

Introduction

A little more than a lifetime ago Saudi Arabia was underdeveloped. Schools were few, and the overwhelming majority of people were illiterate. No highways linked the cities; most travel was done with camel caravans; health facilities were rudimentary and found only in larger centers. In his memoirs, Ghazi Al-Gosaibi, a son of one of the country's wealthiest families, remembers how astounded he was to learn—upon moving to Bahrain—that the electric light bulb existed.

The tremendous changes that were to usher in new ways to Saudi Arabia were achieved at great cost and with some difficulty. Internal opposition to modernization was considerable. To preserve the political stability of the country, the Saudi royal government had to tread a careful path, balancing the demands of ardent advocates of modernization against the forces of conservatism. In this task, the government was assisted by a cadre of young men who went abroad in the 1950s and 1960s for training in management and technology—training that proved essential in bringing modern ideas and new enterprises to Saudi Arabia.

Abdulaziz Al-Zamil, one such young man, is the subject of this book. First as the founding chief executive of Saudi Basic Industries Corporation (SABIC), then as Minister of Industry and Electricity, and now as chairman of the Zamil Group, he has been a pioneer of Saudi Arabia's industrialization and at the very forefront of its modernization. He has been crucial to the creation of employment opportunities for tens of thousands of his countrymen, enabling them to join in a great adventure—the transformation of Saudi Arabia into a modern state that plays a significant role in the global economy and in world affairs.

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