

Abu Dhabi set to become top polo centre

By Ehab S. Shouly

Abu Dhabi

Abu Dhabi is set to become one of the most prestigious centres for polo, the gentleman's sport, in the Middle East with the construction of the magnificent Ghantoot Racing and Polo Club on a 300-hectare plot of land in the heart of the desert.

The soft opening of the Ghantoot Racing and Polo Club, work on which began more than five years ago, was marked here on Thursday evening with three games played on the recently-completed, healthy-looking grass polo field.

An elite group of guests, including two Malaysian princes, were invited to the soft opening, with His Highness Lt. General Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Chief of Staff of the UAE Armed Forces, being the chief guest.

His Royal Highness Crown Prince Abdullah ibni Sultan Haji Ahmed Shah, President of the Royal Malaysian Polo Association (RMPA), and his brother His Highness Prince Abdul Rahman, RMPA's Vice President, flew in especially for a game of polo at the new club.

Also present were Sheikh Khalid Bin Abdel Aziz Al Qassimi, one of the most promising UAE polo players, Minister of Public Works and Housing and Acting Minister of Petroleum Rakad Bin Salem Bin Rakad, and Dr. Amin Badr El-Din, Chairman of UAE Offsets Group.

The Ghantoot Racing and Polo

Club is strongly supported by its Chairman Sheikh Mansoor Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and his brother Sheikh Falah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, who are both avid polo and horse fans.

The new club, which is still under construction, is located in the Ghantoot area along the Abu Dhabi-Dubai Highway adjacent to the Al Jazira Hotel and Resorts. The area is fast becoming a tourist attraction, and a huge golf course is planned there.

Run and managed by Diego Zavaleta, an Argentinean who is himself a six-goal polo handicap, and his team of four trained petiseros who have been on the international polo circuit for five years, the club is slated to become one of the biggest in the region, if not the world.

When fully-completed, the club will include an official-size, flood-lit grass polo field, a sand-surface practice field, stables that can accommodate up to 76 horses, a swimming pool, tennis courts and a club-house among other excellent facilities.

According to Zavaleta, the club currently owns 50 ponies which were selected from Argentina and are ideal for all players, ranging from beginners to advanced. Polo lessons will be provided by professional trainers from Argentina and England.

Dr. Badr El-Din presented mementos on behalf of Sheikh Falah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan to the two Malaysian guests. Prince Abdullah also presented Sheikh Mohammed with his own beautiful memento.



Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed receives a gift from Crown Prince from Malaysia. Also seen is Amin Badr El-Din, Member Ghantoot Polo club. Below: Players in action at the Ghantoot Polo Club. GN Pictures by Abdul Rehman.

