

# 21st National Day of the United Arab Emirates



## UAE — at a Glance

WHETHER you drive a car, take a train or go by air, there is a good chance that the fuel used in your transport comes from the United Arab Emirates.

It is one of the world's major oil producers, with the second largest reserves in the Middle East, enough for another 200 years of production. With around 1.9 million inhabitants, the country occupies part of the eastern fringe of the Arabian Peninsula, the Horn of Arabia. At 80,000 sq. km. in area, it is about the size of Portugal. Last year's Gross Domestic Product of about 31 billion gives its people one of the highest living standards in the world, while at the same time, this still developing country is a major international aid donor. Contributing more per capita than many developed states, it has given well over five billion dollars in grants, aid and soft loans to other states since it was established 20 years ago.

### The People

The indigenous people of the country are Arabs, whose ancestors arrived in the area 2,000 or 3,000 years ago. Pre-history goes back over 10,000 years, to Neolithic times. By around 3000 BC, a culture emerged that was linked by trade with Moenjodaro in the Indus valley and to Mesopotamia, to which it exported copper from the mountains. Elaborate burial chambers, ancient towers and temples are testimony to a rich and interesting past.

The national language is Arabic, while the expatriate communities also speak English, Urdu, Malayalam, Filipino and Farsi.

The religion of the state is Islam, which first arrived in the region during the lifetime of the Prophet Mohammed (SM), and which provides the underlying inspiration for all legislation. Foreign communities of Christians and other denominations practise their religions freely within the UAE's heterogeneous and harmonious society.

### The Land

The climate consists of two seasons, a long, hot and humid summer from May to October, and a mild, pleasant winter, when shamals, the moist northern winds, bring rainfall which is usually slight along the coast and on the plains, and heavier in the mountains. The summer peaks between

by nearly two and a half million barrels of oil production a day, the Government of the United Arab Emirates has created one of the finest infrastructures to be found anywhere in the world. Ribbons of all-weather metalled roads criss-cross the country providing fast intercity access for the estimated 300,000 vehicles that provide the largest single means of internal transport.

The telecommunications network, linked to global satellites, is among the most efficient in the world, a key facility for the many multinational companies that have set up their base in the Emirates after upheavals elsewhere in the region.

Local telephone calls are free, as is education and medical care, while citizens enjoy all the security of a classic welfare state, including generous state pensions and, for those who need it, free housing.

The quality of medical care at the Government's 40 hospitals is world class, with one doctor for every 933 of the population, and a bed for every 250.

Import tariffs are low, and the country has become a regional entrepot, with extensive free trade zones in which well over a billion US dollars have been invested. Annual trade continues to increase, and despite the 1990-1991 Gulf conflict, it reached during that period an all-time high of over a hundred billion dirhams.

Industrialisation is well under way. At Ruwais, in the west of Abu Dhabi, there are a major petrochemical complex and an oil refinery, while at Jebel Ali is one of the world's most efficient aluminium smelters. Dubai's Dry Dock is of similar status.

Both local and foreign merchants thrive in an atmosphere of unfettered free enterprise, while with five international airports, the UAE is linked smoothly and quickly to the rest of the globe.

