Meanwhile, Saudi broadcasting has gone from strength to strength despite the setbacks that followed the events of 1979. A total of 12 TV channels are now available, covering a broad spectrum from music to news and entertainment. In September 2018, Weam Al-Dakheel became the first Saudi woman to anchor the main evening news on the Riyadh-based Al Ekhbariya channel.

"Mama Dunia" praised King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for giving Saudi women more opportunities. "We are grateful for how far women have come under their rule. They have given women the opportunity to play a major role in society," she said.

> Cinemas had triple bill film screenings, showing an Egyptian film first...
>
> **Yasser Hammad**
> Saudi screenwriter

National Day 2019

MOVIES

The golden age of Saudi cinema

The first films were shown on makeshift screens, but a 'daring, determined cinema pioneer' soon changed that

Deema Al-Khudair Jeddah

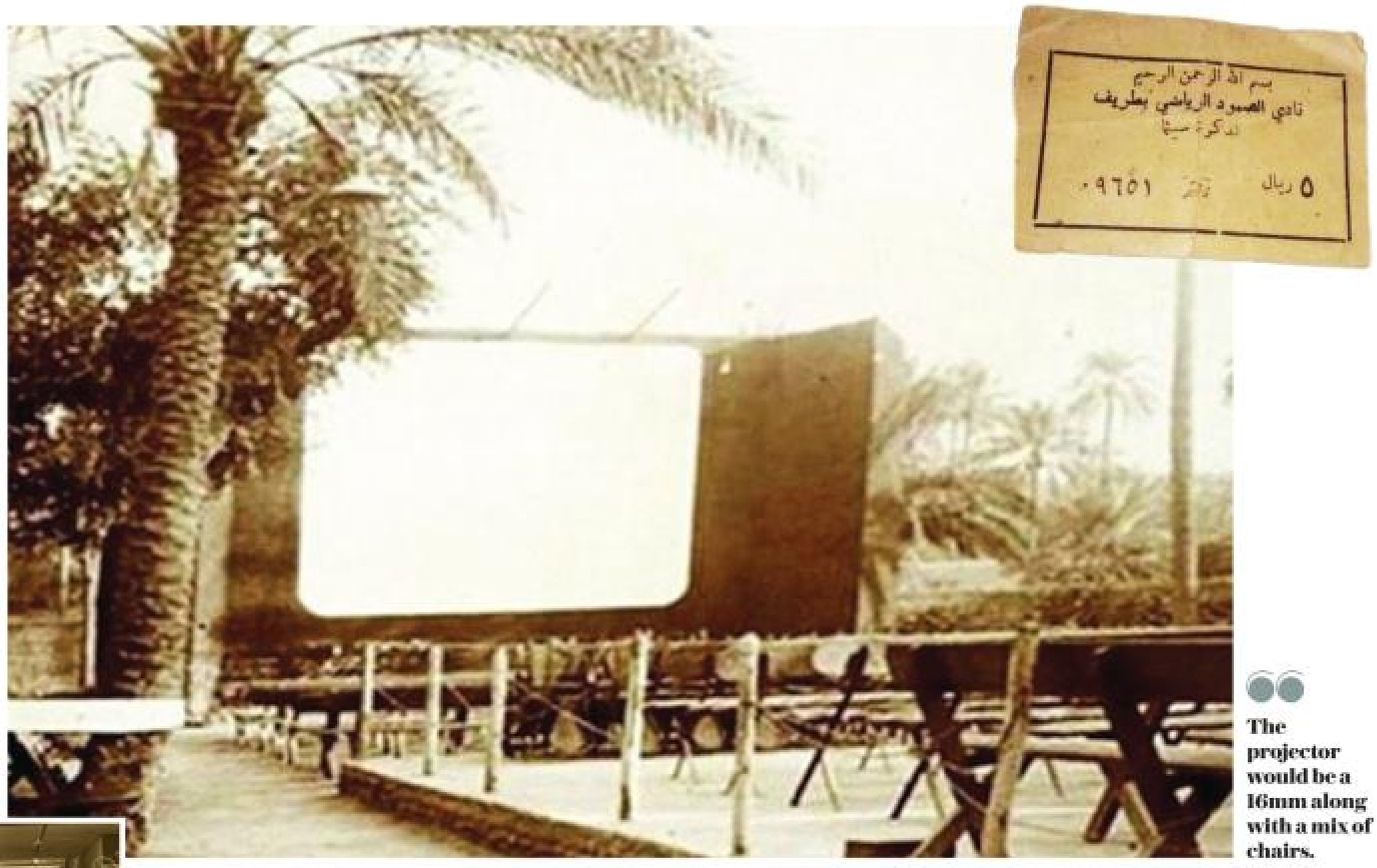
More than half a century ago, cinemas were a popular source of entertainment in major cities in the Kingdom.

Westerners working for the California State Oil Company (later Aramco) were the first to introduce cinemas to Saudis, setting up large screens in their residential compounds during the 1930s to watch American and European films. Cinemas soon spread to the four major Saudi cities: Riyadh, Jeddah, Taif and Abha. There were more than 30 theaters in Jeddah alone, with admission prices ranging up to SR10 ($2.80).

Thuraya Arafah, 70, who worked with the General Administration of Girls Education in Jeddah, recalls visiting Cinema Jamjoom and Cinema Al-Attas in Jeddah.

"They used to show Egyptian films with Farid Al-Atrash, Anwar Wagdi, Shadia, Faten Hamama and Abdel Halim Hafez, all leading actors and actresses still adored to this day," she told Arab News.

Jomanah Khoja, producer of Al-Arabiya's documentary Cinema Al-Ahwash (Backyard Cinemas), said the popular movies at the time were mostly Egyptian. "There were also many American movies like James Bond, for example."



> **The projector would be a 16mm along with a mix of chairs.**



Above, Cinema Al-Ahwash (backyard cinemas) operated in a coutryard or yard. Left, in the background, Fouad Jamjoom, pictured in the background in a TV studio, set up a chain of eight cinemas.

Ticket prices varied from one yard cinema to the next. "The variations of prices, according to some owners we interviewed, said tickets were sold for 2 SAR while others were 20 SAR. The price of the ticket also depended on the movie: If it was a new movie, prices were more expensive."

The introduction of VHS cassettes was "a key factor in the disappearance of these cinemas," Khoja said.

However, in the wake of the 1979 terror attack on the Grand Mosque by Juhayman Al-Otaibi and his followers, conservative voices increasingly spoke out against the spread of cinemas, TV and music. A major social shift occurred that led to cinemas being banned from the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Saudi screenwriter Yasser Hammad said that there were cinemas operating in Taif and Madinah, while in Riyadh cinemas were opened at the Al-Hilal, Al-Nassr and Al-Shabab sports clubs. Cinemas were also still in use at Aramco facilities in the Eastern Province.

"Jeddah had several. They were called Cinema Al-Ahwash (backyard cinemas). They operated in a house courtyard or in an adjacent yard used initially to accommodate pilgrims with their camels, so I figure this might be their off-season use of the space," he told Arab News

The city's theaters included Al-Attas Hotel cinema on the beachfront; Cinema Al-Hindaweya; Cinema Al-Baljoon in Al-Sharafiya district, just off the Old Airport Road; and Cinema Abu-Saffiya, near Bab Sharif, as well as cinemas in the Egyptian and Jordanian embassies. Most were operated by wealthier families who had money to buy or rent cinema projectors, he said.

"The projector would be a 16mm along with a mix of chairs. Films were rented out, and the 16mm film roll was cut into parts, so each cinema would rent out a part of the film and then swap them in the middle. Cinemas had triple bill film screenings, showing an Egyptian film first, followed by either an Italian or an American movie, and finishing with an Indian movie."

Hammad said the leader of the era was Fouad Jamjoom, who first went to Egypt in the mid-1950s.

"He was fascinated by cinema and was chasing his dream. He opened a cinema in Tanta, Egypt, which got him more involved in the process of distributing films, which evolved into producing."



A movie poster for the Egyptian film 'Years of Love.'

Jamjoom returned to Jeddah in the early 1960s and set up a chain of eight cinemas.

"Cinema shops also rented out projectors, films and even promotional material such as film posters. Eid specials showed the latest James Bond films, "Khally Ballak men Zouzou" and other blockbusters," Hammad said.

Jamjoom censored the films himself, "even though cinema at the time didn't require much censoring."

He also held premieres and invited Egyptian stars such as Ahmed Ramzy, Farid Shawqi, Magda El-Khatib and others.

Hammad explained that the yard cinemas had only male audiences, except for a few houses that held private screenings for women. "Even the young male audience went to the cinema without their parents knowing," he said.

"Jamjoom wanted families to attend, and made a theater with a roof and air-conditioning in the mid-1970s that had seating for women in the upper section."

