

# THE TIMES

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## Saudi lawyer's work honoured with CBE

From Michael Theodoulou in Nicosia

A LAWYER who defended six Britons jailed in Riyadh on terrorist charges will become the first Saudi commoner to be honoured by the Queen.

Downing Street has authorised the decision to appoint Salah al-Hejailan CBE in what diplomats say is an attempt to encourage reform of the kingdom's legal system.

The announcement of the award in the New Year Honours will be made weeks after he helped to free the British men who claimed that they were tortured into falsely confessing their part in a spate of bomb attacks. However, the award may place a strain on diplomatic relations between London and Riyadh after growing British criticism of Saudi Arabia's human rights record and legal system.

Tony Blair has already privately made clear to the Saudi authorities his anger at the treatment of the jailed Britons, who were made scapegoats to cover up the existence of al-Qaeda terrorists operating in Saudi Arabia.

The men are attempting to sue the Saudi Government for their mistreatment and wrongful arrest.

Mr al-Hejailan, 62, angered his own Government by publicly condemning the way the cases were handled by ministers who claimed that the bombings, in which two British businessmen were murdered, were the result of a turf war over the illicit trade in alcohol.



He has also been involved in other high-profile criminal cases involving Britons, including the fate of two nurses accused of murdering a colleague.

While the Queen has honoured members of the Saudi royal family, including the country's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Abdullah, this award is seen as an unprecedented break with protocol.

The honour will please Western allies of Saudi Arabia, who have been warning its rulers that they must improve its judicial system.

Mr al-Hejailan is also an avowed critic of the death penalty, which is used frequently in Saudi Arabia.