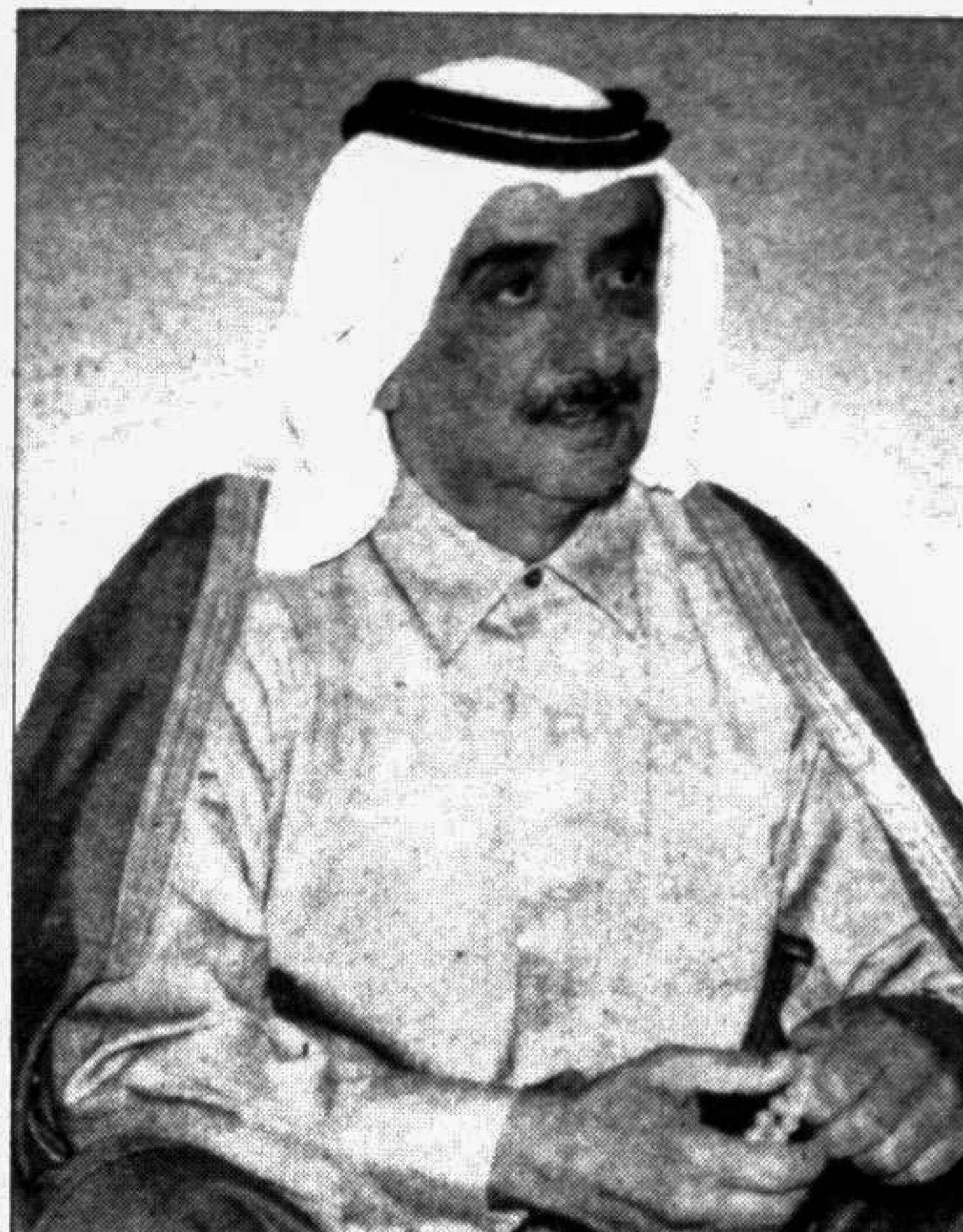
Those at Abu Dhabi and Dubai each handle several million passengers a year, while the man-made harbours at Jebel Ali and Abu Dhabi's Mina Zayed are among the largest in the world. Port Rashid in Dubai and the port of Fujairah, on the UAE's Gulf of Oman coast, are both ranked among the world's top 50 container ports.