Hammad said that cinema at the time appealed to a young audience with little to do during their free time. "National television wasn't as impressive as watching 'King Kong' on a large screen," he said.

Shehab Jamjoom, a close relative of the Saudi cinema pioneer, said: "Without a doubt, he was daring, ambitious and had so much determination. He had so much love for the field and would try to overcome any obstacle.

"He was fighting to bring entertainment to people — innocent entertainment — and today it has become accepted and licensed."

Cinemas officially returned in the Kingdom after a 35-year hiatus in April 2018, with the first screening of Marvel's "Black Panther" at the AMC cinema in Riyadh's King Abdullah Financial District.

In January 2019, Jeddah witnessed the opening of its first cinema, Vox, at Red Sea Mall.

The return of cinema has paved the way for a new generation of Saudi filmmakers.

"Roll 'em," a drama produced by an all-Saudi team, made its way to movie theaters in March 2019.

The lifting of the ban on cinemas is part of widespread social reforms led by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

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Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques
King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud
Crown Prince
Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud
and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
on the occasion of
the 89th Saudi Arabia National Day



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People woke up to a raft of prohibitions that turned society into an arid place.
Abdo Khal
Saudi author

POP CULTURE

'Darkness reigned. But the zealots couldn't stop the music'

Decades after religious hard-liners targeted artistic expression, Saudis are benefiting from a cultural rebirth

Ruba Obaid Jeddah

A conservative brand of Islam has always existed in Saudi Arabia, one of the many strands of Saudi society. However, in the wake of the 1979 Grand Mosque siege, this school of thought gained increasing prominence, spreading into official institutions including the legal system and education.

Saudi society began to lose its artistic and cultural moorings under the influence of religious hard-liners who attacked music, sculpture, painting and photography, along with a host of other artistic activities. Regressive social ideas were widely propagated via schools, universities and mosques.

Conservative preachers argued that new entertainment devices — the record player, radio, cassettes, videotapes or television — were forbidden in Islam as they encouraged moral corruption and symbolized the technological domination of the West.



In 1965, shortly after the launch of the official Saudi TV channel, a group of extremists attacked the Saudi Broadcasting Authority building, claiming that the development was a threat to the Muslim nation.

This reactionary movement, which later morphed into the "Islamic Awakening" or "Sahwa," succeeded in eliminating most forms of entertainment, including those with a religious theme.

Abdo Khal, a Saudi author, said that the 1979 attack on the Grand Mosque in Makkah by a group of militants ushered in "an era full of extremism."

Musical instruments were smashed by the Muhtasibin — volunteers in the religious police — in acts that appeared to have public approval, Khal said.

Although the leader of the Grand Mosque assault, Juhayman Al-Otaibi, and his followers were eliminated, their ideology spread like poison.

"Darkness reigned everywhere," said Khal. "Television was the first to be affected. People woke up to a raft of prohibitions that turned society into an arid place where all life-affirming activities were prohibited."



Before 1979, Saudi TV broadcast songs and concerts by Saudi folk bands and artists, including female singers such as Toha, Etab and Ibtisam Lutfi, as well as concert performances by Um Kalthoum, Fayza Ahmad, Samira Tawfik, Najat Al-Saghira and Farid Al-Atrach.

However, after the war on entertainment and the arts was launched, generations of Saudis grew up deprived of their rich cultural and artistic heritage, unaware of their country's important role in regional art, music and culture.

Talal Maddah, known as "The Earth's Voice" and one of Saudi Arabia's most beloved singers, was the first to perform on Saudi television and the first Saudi to broadcast his songs to the world. Below, Um Kalthoum appeared on Saudi TV.

According to researcher and critic Yahya Yzuriqan, the first Saudi radio station was established in 1948 in Makkah. It was later moved to Jeddah, where it flourished, recording and producing musical plays, and becoming the first building block of the modern Saudi music sector.

In Riyadh, there was no music on an official level until Riyadh Radio was founded in 1964. However, singers from other Gulf countries often visited the city, and Saudi folk music was a staple of official and private occasions.

The real renaissance of Saudi musical arts began in the 1960s when the Saudi army band was established. It was later transformed into an orchestra, featuring Arab musicians from Syria, Lebanon and Egypt, and is credited with sparking a musical revival across the Kingdom.

Private musical production and marketing companies soon emerged in Al-Ahsa, Riyadh and Jeddah, in addition to talents in poetry, and music composition and performance.

Saudi society was introduced to local voices such as Ghazi Ali, Talal Maddah and Jamil Mahmoud. Some singers — Mahmoud Halawani, Mohammed Ali Sindi, Abdullah Mohammed and Fawzi Mahson — gained fame as wedding performers. The list of contributors to that era is long, but two people — composer Omar Kadars and poet Taher Zamakhshari — deserve special mention.

Now we can see that Saudis are thirsty for music. The success of recent concerts by the General Entertainment Authority is proof.

Private companies that appeared included Riyadh Phone, a recording studio established in 1964 by Talal Maddah and Lutfi Zaini.

The studio shut down after a few years when cassette tapes began to replace vinyl records in Saudi Arabia.

Talal Maddah, a Saudi composer and singer who became hugely popular across the Middle East, was known as "The Earth's Voice" to his admirers in the Kingdom.

Maddah's career took off in the late 1950s with the release of his first album, "Wardak Ya Zaree Al-Ward" ("Grower of Roses").

Another prominent figure in that era, Saudi composer Tareq Abdul-Hakim, was a key player in the Kingdom's musical renaissance.

Abdul-Hakim, who composed the Kingdom's national anthem, was among the first Saudi students to be granted a music scholarship. He was twice elected president of the Arab Music Academy and received the IMC-UNESCO International Music Prize in 1981.

Saudi music and singing can be divided broadly into two schools. Ibtisam Lutfi represented the Hijazi school, which was headed by her teacher, Talal Maddah. Well-known singers who belonged to this school included Toha, Lutfi Zaini, Fawzi Mahsoun, Siraj Omar and Abadi Al-Jawhar.

The Najdi school was represented by Abdullah Al-Sreikh, along with Abu Saud Al-Hammadi, Abdullah bin Salloum, Fahd bin Saeed, Bashir Hamad Shannan and Hamad Al-Tayyar.

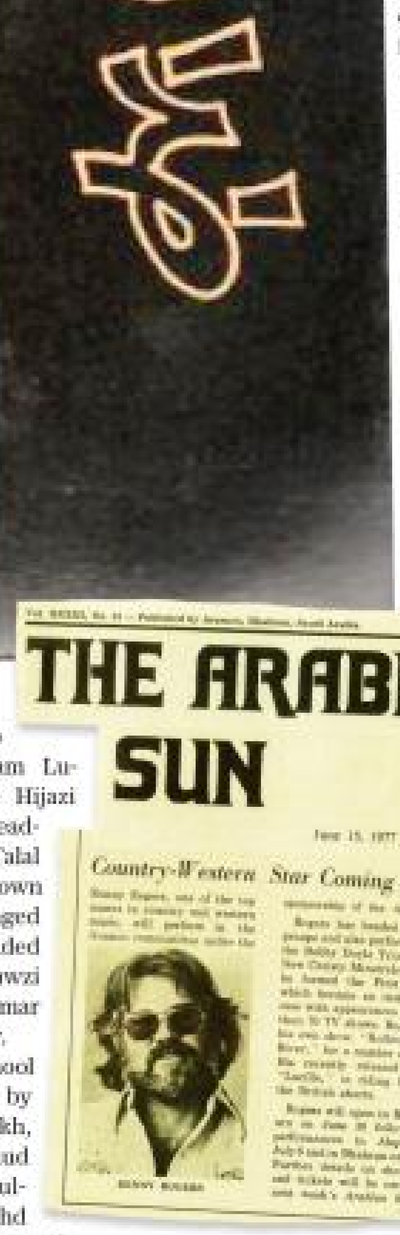
Singers of both schools were anything but purists, and collaborated with artists from around the Middle East.

Although most of the famous names were male, the few female voices proved hugely influential. The most popular female singer was Ibtisam Lutfi.

Lutfi, whose real name was Khayriya Qurban, was blind from a young age. Like so many others, her musical career began singing at weddings feasts in Jeddah. At the age of 16, Lutfi's melodious voice gained her an invitation to perform at King Faisal's council.

King Faisal was impressed by Lutfi's performance. She said in one of her interviews that he asked her: "What do you wish?" Her response came as a surprise. "I want to be the first Saudi woman to sing on radio," she said.

Two months later, her wish came true when she received an invitation to sing for a radio station. In 1986, she became the first female voice on a Saudi TV broadcast.


