

OFFICIAL NAME: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

CAPITAL: Riyadh

SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT: Absolute Monarchy

AREA: 2,331,000 Sq Km (900,004 Sq Mi)

ESTIMATED 2000 POPULATION: 21,140,400



LOCATION & GEOGRAPHY: Saudi Arabia is located on the Arabia Peninsula and comprises around 80% of it. It is bound by the Red Sea to the west, Egypt and Jordan to the northeast, Iraq and Kuwait to the north, the Persian Gulf, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates to the east, Oman to the southeast and south as well as Yemen to the south and southwest. The country is divided into four geographical regions (1.) The Red Sea escarpment, from Hejaz in the north to Asir in the south. (2.) The central plateau which extends to the Tuwaiq Mountains and further. (3.) The sand deserts of Dahana and Nafud. (4.) The Rub al-Khali Desert, which is the largest sand desert in world. The country has no permanent rivers or bodies of water. Major Cities (pop. est.); Riyadh 1,300,000, Jidda 1,250,000, Mecca 55,000 (1980). Land Use; forested 0.5%, pastures 56%, agricultural-cultivated 1.5%, desert and other 42% (1993).

CLIMATE: Saudi Arabia has a hot and dry climate with frost and freezing temperatures in winter while the Red Sea coast experiences high humidity and temperatures. Rainfall is sparse with an average annual precipitation of approximately 100 mm (4 inches). The prevailing winds are severe dust storms such as the southerly Kauf and the northwesterly Shamal. Average temperature ranges in Riyadh are from 8 to 21 degrees Celsius (46 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit) in January to 26 to 42 degrees Celsius (79 to 108 degrees Fahrenheit) in July.

PEOPLE: The principal ethnic majority are the Arabs who account for 90% of the population. The remainder consist of Black Africans, Javanese, Indians, Pakistanis and Egyptians.

DEMOGRAPHIC/VITAL STATISTICS: Density; 7 persons per sq km (17 persons per sq mi) (1991). Urban-Rural; 77.3% urban, 22.7% rural (1990). Sex Distribution; 54.4% male, 45.6% female (1990). Life Expectancy at Birth; 61.7 years male, 65.2 years female (1990). Age Breakdown; 43% under 15, 25% 15 to 29, 19% 30 to 44, 8% 45 to 59, 4% 60 to 74, 1% 75 and over (1990). Birth Rate; 42.1 per 1,000 (1990). Death Rate; 7.6 per 1,000 (1990). Increase Rate; 34.5 per 1,000 (1990). Infant Mortality Rate; 108.6 per 1,000 live births (1988).

RELIGIONS: The official religion is Islam with 85% of the population Sunni Muslims while 14% are Shiite Muslims. Christians account for less than 1% of the population and are the largest religious minority.

LANGUAGES: The official language is Arabic, although English is also widely understood.

EDUCATION: Aged 25 or over and having attained: no formal schooling 31.8%, primary, secondary or higher 68.2% (1986). Literacy; literate population aged 15 or over 62.4% (1990).

MODERN HISTORY - WWII TO 1993: In Nov. 1953 King Ibn Saud died and was acceded by his son Crown Prince Saud. In 1956 King Saud provided financial support and invoked the first oil embargo against Britain and France. In 1964 Saud was forced to abdicate and was acceded by his brother, Faisal. From 1962 to 1967 Saudi Arabia supported the Monarchists in North Yemen's civil war and in 1967 Saudi Arabia supported Egypt, Jordan and Syria in the "Six Day War" against Israel. During the early 1970's King Faisal introduced socio-economic policies which included the abolishment of slavery and opportunities for women in employment and education. In 1973 Saudi Arabia invoked another oil embargo on the US and other Western nations after another Arab-Israeli war broke out. As a result, oil prices quadrupled. On Mar. 25, 1975 King Faisal was assassinated by his nephew and was acceded by his half brother, Prince Khalid. In Nov. 1979 during the Haj or pilgrimage to the Great Muslim Mosque at Mecca, it was occupied by some fanatical Wahhabi Muslims which resulted in the death of 102 rebels and 27 Saudi security forces over the two weeks of ensuing conflict. In Jan. 1980, 63 of the rebels arrested were publicly beheaded. In Dec. 1980 riots took place in the towns of the Shiite Muslims after they were inspired by the Kohmeini's Shiite Revolution in Iran. In May 1981 Saudi Arabia joined other East Arabian nations and formed the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC). In June 1982 King Khalid died and was acceded by his eldest brother, Prince Fahd. Since that time King Fahd has built stronger ties with Western nations, in particular the US. In 1987 the Haj resulted in another 400 or more deaths as clashes broke out between Iranian pilgrims and Saudi security forces. In the July 1990 Haj, some 1,500 people died after a stampede occurred in a pedestrian tunnel leading to Mecca. In Aug. 1990 after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, King Fahd agreed to the deployment of US and other Western troops on his territory. On Jan. 18, 1991 a scud missile launched by Iraq targeted Dhahran with 10 further scud missiles launched at Riyadh and Dhahran on Jan. 20-21, 1991. More scud attacks were launched within a few days and also targeted barracks at al-Khubar in which 28 US soldiers were killed and 100 injured. On Jan. 17, 1991 Saudi troops actively took part in the liberation of Kuwait as part of "Operation Desert Storm". During the Gulf War, Saudi Arabia provided much of the needed financial assistance and was engaged in a massive clean-up operation of oil after Iraq had deliberately released several thousand barrels into the Persian Gulf. On Jan. 30, 1991 Saudi troops participated in the liberation of the Ra's al-Khafji, a border town Iraqi troops briefly occupied. On Mar. 26, 1991 Saudi Arabia