### The Federation

The UAE is still a young country, comprising seven emirates which federated only



H. H. SHAIKH ZAYED BIN SULTAN AL NAHYAYAN  
President of the United Arab Emirates

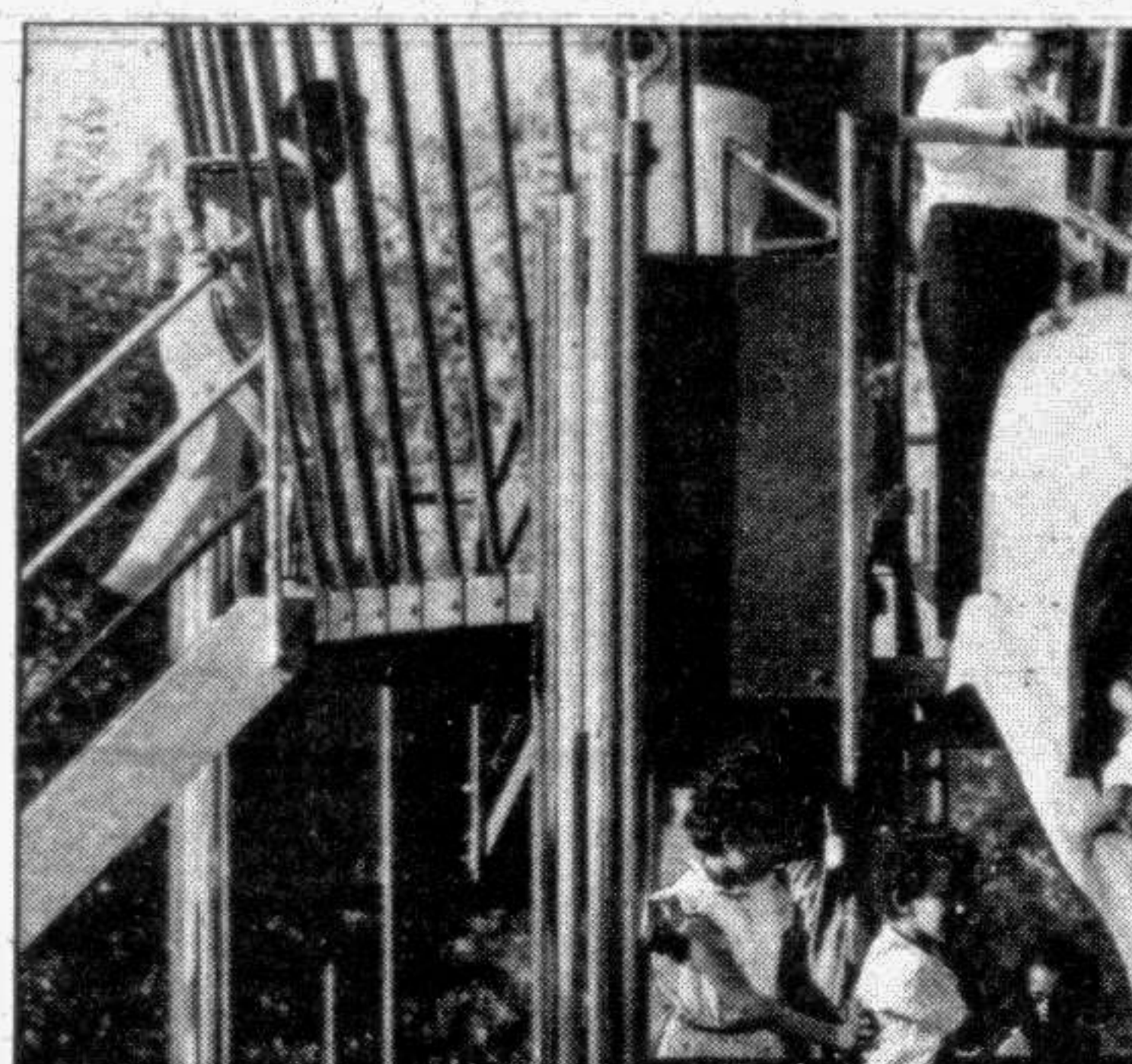


H. H. SHAIKH MAKTOUM BIN RASHID AL MAKTOUM  
Vice-President & Prime Minister of the U. A. E. and Ruler of Dubai

## An Enchanting Place to Visit

THE culture, history and environment of the United Arab Emirates make the country an enchanting place to visit. Over the course of the past few years, an increasing number of visitors from abroad have chosen to do precisely that — driven not, as in the past, by a desire to do business with one of the world's most vibrant economies, but by the desire to learn something about the

country itself and to have a pleasant and relaxing time while they do so. Indeed, many of the foreigners who now live in the Emirates have chosen to stay on despite the desire at some stage to return to their homelands, simply because the UAE is such a pleasant place in which to live. Many foreign businessmen, too, coming for a hard round of salesmanship, now take the opportunity of spending a few days to relax as well. With the facilities that are available, to residents and visi-