THE ARABIAN SUN

June 15, 1977

Country-Western Star Coming Soon

Music was freely available at the time. Poet Ahmad Abdul-Haqq, a witness to the period before the "Awakening" movement, said that people could listen to music on radio and, later, on TV.

"We used to look forward to the Saudi TV theater program, which introduced us to the local Saudi stars," Abdul-Haqq told Arab News.

Saudi music and arts proved resilient in the face of the prevailing religious orthodoxies, he said.

Despite the obstacles placed in their path, Saudis continued to represent their "heritage and the authentic arts and show them to the world," Abdul-Haqq said.

But when official support began to dry up, some artists focused on the private sector and individual initiatives, while others moved abroad to continue their careers.

With the advent of the "Sahwa" movement, society's need for music began to be satisfied in other, less visible, ways.

Many Saudis, especially women, took to singing at private gatherings and special occasions such as weddings.

"Awakening" activists tried to fill the vacuum with Islamic Nasheed, a form of religious-themed devotional singing involving minimal use of musical instruments and avoiding romantic themes.

However, those who continued to believe that music was forbidden in Islam created a new kind of music, Shailat, that relied on human sounds and the keyboard.

Muteb Al-Hallaj, a Saudi musician, said Shailat "came at a time when musical concerts were no longer performed in Saudi Arabia."

"But now we can see that Saudis are thirsty for music. The success of recent concerts organized by the General Entertainment Authority is proof," Al-Hallaj said.

Saudi Arabia's first major concert in almost seven years was held in Jeddah in February 2017 when an 8,000-strong crowd sang along to love songs by Rabih Saqr, Mohamad Abdo and Majed Al-Muhandes for more than six hours.

In view of the social changes taking place across the Kingdom, many young Saudis see the current period as a second "Awakening."

In 2018, the General Culture Authority in Riyadh announced the formation of the Saudi National Music Band, led by Abdel Rab Idris, a prominent Saudi singer and musician who contributed to the Kingdom's cultural flowering before and after 1979.

With the creation of the General Entertainment Authority in 2016, Saudi Arabia is striving to build a world-class entertainment industry.

The Kingdom's doors are now open for local, regional and international stars to start tapping into the Kingdom's potential as a key regional cultural hub.

FUN FACT

According to this old newspaper clipping, country music star Kenny Rogers performed at the Aramco communities of Ras Tanura on June 30, 1977, followed by Abqaiq on July 6 and Dhahran on July 7.

National Day 2019



There was a lot of funding to improve sports facilities to the highest level.

Saudi Arabia sent its first athletes to the Olympics in 1972, above left, and its first female athletes, including Sarah Al-Attar, main image, to the Olympics in 2012. AFP

ATHLETICS

Sporting glory: How the Kingdom raised its game

The groundwork for today's success was laid in the 1970s

Ruaa Alameri Dubai

Many Saudis look back on the 1970s as a time of unprecedented development when sport, along with other aspects of life in the Kingdom, enjoyed rapid growth.

A government push to improve sports organization and boost participation in international competitions led to Saudi Arabia making its Olympic debut at the 1972 Munich Games. It marked the first time the Saudi flag was raised at the opening ceremony, although the Kingdom had been part of the International Olympic Committee since 1965. Saudi Arabia also participated in the first Arabian Gulf Cup in 1970, and made its debut at the Pan Arab Games in 1976 and at the Asian Games two years later.

Also in the 1970s, the Kingdom attracted foreign players to its football teams, including Brazil's Roberto Rivellino, who played for Riyadh's Al-Hilal.

Mohammed Al-Kharashy, a former manager of the Saudi national football team, told Arab News that in the 1970s, "there was a lot of funding to improve sports facilities to the highest level. More focus was put on international participation in football and many other sports."

Although sport was part of Saudi culture, its official development can be traced back to Interior Minister Prince Abdullah bin Faisal Al-Saud, who created the Department of Sport in the Interior in 1952.

OLYMPICS 1972

The first Saudis to represent the Kingdom at the Olympics

Men's 100m
Mansour Farhan Al-Gegd

Men's 1,500m
Naser Al-Safraa

Men's 5,000m
Abdallah Rouei Al-Mabrouk

Men's 4 × 100m relay
Mohammed Al-Dosary, Mansour Farhan Al-Gegd, Bilal Said, Saad Khalil Al-Dosary

Sporting development gained momentum with the introduction of the First Development Plan in 1970. A network of sports and athletics facilities was established along with recreational programs and sporting clubs for the Kingdom's youth. These included federations for tennis, basketball, martial arts, handball, fencing, swimming, shooting and archery. The mandate of the General Presidency of Youth Welfare in 1974 was "to get as many people interested and involved in these activities as possible," according to a statement published by the Saudi Embassy in the US.



In the 1970s, Saudi Arabia attracted foreign players to its teams, including Brazil's Roberto Rivellino, right, who played for Riyadh's Al-Hilal.

While sporting standards in the Kingdom have improved dramatically, women's participation is a more recent phenomenon. In 2003, the first women's basketball team in Saudi Arabia was formed by Lina Al-Maeena. Three years later, she co-founded the Jeddah United Sporting Company, to encourage the development of female athletes; it now has a football club for women. In 2010, equestrian Dalma Rushdi Malhas became the first female athlete from Saudi Arabia to compete at the inaugural Youth Olympic Games in Singapore, winning a bronze medal.

Saudi Arabia sent its first women's team to compete in the 2012 London Olympics. The team included Wojdan Shaherkani in judo and 800-meter runner Sarah Al-Attar. In 2016, Al-Attar, Lubna Al-Omair, Cariman Abu Al-Jadail and Wujud Fahmi represented Saudi Arabia at the Summer Games in Brazil.

In 2017, the Kingdom announced that public schools would begin offering physical education for girls as part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's reforms.

PAKISTAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL JEDDAH
(ENGLISH SECTION)



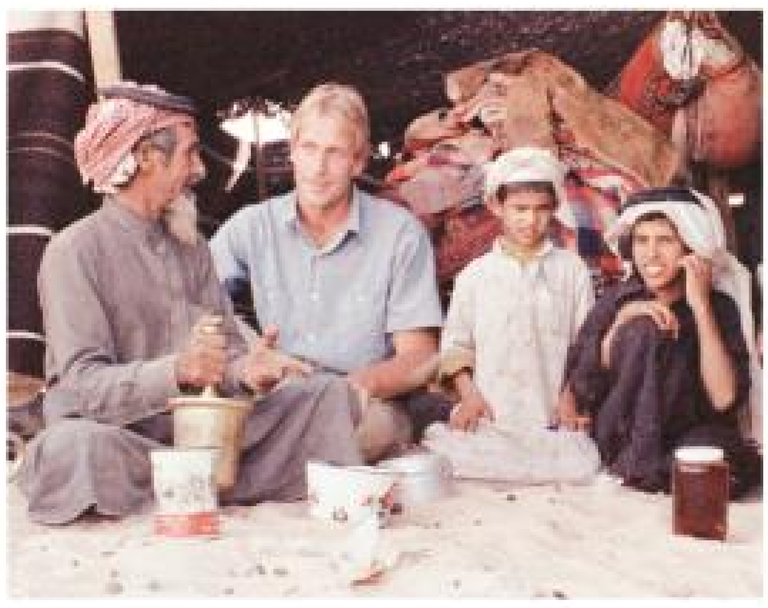
When miracles and marvels combine, a land in its colossal eccentricity rise and shine;
Rich with the timeless legacy of Prophets and selfless submissions on the decree of Divine.

To strengthen the Pak-Saudi cordial friendly relationship, PISJ-ES shares the pride and joy of Saudi National Day celebrations with the custodian of the two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdul –Aziz al Saud, the Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman and people of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

May this land of hope and peace for the entire Muslim Ummah live long and treasure an everlasting prosperity and success.

