

The establishment and the external relations of SPA:

The Saudi press agency was established in 1390h / 1971 as the first national news agency. The main goal of its establishment was to serve as a central body to collect and distribute local and international news in the kingdom and abroad. It is an important channel to keep abreast with developments in the kingdom and to serve as a true reflection for transfer of different kinds of information to Saudi citizens from events locations in the kingdom and abroad.

Since its establishment, SPA has made great strides to complete its basic components to be a modern and an effective news agency. In a short time, it became the first and main source of news in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Its news services have gained a vast trust because of its objective and authentic coverage and highest professional outlook.

Modern wire and wireless communications means in the kingdom have provided SPA with a great potential to spread its news services rapidly in the kingdom and abroad. Therefore, its news services are now available for various kinds of media and governmental circles and bodies. Since its establishment, SPA has been trying to build up close ties with Arab, international, and other agencies of developing countries. In addition, SPA has made linkages with information bodies in order to develop the process of exchanging news and the free outflow of news and information.

SPA is a founder member of the federation of the Arab news agencies, the gulf news agency, the international Islamic news agency and the pool of news agencies of the nonaligned countries. The Saudi press agency takes part in annual conferences and meetings to review aspects of the joint cooperation between news agencies of different regional groups. It also participates in other media and information conferences.

By a decision of the Council of Ministers on 7 Rajab 1433 AH, SPA was converted to a public body called the Saudi Press Agency, linked administratively with the Minister of Culture and Information, with a board of directors headed by the Minister of Culture and Information and its membership includes representatives from a number of government bodies and two of experts and intellectuals.

The new Saudi Press Agency building in Riyadh

The construction of the new headquarter building of Saudi Press Agency (SPA) began on 12 February 1431 H, in Riyadh to meet the agency's needs and help improve the performance of employees; it will be completed within 24 months. The new building is located in Al-Sahafa neighborhood along King Fahd Road.

The Structure of SPA

SPA is a public body which enjoys an independent legal status. It employs more than 600 people, and is chaired by a president of excellent rank linked with the Minister of Culture

SPA has three main divisions:

First: News and Editing Division

This department has two sections: internal and external editing desks comprise of a number of specialist editors and correspondents who supervise the daily work. All editors at the headquarters and regional offices in Jeddah, Dammam and other cities in the kingdom are well-qualified Saudi citizens.

It has also the English and translation section, which transmits SPA news in English and French, and also translates the received English and French news into Arabic.

There is also the political monitoring section, which listens to foreign radio stations and provides editing sections with news about current happenings. This section is one of the news sources of the editorial division.

SPA has a modern information and research center, which is considered one of the biggest specialized archives in the kingdom. The primary aim of the center is to classify and store information, in addition to providing research works, reports and statistics on various subjects. SPA has also a complete photo archive

that covers the daily events in the kingdom. It sends daily photo service by phone to its subscriber's newspapers and news agencies. It also receives foreign photo service from its offices or other news agencies under contracts and cooperation agreements, and retransmits it to its internal subscribers.

SPA Bulletins

SPA transmits a daily 24 hours comprehensive Arabic news bulletin that contains national and international news. It also transmits an English and French news bulletins and distributes a special bulletin and photos. SPA receives news services in different languages from Arab, European, and Islamic news agencies. It also helps in retransmitting a regular news service for both international Islamic news agency and the pool of news agencies of the nonaligned countries. Every morning, SPA issues a printed daily bulletin on important news, which is distributed, to all senior officials in the country.

SPA Offices and Correspondents

In the light of its desire to make its coverage of events direct and comprehensive, SPA has set up a number of offices and has sent correspondents in all parts of the kingdom and abroad.

Locally, SPA has set up main offices in the big Saudi cities and appointed a number of correspondents in governorates and small towns.