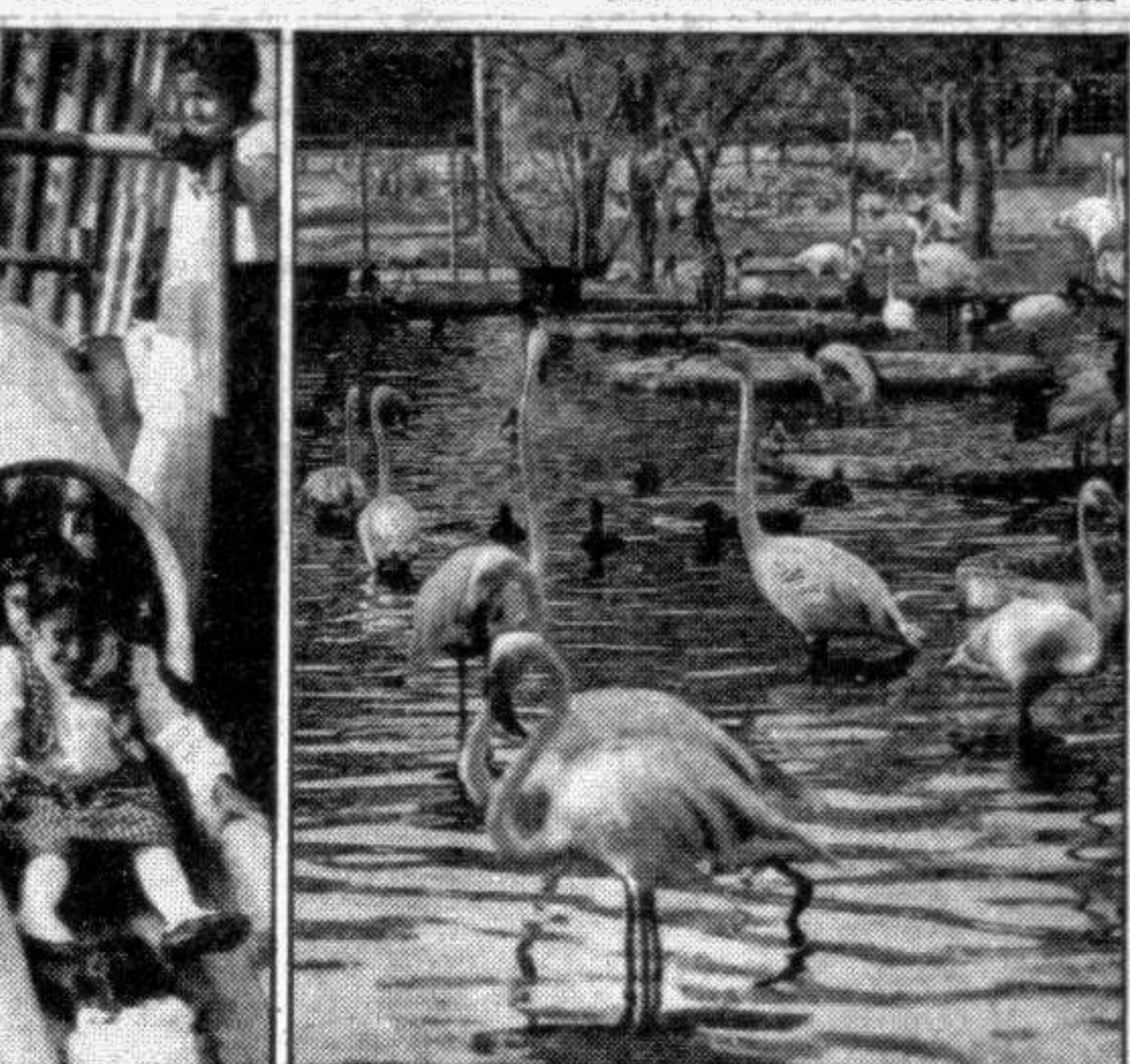
Children play and birds wade in the UAE's many parks.

thers alike, that is not surprising. Whatever particular interests individual visitors may have, however, they will want to be reassured that sun, sea, sand and shopping are available, along with the promise of comfort in conditions that will be accepted by even the most demanding. The Emirates offers all that, and more. From the moment a visitor arrives in the Emirates, wh-

great variety of cuisine, but entertainment as well. Particularly during the winter months, there often seems to be show of an international standard on somewhere in Dubai or Abu Dhabi almost every night. Classical jazz, played by a top orchestra from New Orleans, may be followed by a pop concert from singers of the stature of Tina Turner, and then a comedy brought out from a theatre in London's

example, will find that the Emirates Golf Club at Jebel Ali is the best course in the Middle East, attracting players on holiday from as far away as Japan. Now on the European professional circuit, it stages tournaments every year with top players like Ian Woosnam and Seve Ballesteros competing for rich prizes.