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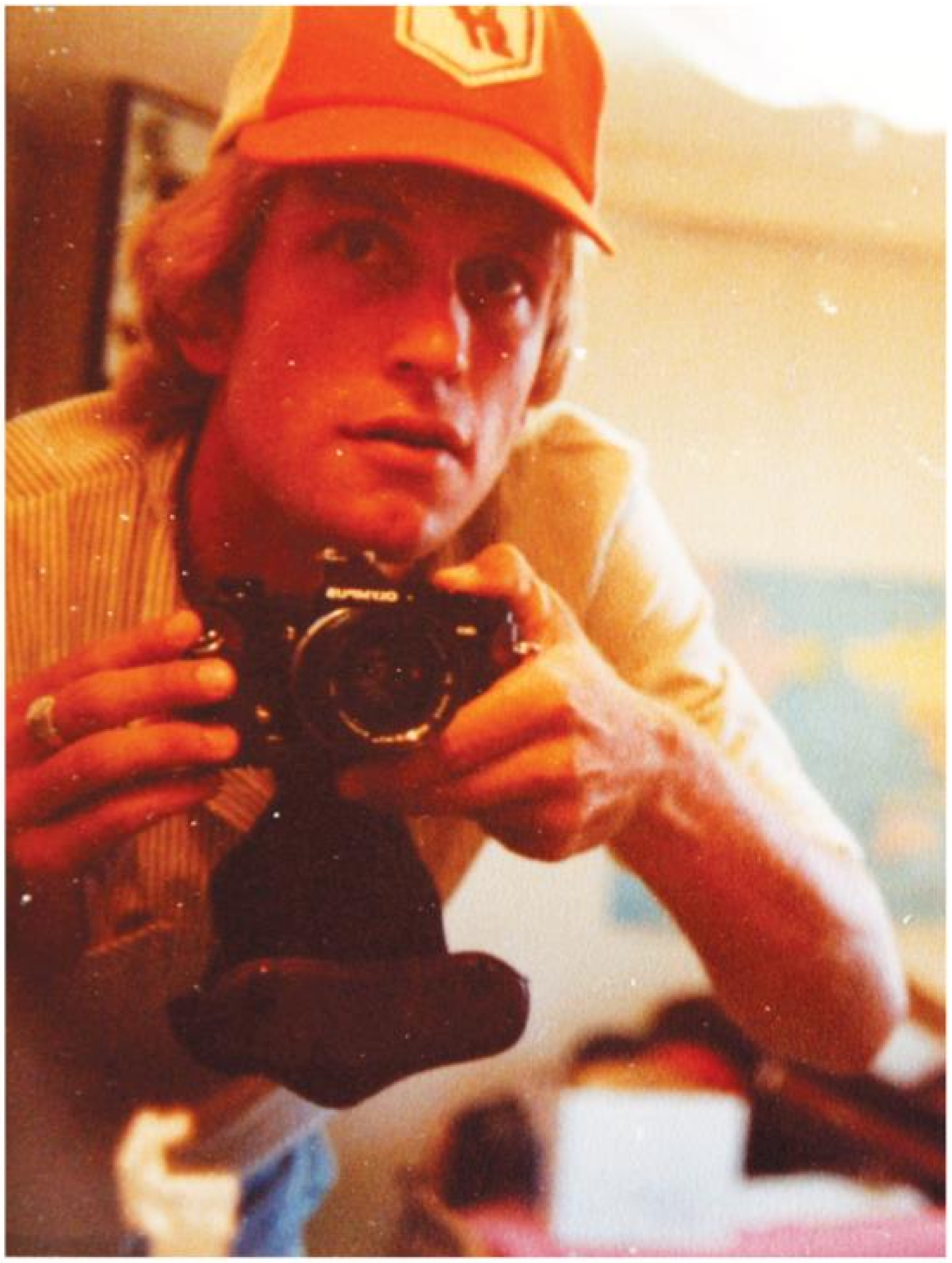
National Day 2019



A VIEW FROM OUTSIDE

Arabian adventure, ’70s style — through the eyes of ‘Abu Jack’

A US oil engineer’s treasured photographs reveal a love affair with the Kingdom stretching back four decades



Dhai Al-Mutairi Dammam

From San Francisco, the hippie heartland of 1970s American counterculture, to Abqaiq, Aramco’s gated community and the largest oil facility in Saudi Arabia — Mark Lowey’s love of adventure took him on a journey that later defined his life.

After graduating with a science degree specializing in construction engineering in 1977, Lowey was offered a job in San Francisco. But when the 21-year-old engineer heard that a friend had received an offer from another company that planned to send him to Saudi Arabia, he decided to take the leap.

“I was looking for adventure and ready to travel the world,” Lowey told Arab News. “It was pure luck that a company wanted to hire a graduate and send me to Saudi Arabia.”

For three months, he worked for Santa Fe International, a subcontractor, before being assigned to a remote job site in Abqaiq. “We were building gas and oil-separation plants in Ain Dar and Shedgum,” he said. “The plants we built at that time still had flare shacks to burn the separated natural gas. Aramco’s gas-gathering program would begin 15 years later.”

As a project control engineer, Lowey was responsible for monitoring the progress of construction and scheduling work to be completed to a strict timetable.

With no direct flights at the time, Lowey’s journey to Saudi Arabia took more than 24 hours, with connections in Atlanta, New York and London before arriving at today’s King Abdul Aziz air base, formerly known as Dhahran International Airport.

Fresh off the plane, Lowey was uncertain where to go as crowds of passengers crowded the airport. He walked into the arrivals hall where he spotted a man holding a sign bearing the company’s orange-colored Santa Fe International logo.

As the two men waited for other employees to arrive, Lowey observed different nationalities from the Arab world passing by. While some women were covered in black, others wore trendy, colorful clothing.

“At Dhahran airport for the first time, I saw women wearing all kinds of clothes — modern and traditional. Many had niqabs (a piece of cloth that covered half of the face, revealing only the eyes). I think it was a time before wearing the niqab and hijab became a common trend,” he said.

Days before his trip, Lowey took time to study and learn about Saudi culture, history and its people. He found it fascinating that some Saudis lived in tents out in the desert. “It was the romantic version of the Arab culture I was expecting,” he said.

Lowey lived in the Abqaiq contractors camp, in a single room in a prefabricated modular building across the road from the Aramco community, where thousands of men from different countries worked for contracting companies supporting Aramco were housed.



Below left, the camel souq in Al-Ahsa, and below right, a watermelon vendor in Hofuf, both in 1978.

“There were Americans, Canadians, British. Other workers were from Thailand and the Philippines. There were Somalis and Egyptians. There were very few Saudi workers,” he said.

Living in the eastern deserts, Lowey wasn’t oblivious to events occurring in the region, but he recalled one memory that still stands out for him. “I was in Abqaiq when the shah of Iran fell in 1979. One American friend had fallen in love with a young woman from Tehran and was in Iran at that time. He had to leave his fiance and run away, over rooftops, to escape the ayatollah’s guards. He escaped back to Saudi, somehow. Much later, the woman was able to join him in the US and they were married.”

Mark Lowey took what he calls an “early selfie” in the mirror of his room in the Abqaiq contractors camp, with his Olympus OM-2. Above left, with Abdulhadi Alsyari and his sons in their desert encampment in Fazran. Left, with his American friends Jim Sides and John Grimm, on a weekend desert excursion in 1979, near Shedgum.

Since 1979, the trend has been toward more traditional and conservative dress for women in the Middle East, he said.

“The Arab Spring in 2010-11 further accelerated the trend toward conservatism. Only now are we moving toward a more progressive Middle East.”

Growing up in California during the 1970s, life was easy and there were fewer rules. Arriving in Saudi Arabia, Lowey knew that there would be restrictions. He was worried that local people might dislike him and question why he was here — that feeling of discomfort familiar to those living in a foreign country.

Lowey had a friend, Rob Hardesty, who was in Alkhobar working for an irrigation company. Lowey looked him up, and found that he, too, was interested in exploring and meeting local people. “He introduced me to some of his Saudi friends and helped me get acquainted with the Kingdom.”

On one of their days off, the two men decided to venture into the desert in Hardesty’s pickup truck to test a new camera, an Olympus OM-2, which Lowey had bought in Alkhobar’s electronics souq.

“Both Rob and I were keen to become good photographers. We wanted to go out on weekends and experiment and take lots of photos,” he said.

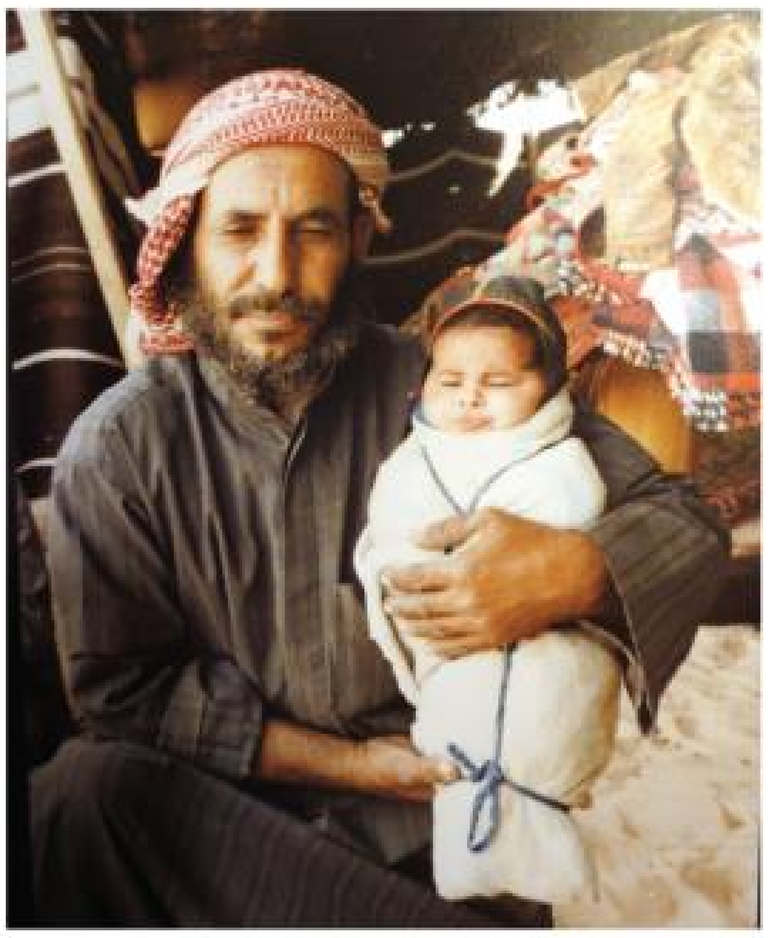
Photographing people was not a simple matter, since some Saudis were not open to being photographed. The duo were discreet, however. With the Olympus hidden in a large bag, Lowey would take a picture and then quickly hide the camera from sight. “One time, my friends and I were in the women’s