Abroad, SPA has set up offices in the capitals of major countries, as a first step. It has also appointed a number of correspondents in a number of other big cities to provide it with news reports on time and in a direct way. It also appointed a number of female correspondents in a number of cities inside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

SPA's Offices Abroad

- 1. Beirut office was set up in 1390 h. It has a staff of more than 20 reporters and administrative personnel. This office has shown a great proficiency in covering Lebanese civil war.
- 2. Cairo office was set up in 1392 h. It has a staff of about 30 employees.
- 3. Sana'a office was set up in 1393 h. It covers events and news in Yemen.
- 4. London office was set up in 1397 h. It has a staff of nearly 10 employees.
- 5. Washington office was set up in 1399 h. But from 1397 h, SPA had a correspondent in Washington. It has now a staff of more than 10 employees and covers events and news in north and South America.
- 6. Tunis office was set up in 1401 h. It covers the news of Arab-Moroccan region. The office has a staff of more than 10 employees.
- 7. Tehran office was set up in 1421 h.
- In addition, SPA has correspondents in Islamabad, Jordan, New York, Damascus, Morocco, Mauritania, Palestine, Berlin, Brussels, Paris, Moscow, Beijing, Vienna, Madrid, Geneva, Sydney, Algeria and Kuwait. SPA plans to set up a number of new offices and send correspondents to a number of other countries. The activity of the agency isn't confined on what it receives from its offices and correspondents, but it sends press missions to locations of events in any place in the world to cover these events

Second: Technical Division

Since December 20, 1997, SPA began to use computers in all its operations, divisions, sections and offices. The computerizing of its operations led SPA to transmit and receive news as well as classify and save information automatically. The technical division supervises computer operations and maintenance. .

This division supervises also all activities and equipments in the technical and engineering sections. It supervises all installation, maintenance, operating works, in addition to planning and carrying out technical projects of the agency. It also oversees the maintenance of the agency's building.

- Sections of the technical division:
- - Planning and follow-up section.

- - Operating and maintenance section.
- - Photo transmission and reception section.
- - Computer section.

*Projects that have been supervised by the technical division are:

- - Introducing digital photo service in photography division.
- - Computerizing SPA activities in editing sections.
- - Modernizing internal and external offices of SPA in order to qualify them for computerizing process.
- - Modernizing all SPA equipment to be receptive to technical advances and increase its efficiency and performance. This includes the following services;
 - 1- Introducing satellite service in SPA transmission by using 4 satellites to cover the world.
 - 2- Automating all of the Agency's works.
 - 3-Introducing the digital photography service
 - 4- Setting up a modern information center, equipped with most sophisticated means.
 - 5- Setting up color digital photo labs.
 - 6- Setting up a conference room, equipped with highly technical means of translation and live shows.
 - 7- Introducing SPA services on the Internet.

Third: Administration Affairs Division

It is concerned with following up and accomplishing all administrative and financial affairs of SPA, its employees and offices in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia and abroad.

It consists of:

- 1. The personal affairs section is assigned to provide all administrative services for SPA employees.
- 2. The accounting division is assigned to deal with all SPA financial affairs.
- 3. The communication section is assigned to save all documents received and sent to SPA. Moreover it keeps records of all employees.
- 4. The administration section supervises also the movements of SPA vehicles and information unit, in addition to the small units that are required by the agency

Ties of SPA with Other News Agencies

SPA has reached bilateral agreements to facilitate exchange of news with other Arabic and international news agencies. It has built up strong relations to promote cooperation and exchange expertise with regional and world agencies. On many occasions, SPA sends press and technical delegations to visit friendly news agencies and receives similar delegations.

SPA uses direct satellite and microwaves lines in order to exchange news with other agencies, such as Kuwaiti, Qatari, Gulf, Tunisian and Moroccan news agencies. On the international level, SPA has forged cooperation and exchange news agreements with five world news agencies. They are Reuters, the Associated Press (AP), the United Press International (UPI), the Agence France-Presse (AFP), and Deutsche Presse-Agentur (DPA).

The Prominent Achievements of SPA

Steps that had been undertaken by SPA, ever since its beginning, gave it a momentum to support its abilities and intensify, and develop its services to meet the needs of the upcoming phase. SPA has been trying to employ technically and journalistically qualified cadres in order to activate its news services. SPA has set up in 1401h new sections such as English and French bulletins. It has also set up new sections in internal news department. One of them is to cover cultural affairs, innovations in the field of science in the kingdom and abroad and to cover scientific meetings and conferences.