Perhaps the most unlikely of sports to be found in the cities of this arid and hot coun-



try is ice skating. Olympic-sized rinks in Dubai, Al Ain and Abu Dhabi are popular among citizens and foreign residents alike. Out in the desert, however, residents and visitors are developing an entirely new sports that is perhaps even more unlikely — that of skiing. Not, of course, on snow, but on the slopes of the great dunes to be found in areas like the Liwa, in the South-west of the country. Steeply-angled slip-faces that can be as much as 200 metres high provide skiers a special thrill, even if a sturdy four-wheel drive vehicle is required to reach the top of the slope rather than a ski-lift.

For those who prefer to be spectators, of course, there are opportunities as well. Football is the most popular game in the country, with local leagues throughout the winter months, while top teams from leading soccer nations like France, Germany and Britain are frequent visitors for challenge matches. Lovers of cricket will find the world's top teams in the Emirates, too, for Sharjah has now become established as regular venue on the international calendar, with one-day series in which all the top nations like India, Pakistan, the West Indies, Australia, England and Sri Lanka perform.

The tourist industry is the latest sector of the UAE economy to start developing. Already, at least 50,000 people a year choose the Emirates for a few days rest and relaxation, while as the word gets around about this as yet relatively unknown holiday destination, the numbers are expected to grow dramatically over the course of the next few years.

West End, complete with top actors and actresses. Film festivals, staged at centres like Abu Dhabi's Cultural Foundation, compete for attention with classical concerts by groups such as the Vienna State Orchestra, while a lively cultural programme also includes performances by artists from China, the Bolshoi Ballet in Moscow, and many more. Comfortable, top class accommodation guaranteed, there is much that the visitor can find to do outside the hotels. Shopping is, of course, an important preoccupation.

One of the attractions for any visitor, of course, will be to search out a special moment to take home and the markets (or 'souqs') in the Emirates offer a wide choice of goods from the region. The stunning Central Souq in Sharjah, for example, a modern building of an Islamic-inspired design, houses dozens of little shops offering traditional Arab coffees, carpets from nearby Iran, incense burners, the colourful dresses much loved by local ladies, and a variety of other goods.

The traditional market in neighbouring Dubai is a maze of little streets, where window displays of intricate local jewellery can be found to tempt the buyer, or where local merchants of spices and perfume await passing trade. A cluster of little shops on Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Khalifa Street is similarly tempting, with traditional Arab silver jewellery on offer, or the weapons of a bygone age.

Many visitors to the Emirates are keen sports fans, and the country is well equipped to offer opportunities to play or to watch. Golfers, for

example, will find that the Emirates Golf Club at Jebel Ali is the best course in the Middle East, attracting players on holiday from as far away as Japan. Now on the European professional circuit, it stages tournaments every year with top players like Ian Woosnam and Seve Ballesteros competing for rich prizes.

## Turning the Desert Green

ONE of the most important problems facing humanity today is that caused by the increasing desertification of much of the world's surface. In South America, across the Sahel belt of Africa, and across much of Asia as well, the pressure of man and his animals upon the fragile environment of these arid zones has meant that the desert is creeping forward, overwhelming formerly fertile agricultural land. Droughts add to the problem, so that in many countries, a rising population has to be fed from an ever declining areas of farmland. The potential for human catastrophe is immense.

The United Arab Emirates lies in the heart of the world's arid zone, bordering on the great desert of the Rub al Khali, or Empty Quarter, of the Arabian Peninsula, one of the most inhospitable places on earth. It has little rainfall, in some years virtually none, while its landscape, to the casual observer, appears almost barren.

Yet in the UAE, unlike other countries in the arid zone, the process of desertification is not taking place. Instead, thanks to a massive programme of investment in the planting of greenery, the sands have been halted, and are actually being rolled back.

It has taken vast sums of money to achieve this, but the people of the Emirates have made the discovery that, with the right amount of commitment it is possible to reverse the tide, and to establish forests and waving fields of grass and wheat where once only the desert winds blew.