> Imagine the difference between seeing your photos on a digital camera or iPhone instantly. In 1978, I had to wait weeks to see my prints.
>
> **Mark Lowey, aka Abu Jack**

National Day 2019





Left, Hofuf in 1978. Right, Faleh Al-Hamra, renowned in Abqaiq as a "camel whisperer," with his first-born son Bdah, swaddled according to Bedouin tradition. Bdah, now 41, is a shift supervisor at Aramco's Shedgum gas plant. Clockwise from below, the gateway to Jubail in 1978; a man carrying his purchases from Hofuf's Qaisariah Souq; an abandoned 1950 Ford truck in the desert in 1979; Alkhobar's Kentucky Fried Chicken and Sizzler in 1978.



MYSTERY MAN

● In 1978, while on a desert stroll with his friend Rob Harvesty, Mark Lowey encountered this Bedouin man walking alone near the Fazran Gas Oil Separation Plant. They stopped, exchanged a few words in their limited Arabic, and after he agreed to let Lowey photograph him, they went in opposite directions.

● Throughout the years, Lowey wondered about this mysterious man in the navy-blue jacket, his story and and his tribe. When he returned to Saudi Arabia decades later, he asked his friend, Quriyan Al-Hajri, to help him solve the mystery. Al-Hajri was able to track down the man's family, who told his story.

● His name was Bathan Mohammed Al-Ulayan Al-Marri, and he was a famous water-well driller, responsible for creating more than 50 wells in the Eastern Province and Rub' Al-Khali. "He would make water walls all around the desert," Lowey explained. "Because the Bedouins had to have water, and before Aramco, there was no drilling of wells, they had to dig them by hand."

● Sadly, Lowey wasn't able to meet Al-Marri, because he passed away in 2005.







market in Hufof looking at some of the objects on display. I would say, 'Hey, Rob, smile,' and pretend to take a picture, but would photograph the woman behind him.

"We were probably a bit reckless, and if we had been seen by police or the Mutawa (religious police), they would object," he said. "But I hardly saw any religious police in the Eastern Province during the 1970s. They were more common during the early 2000s."

Lowey wouldn't have his photos developed in the Kingdom. Instead, he sent rolls of film out with friends going on vacation to the UK, US or Far East, and they would bring back prints. "Imagine the difference between seeing your photos on a digital camera or iPhone instantly. In 1978, I had to wait weeks to see my prints."

After working for two years in Saudi Arabia, Lowey took 12 months off to travel, including a trek in Nepal and India, and visits to Australia and New Zealand, before returning to California in 1981.

"After living in Saudi and my Asia walkabout, I was changed. I had incredible experiences. I had met and become friends with people from so many different cultures.

"I thought of Saudi Arabia a lot. I loved my photos of the places I had visited and, especially, the pictures of the Bedouin."

Lowey stayed in the US for five years, got married and then, as a newlywed, moved to Kuwait for a new job. He spent three years working in Kuwait, and his first son, Jack, was born there. In 1988, Lowey and his family left Kuwait and returned to the US.

Lowey never thought that one day he might return to Saudi Arabia. But his final project before retirement brought him back to the place where he first started working. In 2013, three decades after leaving the Kingdom, Lowey landed in Dhahran.

> **I hardly saw any religious police in the Eastern Province during the 1970s.**



"My last project was representing the Projects Department as OE (Operational Excellence) representative and implementer. Starting in 2015, Aramco began using OE principles and methods to improve quality and reliability in the company," he said.

During his time in Aramco, there were Bedouin families who lived near his job site. Lowey enjoyed watching them and was keen on getting to know them. "I frequently met Bedouin, either passers-by traveling on the migration routes, or families who camped for extended periods near the site, attracted by Aramco's permanent water supply," he said.

His brief encounters often involved nothing more than a simple wave, a smile and the traditional Arabic greeting.

"It wouldn't be long before my minimal abilities in Arabic would be put to the test. I would soon embark on a lasting friendship with two Bedouin tribes — a friendship lost and rediscovered more than three decades later."

Lowey returned in 2013 and again in 2016, and was reunited with the some of the same families that he befriended in the late 1970s.

"They were just overwhelmed with joy that I remembered them. I took the effort to become friends with them again, and they welcomed me as a brother and as a son. I am part of their family. They honored me with the title Abu Jack (father of Jack). I love the name."

After returning to the Kingdom, Lowey saw how much the Bedouin culture had changed. "The big difference has been the nomadic lifestyle. It has disappeared now, pretty much."

Lowey said that living and working in the Kingdom during the 1970s would have been similar to the Old West in America during the 1800s. "A young guy like me, as a graduate, I could easily go and find work and make business as there were fewer regulations. I could succeed, learn a lot, and contribute to the economy and society," he said.

When Lowey and his wife visited Saudi in March this year for an Aramco expats reunion, he was able to witness the changes first-hand, including women driving, greater public freedoms, and the return of music and theater.

"We had been following the progress initiated by the late King Abdullah and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. It is refreshing, and we hope good and positive progress continues," Lowey said.

National Day 2019

FINANCE

A seismic decade for the Kingdom's economy

Surging oil wealth in the 1970s allowed Saudi Arabia to seize its destiny, paving the way for today's prosperity



FRANK KANE

The 1970s were a seismic decade in business for Saudi Arabia, during which the foundations of the Kingdom's modern economic structure were laid.

Ahmed Zaki Yamani — who as oil minister and head of the Saudi contingent at the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) became a globally recognized personality — said it was the era when Saudis became "masters of our own commodity."

Ellen Wald, a historian of the Kingdom's business scene and author of the book "Saudi Inc," told Arab News: "The significance of the 1970s for the Saudi economy can't be overstated. The Kingdom saw great acceleration in urbanization, and major steps toward the Saudization of its oil and other industries."

She added: "The wealth brought in through OPEC's control of oil prices significantly changed the Kingdom's buying power in the world, and its ability to mold its own future."

Anthony Harris, a Dubai-based businessman who was a diplomat in Saudi Arabia, recalled the economic spirit of the decade in which global oil prices rose tenfold as OPEC solidarity and global crises combined.

"Suddenly, some Saudis were among the richest people on the planet," he said. "It was a time when many of the big family businesses were set up, and they're still around today. That money started to flow down, and ordinary Saudis began to feel much better off."

It was the birth of the Saudi consumer economy, with cars and electric goods coming into the country on an unprecedented scale. "The outside world came in to Saudi Arabia," said Harris.

> **Suddenly, some Saudis were among the richest people on the planet. The outside world came in to Saudi Arabia.**

Oil was at the heart of that transformation. The decade witnessed the birth of Saudi Aramco — still the Kingdom's most important asset — when control of the oil company was bought back from its original American owners in a series of share purchases.

The Saudis called the process "participation," in distinct contrast to the outright seizure of foreign oil assets by other Arab states, such as Libya and Iraq, in the same decade.

The Saudi government paid good hard cash in a series of share transactions that were described as "amicable."

The price it paid has never been revealed, but informed speculation at the time put it at $1.5-$2 billion — roughly one-thousandth of the value range that Aramco hopes to realize in the forthcoming initial public offering.

The 1970s also saw the first moves toward a national, coordinated economic and industrial strategy in the Kingdom, with the mid-decade founding of the Saudi Arabian Basic Industries Corp. (SABIC), and the establishment of the Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu.