resumed diplomatic ties with Iran following a three year absence. On July 11, 1991 a Nigerian chartered DC-8 crashed near Jiddah airport killing all 261 aboard. On July 20, 1991 the Saudi government announced a proposal to lift the Arab boycott of Israel if their government ordered a halt of Jewish settlement of the occupied territories. On Sept. 25, 1991 Prince Khalid ibn Sultan Adb al-Aziz the commander of Saudi and Islamic forces retired from active service and received an honorary knighthood from Queen Elizabeth II on Nov. 15, 1991. On Dec. 30, 1991 King Fahd announced that the establishment of a consultative council would begin in Feb. 1992. In 1992 King Fahd maintained his commitment to political reform, despite open attacks from the religious establishment. On Feb. 22, 1992 Prince Sa'ud al-Faisal signed diplomatic relation protocols with the former USSR Islamic republics of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. On March 1, 1992 King Fahd established a 60-member Consultative Council (Majlis ash-Shura) to advise on political reforms and ordered a devolution of power to local councils, the establishment of basic law to strengthen civil and religious legislation, and rules for royal succession for second-generation princes. In April 1992 the Saudi government warned Yemen-based oil exploration companies that they were operating within Saudi territory. In Sept. 1992 Saudi Arabia banned the importation of Jordanian fresh produce alleging contamination. On Sept. 23, 1992 King Fahd inaugurated Sheik Muhammad ibn Ibrahim ibn Jubair as the Consultative Council's first speaker. On Sept. 30, 1992 Saudi troops attacked a Qatari border post at Khofous killing two soldiers that led the Qatari government to abrogate a 1965 border agreement. In Nov. 1992 King Fahd dismissed several members of the council of religious scholars (ulema) and replaced them with 17 younger clerics after they failed to condemn a petition signed by 107 scholars and clerics calling on the government to adhere to strict Islamic law and accusing it of wasting billions of dollars. In Dec. 1992 Qatar and Saudi Arabia signed another border agreement that ended the tense relations, and Saudi Arabia threatened to supply weapons to Bosnian Muslims unless the UN acted to end the hostilities there. Also in 1992 relations with the US were uncertain following the Bush administrations approval of the sale of 72 F-15 fighter to Saudi Arabia, although the President-elect Bill Clinton cautioned that before he would endorse the sale he would need to be confident that Israel maintained its military superiority within the region. In Jan. 1993 King Fahd permitted the US to use Saudi bases to operate air strikes against Iraq and on Jan. 28, 1993 the UK confirmed the sale of 48 Tornado aircraft to Saudi Arabia. On May 9, 1993 religious fundamentalist members belonging to the Committee for Defense of Legitimate Rights called on the government and King Fahd to safeguard the rights of Islamic (Shariah) law, although the Council of Ulema declared the committee's declaration illegal and reminded Saudis of their duty to obey the King and Ulema. On May 20, 1993 the committee declared its loyalty to the government following the arrest and detention of several leaders. In May 27, 1993 police banned a planned protest by Iranian Haj pilgrims, although on June 1, 1993 demonstrators gathered to announce anti-Israeli and anti-American slogans. In July 1993 Abdullah ibn Amr Nassif was appointed vice chairman of the Consultative Council and on Aug. 20, 1993 a law was published that covered the operations of the Council and rules governing the conduct of the Council of Ministers (Cabinet). On Sept. 16, 1993 King Fahd announced a decree that confirmed the organization of the kingdom into 13 regions governed by Emirs. Also in 1993 King Fahd divided the Ministry of Pilgrimage and Religious Trusts into two ministries in an attempt to strengthen the official religious establishment against the rising challenge of fundamentalists.

CURRENCY: The official currency is the Riyal (SRIs) divided into 5 Qurushes and 100 Halalals.

ECONOMY: Gross National Product; USD \$173,100,000,000 (1994). Public Debt; USD \$2,893,000,000 (1991). Imports; SRIs 87,422,000,000 (1994). Exports; SRIs 170,884,300,000 (1994). Tourism Receipts; USD \$2,050,000,000 (1989). Balance of Trade; USD \$22,286,000,000 (1994). Economically Active Population; 5,614,000 or 32.2% of total population (1994). Unemployed; N/A.

MAIN TRADING PARTNERS: Its main trading partners are the USA, Western Europe and Japan.

MAIN PRIMARY PRODUCTS: Alfalfa, Cattle, Crude Oil and Natural Gas, Dates, Goats, Grapes, Poultry, Sheep, Sorghum, Watermelons, Wheat.

MAJOR INDUSTRIES: Cement, Crude Oil and Natural Gas Production and Refining, Fertilizers, Petrochemicals, Steel.

MAIN EXPORTS: Crude Oil and Refined Products, Natural Gas.

TRANSPORT: Railroads; route length 893 km (555 mi) (1989), passenger-km 121,000,000 (75,186,000 passenger-mi) (1989), cargo ton-km 801,000,000 (548,605,000 short ton-mi) (1989). Roads; length 92,802 km (57,664 mi) (1988). Vehicles; cars 2,300,000 (1989), trucks and buses 2,000,000 (1989). Merchant Marine; vessels 311 (1990), deadweight tonnage 2,716,262 (1990). Air Transport; passenger-km 16,068,000,000 (9,984,000,000 passenger-mi) (1990), cargo ton-km 609,619,000 (417,528,000 short ton-mi) (1990).

COMMUNICATIONS: Daily Newspapers; total of 10 with a total circulation for 9 of 579,300 (1992). Radio; receivers 3,800,000 (1994). Television; receivers 4,700,000 (1994). Telephones; units 1,574,900 (1993).

MILITARY: 105,500 (1995) total active duty personnel with 66.4% army, 12.8% navy and 20.8% air force while military expenditure accounts for 11.2% (1994) of the Gross National Product (GNP).