The inspiration for the scheme comes from the country's President, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyayan: Himself born on the edge of the desert, he grew up at a time when the people of the country were accustomed to hunger and thirst, when plagues of locusts descended upon the land to eat every blade of grass, and every carefully-tended ear of corn. From the experiences of his childhood, he became determined that, should the opportunity arise, he would spare no effort to make sure that the hardships through which he had lived would not be suffered by the younger generation. The results of his efforts are now plain for all to see.

Not all of the Emirates is a desert of course. The country has had a long tradition of agriculture in the fertile oases, where for at least 5,000 years farmers have tapped the underground water reserves to grow their crops. As the climate became harsher 3,000 to 4,000 years ago, the early inhabitants developed a new skill, of tunnelling for kilometres under-ground to reach the sources of water, and to chan-

nel them to the palm groves and small fields. The oldest such channel, or 'falaj', to be found has been dated to around 1000 BC, and the technique is still in use in oases like Al Ain and Dhaid.

Up in the mountains, the people developed the skill of digging into the beds of the valleys, to trap the water under the gravel upstream, and then to lead it in small channels down the valleys until it reached a place where small terraced fields could be created. It was tiring, back-breaking work, as can be seen from the terraced farms that continue in use today, but at least it meant that some agriculture was possible.

In the last 20 years, the population of the country has risen more than ten-fold, but the rate of growth of agricultural production has kept pace, so much so that this desert land is not only self-sufficient in salad crops and poultry for much of the year, but is even exporting some crops, including strawberries, to markets as far away as Europe, something that would have been almost inconceivable in the recent past.

The bulk of the country's agricultural production comes from four areas, in and around the inland oasis-city of Al Ain, 160 km east of Abu Dhabi, the fertile but narrow strip along the East Coast, from the oasis of Dhaid, 60 kilometres east of Sharjah, and from the gravel plains that make up much of the northern emirate of Ras al Khaimah.

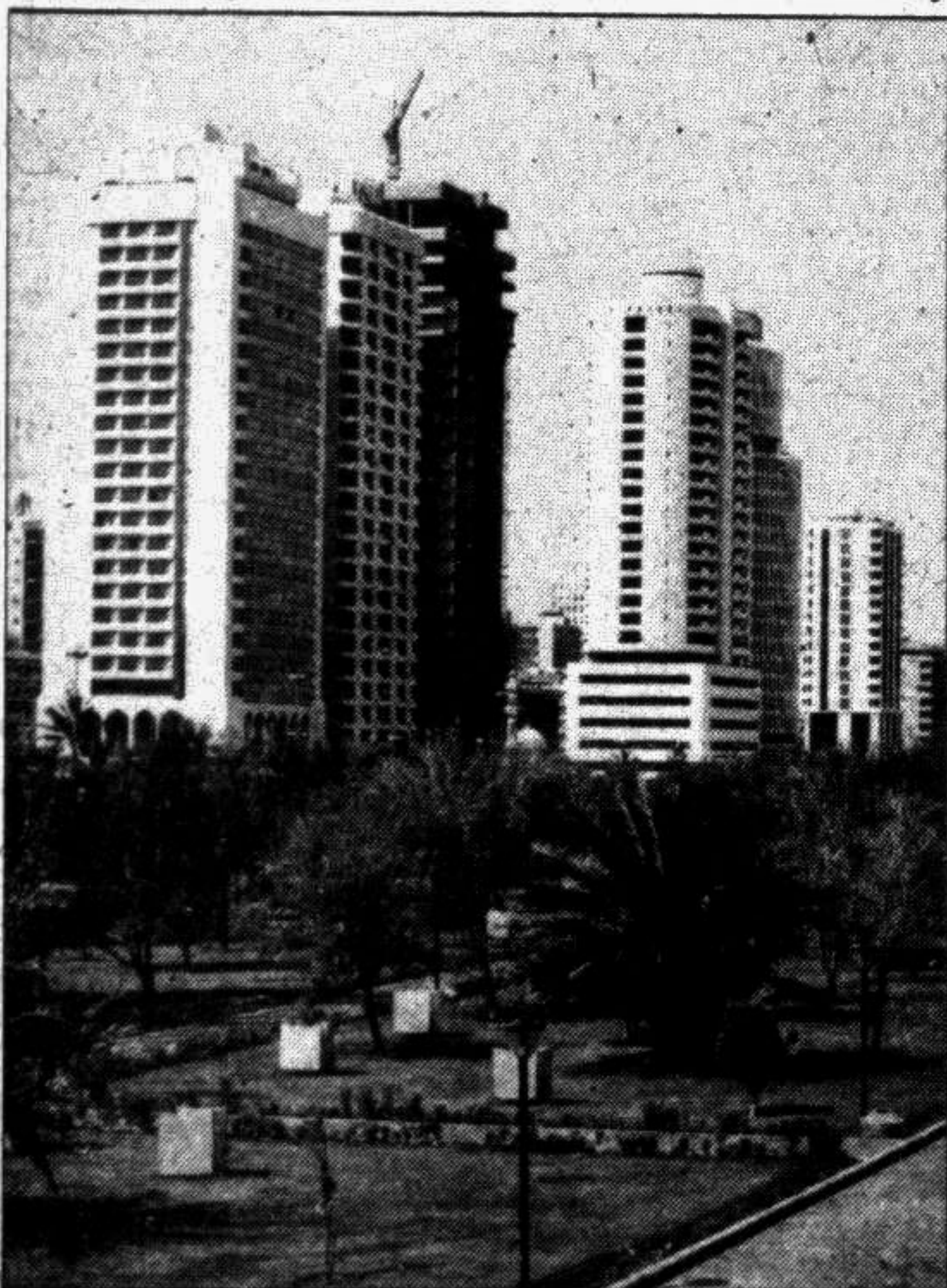
With an intensive programme of drilling of water wells, it has become possible to extend dramatically the area under cultivation, and in the period between 1978 and 1990, the amount of land under cultivation rose from 18,000 hectares to over 250,000 hectares. Further expansion has taken place since, with the number of small farms growing year by year. In 1973, there were less than 5,000, but there are now over 19,000.