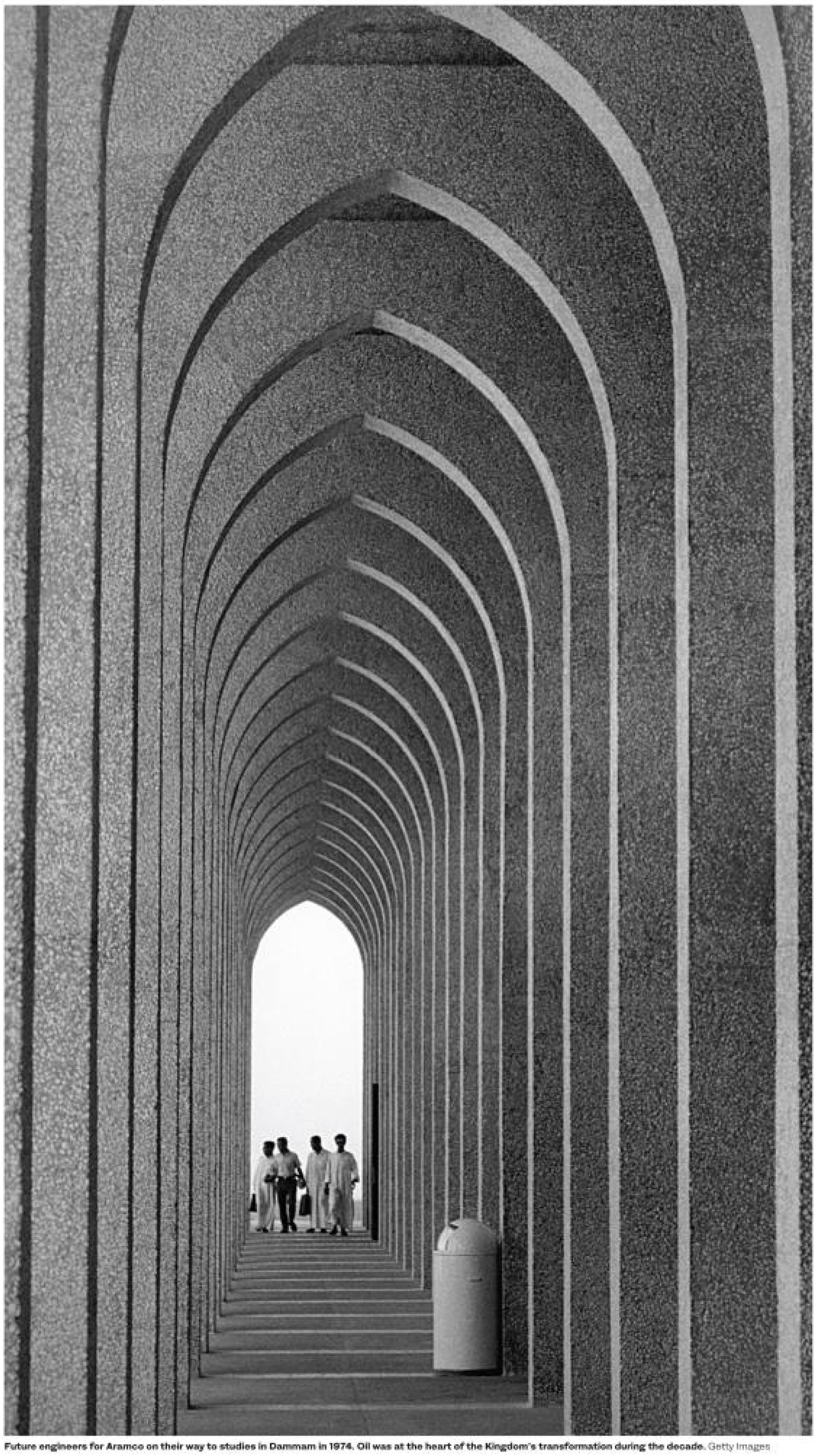
For the first time, the enormous wealth generated by the soaring oil price was being planned and directed centrally.

When SABIC was set up by royal decree in 1976, it could legitimately be called the Kingdom's first attempt to diversify away from oil dependency.

It aimed to convert the by-products of

Continued on page 17

Frank Kane is an award-winning business journalist based in Dubai. Twitter: @frankkanedubai.



Future engineers for Aramco on their way to studies in Dammam in 1974. Oil was at the heart of the Kingdom's transformation during the decade. Getty Images

National Day 2019

Continued from page 16

crude oil production into commercially viable products such as chemicals, polymers, fertilizers, and a whole range of other industrial materials essential for a modern economy.

Back then, there was virtually no large-scale industrial plant in the Kingdom beyond the exploration, production, refining and shipping infrastructure necessary for the oil market.

SABIC, as a Saudi company from the outset under the chairmanship of Ghazi Abdul Rahman Al-Gosaibi — a technocrat, businessman, diplomat and novelist once described as the "godfather of innovation" — laid the foundations for that industrial infrastructure.

Today, SABIC is the world's third-biggest chemicals company, with offices around the globe and more than 34,000 employees in 50 countries. It is the most valuable quoted company in the Middle East through its Tadawul share listing.

Back then, the Kingdom was improving on industries in which it had a proven record.

It is in the process of reaffirming its roots in the oil business via the $70 billion merger with Aramco, regarded as a vital part of both the latter's global market listing plans and the Vision 2030 strategy to further reduce oil dependency.

The other crucial element to 1970s economic policy was the Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu, which was set up in 1975 and was the first government body to look to plan a national industrial economy.

In the 1970s, the Eastern Province was separated from the Hijaz by roadless tracts of inhospitable desert, linked by Bedouin trails but little else.

The commission — which is still in business as an economic and industrial planning and investment authority — linked the two parts of the Kingdom, at first with oil pipelines that today are strategically crucial to the Saudi economy, then by a modern road system.

In the process, the commission created two big industrial maritime hubs out of what had formerly been sleepy fishing ports on the Arabian Gulf and the Red Sea: Jubail and Yanbu.

Both are now crucial parts of the Kingdom's modern economy, and key to the recently announced National Industrial Development and Logistics Program, which aims to pull in hundreds of billions of dollars of investment to the Kingdom — another vital component of Vision 2030.

An early priority for the commission when it was set up nearly half a century ago was to stop the practice of "flaring" at oil wells (burning off the gas produced during oil production, deemed then to be uneconomic to exploit commercially).

Now, Saudi Arabia has a large and growing gas industry, which it is using to reduce the amount of oil used in domestic power production and, eventually, for large-scale export.

The commission's projects were an example of another feature of Saudi economic and industrial policy: The need to attract international investment and participation in the Kingdom's plans.

The American contractor Bechtel Corp., which played a big role in Aramco's early development, was a major participant in the 1970s projects.

"Yanbu and Jubail were especially successful because they were built around an oil industry that was already strong," said Wald.

"They had secured international companies' participation in advance, mostly through joint ventures with Aramco, and they had strong and efficient management from the US and Saudi Arabia."

Although the echoes of 1970s economic and industrial policy are strong in the Vision 2030 strategy, Wald warns against a direct comparison, mainly because of the scale and transformational nature of current plans.

"Some of the government-supported projects of that decade, especially Jubail and Yanbu, became very successful. But it's not a simple, natural progression between then and now," she said.

"Back then, Saudi Arabia was improving on industries in which it had an established and proven track record. Vision 2030 is trying to develop entirely new areas."

Saudi Aramco now stronger than ever

AMIN NASSER



As we celebrate the Kingdom's National Day, it is an opportunity for us to reflect on our achievements and look forward to the future together with renewed strength, resolve and determination.

For Aramcons in Saudi Arabia and around the world — past and present — this National Day in particular should be a source of tremendous pride and celebration. It is even more meaningful after our collective strength and resolve was tested on Saturday, Sept. 14, when Saudi Aramco's oil processing facilities at Abqaiq and Khurais were attacked, causing numerous fires and significant damage, temporarily shutting down production at both facilities.

This affected not only Aramco's operations and our local communities, but also had a major impact on the global energy markets. The attacks, using missiles and drones, are being condemned internationally as a strike on the world's energy infrastructure that seriously hurts the global economy, which is already facing headwinds.

We cannot choose when and where an attack might take place, but what we can choose is how we respond. And I have never been prouder of how our people responded. Our immediate, resilient, and unified response to these unprecedented attacks was simply outstanding, and essentially above and beyond the field of ordinary human endeavor.

Many of my colleagues demonstrated exceptional situational awareness, courage and determination. I would especially like to thank the plant operators and technicians, the firefighters, operations and security personnel, as well as the many support organizations who worked in close coordination with Saudi Civil Defense personnel and government agencies.

Every second counts in moments like these and, had we not acted quickly to contain the fires and undertake rapid restoration efforts, the impact on the oil market and the global economy would have been far more devastating. This underlines why Saudi Aramco is the most important company in the world.