Studies on the country's soil have shown that much of the land, apart from the rocky mountain slopes and sand dunes, can be cultivated provided that the water is available, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, the Department of Agriculture in Al Ain and the Abu Dhabi Municipality, covering the western region of Abu Dhabi emirate, have carried out an extensive programme of the drilling of water wells. Coupled with this, the Government also levels and prepares land for local farmers, which they are then given free, along with subsidised seeds, machinery, and advice on pest control.

The Government also has its own agricultural research stations, in centres like Dhaid and Al Ain, where new varieties of crops are tested to see how they adapt to the local climate. It has been shown, for example, that it is possible to cultivate wheat, although the high cost per hectare probably means that it will never be possible to replace imports. For some other crops, however, self-sufficiency is well on the way.

The depletable underground water resources are, naturally, of great importance, and the annual rainfall is never enough to replace in the aquifers the amount taken out for agriculture and for homes and industry. Recognising that this poses the greatest long-term challenge to the successful development of the coun-

Continued on page 9



Abu Dhabi's cornice has been beautifully landscaped with gardens and fountains.

July, and September, when temperatures can reach as high as 45° Celsius. Inland areas like the oasis-city of Al Ain or the mountain regions tend to be cooler or less humid than the coast, however, where summer humidity levels can reach as high as 90 per cent. The winter months, from November to April, are cooler and temperate, but with only a few days of rain.

With the wealth generated as recently as 1971. Two decades is a mere micro-dot on the canvas of time, but as part of the Arab nation, the Emirates is as old as history itself. The issues it faces are those simultaneously of growth and renewal, and this challenge is met squarely with a blend of modern and traditional solutions. The country's self-evident prosperity, internal stability and its excellent relations with its neighbours

The other six Emirates, in order of size, are, like Abu Dhabi named after their capitals, Dubai, the commercial centre, Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah, Fujairah, Umm Al Qatwain and Ajman. Several other towns, like Al Ain, are also growing fast.

The structure of the federation itself is highly flexible. The Cabinet system of Government reflects both the consensual nature of governance and the full utilisation of leadership talent. There is a clearly defined consultative

process based upon an ancient tradition of political consensus, reinforced by the Islamic principle of 'shura', whereby all policy making is exposed to the moderating processes of collective wisdom. The 40-member Federal National Council, whose members are drawn from among the most experienced and trusted members of society, sits for the legislative season in Abu Dhabi, and has the duty of approving all new laws. It may also initiate legislation, summon Ministers for questioning, debate matters of public concern and advise the cabinet on important issues.