The resilience of our company rests on three foundational pillars: Our dedicated and committed people, our vast hydrocarbon resources, and our world-class facilities and equipment. If there is a silver lining to the black clouds that rose over Abqaiq and Khurais on that Saturday morning, it is that our most precious resource — our people and the communities nearby — remained safe.

Following the attacks, together with several corporate management members, I visited our brave colleagues in Abqaiq and Khurais and, having also spoken to team members across the company, I can emphatically state that our people are stronger than ever. And this extends beyond the walls of the company.

While the fires were burning, we were receiving lots of support, encouragement and messages of goodwill from our communities, retired Aramcons, both in Saudi Arabia and in other parts of the world, and also the business community — who offered their immediate assistance to rebuild and restore the facilities. This is a great reminder that Saudi Aramco is part of a larger, much stronger global family.

Resilience and overcoming adversity are in our DNA. In fact, production at Khurais resumed within 24 hours of the attack, Abqaiq production resumed soon after, and production of 5.7 million barrels per day will be restored by the end of September. Not a single shipment to our international customers has been missed or canceled as a result of the attacks, and we will continue to fulfill our mission of providing the energy the world needs.

The fires that were intended to destroy Saudi Aramco had an unintended consequence: They galvanized 70,000 of us around a mission to rebound quickly and confidently, and Saudi Aramco has come out of this incident stronger than ever.

They demonstrated that no one can defeat our spirit, which was witnessed by Minister of Energy, Prince Abdul Aziz bin Salman, and Chairman of Saudi Aramco, Yasir Al-Rumayyan, who visited Abqaiq after the attacks.

Every one of us is required to push ahead with resolve, because the company and the Kingdom need us more than ever. Indeed, these incidents have highlighted just how much the world needs a strong and reliable Saudi Aramco.

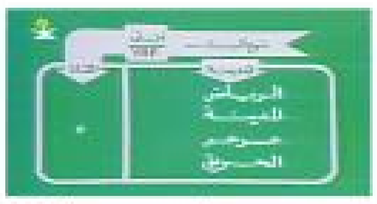
In perhaps the greatest test we have faced, many have not only risen to the challenge, but exceeded all expectations, showing the world the true mettle of our people and the value of our company, our culture, and our community. And for this they have our deepest respect, admiration and gratitude.

I wish each of you a wonderful and safe National Day celebration.

Amin Nasser is President and CEO of Saudi Aramco

This column is based on a message by Amin Nasser to Saudi Aramco employees.

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For location,please call 0114787766



• Go to www.arabnews.com/SaudiNationalDay2019 to see our Saudi National Day video looking at life in the Kingdom in the 1970s and how recent reforms are taking Saudi Arabia back to the future.



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National Day 2019



A festival on Turki Al-Awal St. includes folkloric dance, live music, an air show and fireworks. AN photos by Basheer Saleh

NATIONAL DAY

A capital celebrates

Green is the theme color of all the events

Noor Nugali, Lojien Ben Gassem, Basma Hassoubah Riyadh

The streets of Riyadh are covered with the green of the Saudi national flag, which lines the capital's main highways.

Green is the theme color of all the events that have taken place in Riyadh from Sept. 19-23 to celebrate Saudi National Day.

Activities at Riyadh's National Museum have included performances by folk bands, an Arab falcons show, interactive workshops to teach children about Saudi heritage and culture, displays of classic cars, film screenings, food carts, raffles and prizes. Visitors also have the opportunity to donate blood for King Fahd Medical City.

HIGHLIGHT

Green is the theme color of all the events that have taken place in Riyadh from Sept. 19-23 to celebrate Saudi National Day.

Exhibition

There is also an exhibition at Panorama Mall, where 13 archaeological pieces from the pre-Islamic history of the Arabian Peninsula are on display. Volunteers are at hand to explain the significance of these pieces.

A festival on Turki Al-Awal St. includes folkloric dance, live music, an air show and fireworks. The Defense Ministry revealed special designs for the aircraft taking part in the air show.

Artwork

Festivalgoers also have the opportunity to make their own artwork using rocks from the Tuwaiq Mountains.

A show titled "From the 60s until this moment" features Saudi songs from the 1960s to the present day, at the Princess Nourah bint Abdul Rahman University Theater.

Only a couple of years ago it would have been rare to see women celebrating. But what was once taboo is now the norm, with women driving with their friends and families to the festivities.



Activities at Riyadh's National Museum have included performances by folk bands, an Arab falcons show, interactive workshops to teach children about Saudi heritage and culture.



How Saudi Arabia turned back to the future

#WhatChanged

When Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman pledged to bring back moderate Islam, he referenced a time before the developments of 1979 halted the Kingdom's progress

Saudi Arabia was on a roll in the 1970s, enjoying the social and cultural developments that had begun in the previous two decades, and buoyed by the rising price of oil and the Kingdom's first Development Plan.

But 1979 changed everything. Saudi Arabia took a conservative turn, prompted by two events: the Iranian Revolution in February, which brought Ayatollah Khomeini to power, and the siege by religious extremists of the Grand Mosque in Makkah. As Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman told 2017's Future Investment Initiative: "We were not like this in the past. We only want to go back to what we were, the moderate Islam that is open to the world, open to all the religions ... And quite frankly, we will not waste 30 years of our lives in dealing with extremist ideas ... We want to live a normal life, a life that translates our moderate religion, our good customs."

And that's what has happened. Under Vision 2030 and a flurry of life-altering developments – movies and concerts, greater freedom for women, fitness in schools, to name just a few – the Kingdom is on a trajectory back to the future.

Then

1955

- Saudi Arabia's first private school for girls, Dar Al-Hanan, is founded in Jeddah by Princess Effat, with the support of her husband, Crown Prince Faisal bin Abdul Aziz, amid a social outcry.



- The first TV broadcast in Saudi Arabia is launched from the US Consulate in Dhahran; "The Eye of the Desert" is broadcast in English and only to the Dhahran area.

1957

- The Kingdom's first institute of higher education, King Saud University, is opened in Riyadh.



- The launch of Aramco TV, with a wider broadcasting range that reaches Al-Hofuf and other areas across the Gulf. Broadcasts are in both Arabic and English.

1960

- A royal decree approves public education for girls; schools are established in Riyadh, Makkah and other cities.

1962

- The non-profit women's organization, Al-Nahda, is established by Princess Effat and a number of prominent Saudi women.

1963

- The Council of Ministers approves a project to establish television in the Kingdom.
- The Department of Youth Welfare (previously the Department of Sport) creates four federations: volleyball, basketball, athletic and cycling.

1965

- King Faisal approves the first national television broadcast, a reading of the Qur'an, amid protests from conservatives.

1970

- Launch of the first five-year Development Plan, including investments in education and infrastructure.
- Saudi Arabia begins participating in the Arabian Gulf Cup.
- The Riyadh University for Women is opened as the first female college of education in the Kingdom. It is later renamed Princess Nourah bint Abdul Rahman University, after King Abdul Aziz's sister.

1971

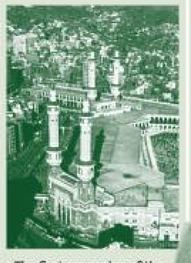
- The Public Investment Fund is created by royal decree to invest funds for the government of Saudi Arabia.

1972

- For the first time, Saudi Arabia sends athletes to the Olympics (four runners participated in the Munich Summer Games).
- The Organization of Islamic Cooperation is founded in Jeddah to strengthen the solidarity and cooperation among member states.

1973

- Saudi Arabia cuts all oil exports to the US and other countries supporting Israel in the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, causing oil prices to quadruple.



- The first expansion of the Grand Mosque of Makkah, which began under the rule of King Saud, is completed, including four new minarets.
- The flag of Saudi Arabia is standardized, with a slightly more condensed version of the Shahada inscription and a straighter sword.

1974

- Richard Nixon is the first US President to visit Saudi Arabia, meeting with King Faisal in Jeddah (pictured right).
- The US-Saudi Arabian Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation is set up.



- The first general population census is conducted.
- The Organization of Islamic Cooperation creates the Islamic Solidarity Fund and sets up the Islamic Bank for Development, to be based in Jeddah.
- The Council of Ministers establishes the General Presidency for Youth Welfare as an independent administration in charge of sport.

1975

- King Faisal University is established in Al-Hofuf, Al-Ahsa.
- Federations for handball, tennis and fencing are created.
- Saudi Arabia's second five-year plan includes the "Master Gas Plan," with natural gas to be used for power generating, and the founding of the Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu.

1976

- The satellite operator Arabsat is founded by the Arab League, with Saudi Arabia as the main backer.
- Al-Saudia TV channel, previously in black and white, begins color broadcasting in Jeddah and Makkah.
- Saudi athletes participate in the Montreal Olympics and for the first time in the Pan Arab Games.