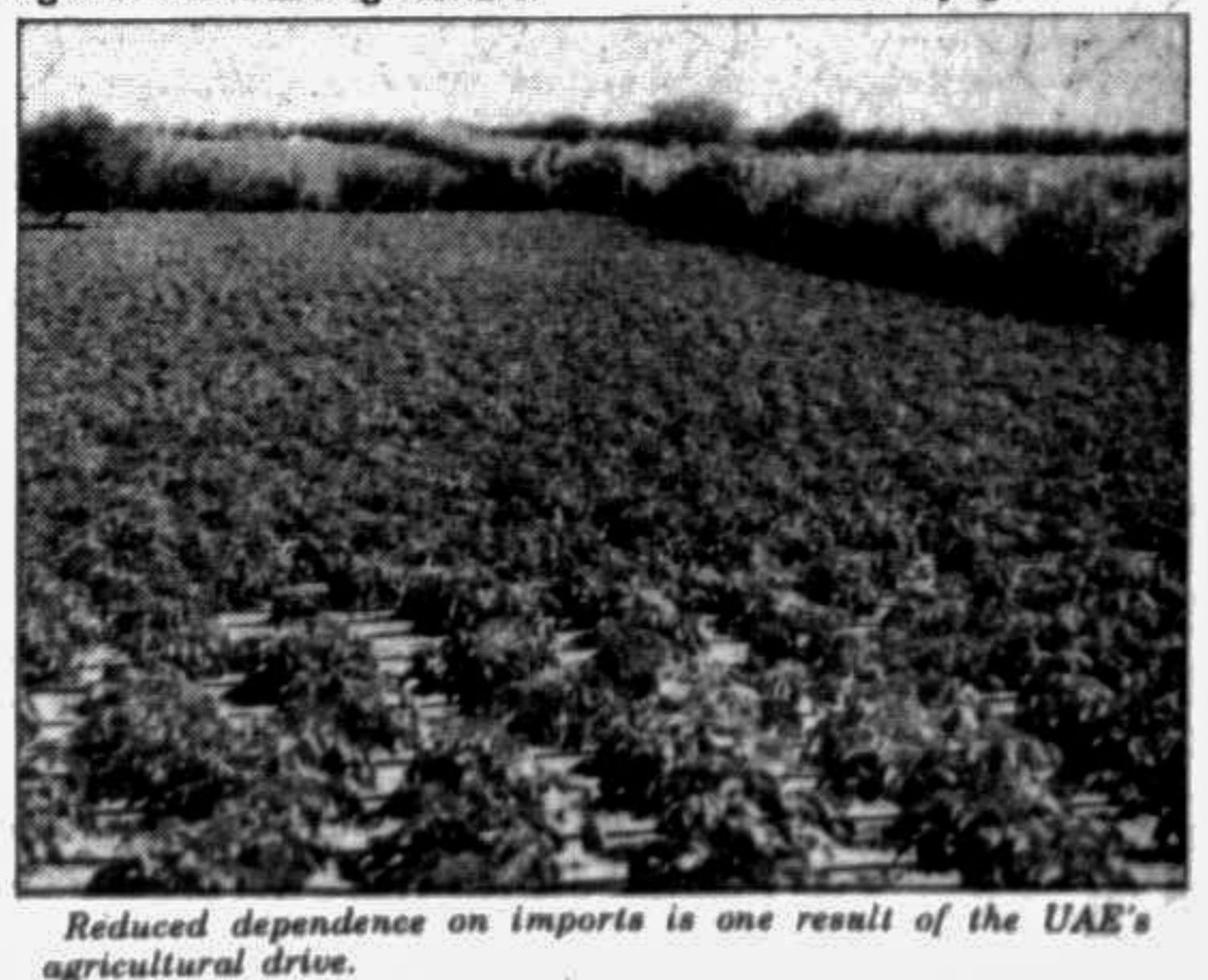
### The Role of Women

The UAE's women, urged on by the President, and led by his wife Sheikhha Fatma bint Mubarak, take an active part in national development, and are now playing an increasingly important role, consistent with the state's culture and traditions, in government, commerce and the professions.

Since 1986, the ratio of female to male students at the Emirates University in Al Ain, Continued on page 9



Tractors are now a common sight in the UAE's agriculture.



Reduced dependence on imports is one result of the UAE's agricultural drive.