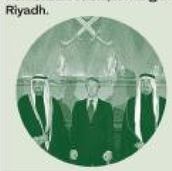
- A royal decree creates Sabic, a Saudi diversified manufacturing company, to convert oil byproducts into petrochemicals.
- The Saudi Football League is established.

1977

- Construction begins on Jubail Industrial City along Saudi Arabia's Gulf coast, now home to the world's largest producers of petrochemicals.
- The Saudi Premier League for basketball is founded.
- Almarai, the Arabian Gulf's biggest food and beverage producer, is founded by Prince Sultan bin Mohammed bin Saud Al-Kabir, with Irish brothers Paddy and Alister McGuckian.
- King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology is established in Riyadh.

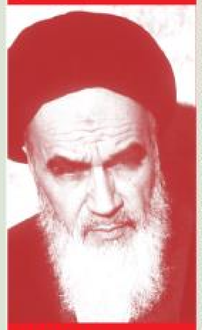
1978

- Jimmy Carter becomes the second US president to visit Saudi Arabia, arriving in Riyadh.



- Saudi Arabia begins competing in the Asian Games.

1979



IRANIAN REVOLUTION

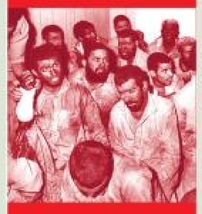
JANUARY 22
- Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi and his wife leave Tehran.

FEBRUARY 1
- Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini returns to Iran from exile in France.

FEBRUARY 11
- Khomeini officially assumes power when troops loyal to the shah surrender.

FEBRUARY 16
- Iran's revolutionary authorities start executions of leading supporters of the shah, including four top generals.

NOVEMBER 4
- US embassy in Tehran stormed by Iranian students who take 52 Americans hostage, demanding the extradition of the shah.



SIEGE OF MAKKAH'S GRAND MOSQUE

NOVEMBER 20
- A well-organized group led by Saudi militant Juhayman Al-Otaibi storms the Grand Mosque with weapons smuggled in coffins and vehicles using members pretending to be there to pray. Al-Otaibi is a member of Al-Jamaa Al-Salafiya Al-Muhtasiba (Salafi Group that Commands Right and Forbids Wrong), which is angered by Western social influence, women's presence in the Saudi workforce, TV and other issues. Worshippers are prevented from leaving after the announcement of a takeover over a microphone. Hostages are forced to pledge allegiance to the group's leader, Mohammed bin Abdullah Al-Qahtani, Al-Otaibi and their followers.

DECEMBER 4
- The siege lasts for two weeks and ends after an intervention by Saudi special forces and their allies, leaving hundreds dead, including Saudi officers, soldiers and civilians as well as Al-Qahtani and his followers. Al-Otaibi is arrested and executed on Jan. 9, 1980.

Now

2016

- Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman unveils Vision 2030, a road map for Saudi Arabia's future.
- The Saudi Cabinet approves a new law restricting the religious police from questioning, pursuing or arresting violators; they must instead report them to the police or anti-narcotics officers.
- Princess Reema bint Bandar is appointed vice president for women's affairs at the General Sports Authority.
- Kariman Abuljadayel is the first Saudi woman to compete in the 100-meter event at the 2016 Summer Olympics in Brazil.
- The General Authority for Entertainment and the General Sports Authority are established by royal decree.

2017

- King Salman appoints Mohammed bin Salman as crown prince of Saudi Arabia.



- The Saudi Stock Exchange appoints a woman, Sarah Al-Suhaimi, as chairperson for the first time.



- In one of the first public music performances in many years, Mohammed Abdo performs for a men-only audience in Jeddah.
- Giga-projects are launched: NEOM, a $500-billion megacity in the Tabuk region, and the Red Sea tourism project (right).
- Saudi state schools announce that they will offer physical education classes for female students.
- At the inaugural Future Investment Initiative in Riyadh, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman pledges a return to moderate Islam.



2018

- Female fans are allowed to attend football matches for the first time in Saudi Arabia; the match was Al-Ahli vs. Al-Batin in Jeddah on Jan. 12.
- Ending a 35-year ban on cinemas, the first commercial movie theater opens in Riyadh with a screening of "Black Panther" on April 18.
- A ban on Saudi women driving is lifted on June 24.
- An anti-harassment law, approved by the Shoura Council, receives praise from around the world.
- King Salman launches plans for Qiddiya, expected to be the world's largest entertainment city.
- The Culture Ministry, headed by Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Farhan Al-Saud, is established (right).



- Al-Ahsa Oasis is designated a UNESCO World Heritage site.
- Weam Al-Dakheel becomes the first Saudi woman to anchor the main evening news on Saudi TV.
- Enrique Iglesias, Amr Diab and the Black Eyed Peas are among the first international performers at the Formula E



'We only want to go back to what we were, the moderate Islam that is open to the world'

in Riyadh, for which the first trial tourist visas are granted.
- The WWE's Royal Rumble takes place at Jeddah's King Abdullah Sports City in Jeddah, beginning a 10-year partnership with the General Sports Authority.

2019

- Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman launches a mega tourism project in AlUla which will include a resort designed by renowned French architect Jean Nouvel and a nature reserve dubbed Sharaan.



- Lubna Al-Olayan becomes the first Saudi chairwoman to run a Saudi bank, a merger between Alawwal and Saudi British Bank.



- Saudi Arabia's first female ambassador, Princess Reema bint Bandar (top center), is appointed to Washington.
- The Saudi Cabinet approves a "Privileged Iqama residency permit," which will allow foreign nationals to work and live in Saudi Arabia without a sponsor, offered to highly skilled expatriates and owners of capital funds.
- By royal decree, Saudi women no longer require permission from a male guardian to travel or obtain a passport.
- A lineup of superstars perform in concerts across the Kingdom: Mariah Carey, Janet Jackson and 50 Cent in Jeddah; Andrea Bocelli in AlUla (below); Pitbull and Akon in the Eastern Province.
- High-profile sports events include the Italian Super Cup between Juventus and AC Milan; Fight Night between world boxing champion Amir Khan (left)and Billy Dib; and the largest Battle Royale in WWE history.





On the cover: Who's who, what's what...

1 Vaseline ad
2 American pop star Michael Jackson
3 Saudi Airlines Lockheed Tristar L-1011
4 Brazilian football team captain Rivellino played for Al-Hilal in the late 1970s
5 Actors of 'Bonanzaz, American TV series featuring Lorne Greene, Pernell Roberts and Dan Blocker
6 Record player and famous cassettes of the 1970s
7 Kuwaiti singer Laila Abdulaziz
8 Famous Kuwaiti comedy show, "Darb Al-Zalaq"
9 Saudi Arabian Airlines (Saudia) ticket
10 Pontiac Catalina
11 Saudi national football team in 1972 Gulf Cup
12 Saudi Aramco logo
13 Evolution of Pepsi
14 Arabic Sesame Street puppets No'man
15 Saudi singer Etab
16 Prince Mamdouh bin Saud, Al-Nasr football club player
17 Al-Saudia TV presenter and news anchor Sulaiman Al-Issa
18 Saudi singer Tooha
19 Sheikh Ali Al-Tantawi
20 Saudi radio impersonator Abdulaziz Al-Hazza'a
21 Students of Dar Al-Hanan School for Girls, Jeddah
22 Saudi Radio music consultant and musician Omar Kadara
23 Young Saudi male music student
24 1976 Cadillac 60 Special Brougham d'Elegance
25 ABBA
26 Saudi singer Ibtesam Lutfi
27 Saudi actor Hassan Dardeer a.k.a. "Meshgas"
28 Arabic Sesame Street puppets Ka'ki
29 Sameer magazine for kids
30 Saudi singer Talal Maddah
31 Saudi singer Mohammed Abdo
32 Egyptian singer Um Kalthoum
33 Child actors from children's show on Al-Madina broadcasting station
34 Actors from Syrian comedy show "Sah Al-Nawm
35 Young Saudi college students
36 Saudi musician, actor and poet Lutfi Zaini
37 Saudi football player Majid Abdullah
38 Saudi footballer Salim Marwan

Video

- Go to www.arabnews.com/SaudiNationalDay2019 to see our Saudi National Day video looking at life in the Kingdom in the 1970s and how recent reforms are taking Saudi Arabia back to the future.



About the cover

London artist Peter Quinell is known for his retro collages, which have appeared across a range of media, from magazines such as "GQ" and newspapers such as The Sunday Times to the window displays of Harvey Nichols. For an animated version of his cover for Arab News, featuring nostalgia from 1970s Saudi Arabia, go to www.arabnews.com/SaudiNationalDay2019

Road to 2030

For the latest news on Saudi Arabia's transformation, visit the Arab News website — which has a dedicated Road to 2030 section tracking the reforms underway.

www.arabnews.com/road2030

