

## A Glimpse of History

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 century, the people of the emirates, drawing upon the maritime skill of their forefathers, ranged far and wide across the Indian Ocean, trading as far away as Mombasa in Kenya, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and even China, in great wooden dhows, similar to those that can still be seen under construction in boatyards around the country today.

Evidence of that trading tradition can be viewed on the surface at the site of Julfar, in Ras al-Khaimah, where fine Chinese and Vietnamese potsherds mingle with pottery from nearer at hand. According to one Portuguese author, Duarte Barbosa, writing in 1517, the people of Julfar were 'persons of worth, great navigators and wholesale dealers. Here is a very great fishery as well, of seed pearls as well as large pearls.'

One of those navigators was Ahmed bin Majid, the 'Lion of the Sea', and one of the greatest figures in the UAE's history, some of whose manuals of navigation still survive. When the Portuguese opened up the area to contact with Europe, they did so in a wave of battles and bloodshed, levelling cities like Julfar and Khor Fakkan, on the east coast. By the early eighteenth century, Julfar was abandoned and the great trading tradition of the region went into decline.

**QAWASIM CHALLENGE THE BRITISH:** While European powers like Portugal, Holland, France and Britain competed for regional supremacy, however, a new power grew almost unnoticed in the emirates, the State of the Qawasim (or Qasimis), whose descendants today still rule Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah. Drawing on centuries of maritime experience, the Qasimis by the beginning of the nineteenth century had built up a fleet of over 60 large vessels, and could put nearly 20,000 sailors to sea. Their strength posed a serious challenge to the British, then emerging as the dominant power in the Indian Ocean, and in the first two decades of the nineteenth century a series of clashes between the two sides ended in the virtual destruction of the Qasimi fleet and the consolidation of British influence in the Gulf.

The British claimed that the Qasimi vessels had engaged in piracy, and from that the area gained the name 'The Pirate Coast'. In a masterful debunking of this claim, however, the Ruler of Sharjah, HH Dr Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, in his book, *The Myth of*



Pearling dhow



Gold pendant, 1800-1500BC, from Gattarah

augmented with treaties on preserving a maritime truce, resulted in the area becoming known as 'The Trucial States'.

Peace at sea meant that the 7,000-year-old pearl fisheries of the lower Gulf could be exploited without interruption, and fine pearls from the emirates were exported, not only to India, but also to the growing market in Europe. The pearl

industry thrived during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, providing both income and employment to the people of the Arabian Gulf coast. The First World War, however, dealt it a heavy blow, while the world economic depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s, coupled with the invention by the Japanese of the cultured pearl, virtually finished it off.

On land, freed from the damaging effects of warfare at sea, but lacking any real economic resources, the region developed only slowly during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One of the greatest figures of the period was Sheikh Zayed bin Khalifa of Abu Dhabi, who ruled for over 50 years, from 1855 to 1909, earning the title 'Zayed the Great'. His son, Sheikh Sultan, father of the present Ruler, Sheikh Zayed, was Ruler between 1922 and 1926, and then, after a brief reign by a brother, one of Sheikh Sultan's sons, Sheikh Shakbut, came to the throne at the beginning of 1928.

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In 1971 the country's population was only around 200,000 and there were substantial differences between the individual emirates in terms of size, population, economic resources and degree of development.

The larger emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai were already oil exporters and the process of their economic development was well under way. At the other end of the scale, Ajman, the smallest emirate, had an area of only 259 square kilometres, while the east coast emirate of Fujairah, with only a few tens of thousands of inhabitants, was not even connected by a proper road through the mountains of inhabitants, was not even connected by a proper road through the mountains to the rest of the country.

Twenty-eight years later the judicious use of oil revenues has brought economic prosperity and massive development to all of the seven emirates and the country's unique level of political stability stands as a testimony to the wisdom of federalism.

## The United Arab Emirates: Profile



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 the development of services related to the country's status as a major regional centre for commerce and tourism. While the Jebel Ali Free Zone, just outside Dubai, has retained its preeminent place among the country's expanding free zones, others, like that in Fujairah, on the country's East Coast, have also continued to grow, while the new Saadiyat Free Zone, adjacent to the island-capital of Abu Dhabi, was also launched. The intention is that the UAE's free zones should complement each other in providing a full range of storage, manufacturing and commercial services, including, at Saadiyat, offshore investment and financial services. These are complemented by the transport sector, and the UAE's increasing claim to the status of the region's top commercial entrepot has been enhanced by the growing traffic through its six international airports and six major ports. The national airline, Dubai-based Emirates, won the accolade of best airline flying to the Middle East for the ninth year running, as well as a number of other international awards.

The UAE's thriving transport and communications sector has been enhanced during the year by the launching of the Thiruvat satellite station, part of plans by telecommunications firm Etisalat to become an international as well as a local supplier of telecom services and to enable the UAE to play its full role in the new Information Age. The inauguration, late in the year, of the Dubai Internet City further consolidated the UAE's place at the forefront of international developments in this sphere.

The combination of modern facilities and services in the UAE has made it an ideal location for international business, and many of the world's top companies have now established their regional headquarters in the country. At the same time, the rapid growth of the country's tourism industry has continued unabated. Over three million visitors a year now come to the UAE, attracted by its combination of top-class hotels, (including the tallest hotel in the world, Dubai's Burj al-Arab), fine shopping, political stability, social harmony and a combination of fine beaches and fascinating desert and mountain scenery. The number of tourists is predicted to double within ten years, and the building of new facilities is a major focus of private sector investment.

At the same time, however, the development of the industrial sector of the economy has continued. Much, naturally, is related to the oil and gas sector, and a major expansion of production capacity is under way in Abu Dhabi, led by the state-owned Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, ADNOC, under the guidance of the local Supreme Petroleum Council. While much of the additional capacity is destined for export, a substantial proportion is being allocated to meet the country's rising demand for fuel, both for domestic and industrial use. To facilitate this, condensate refining capacity was increased by around 250,000 barrels a day during the year, while several other major downstream projects are under construction at the industrial city of Ruwais, in the west of the country.

The UAE's fifty years of experience in the hydrocarbons industry has also been put to good use with the launching of a major regional initiative, the Dolphin Project. Involving the construction of a pipeline to transport gas from neighbouring Qatar to the UAE's industrial centres and then, eventually, away to Oman, Pakistan and India, the Dolphin Project, originated as part of the country's military offsets programme, UOG, will involve investment of around US \$4 billion dollars in its first phase and partnership agreements on the construction of the main pipeline were signed with major international companies during the course of the year.

The UAE has for several years made it a condition that foreign companies bidding for a share of the country's defence procurement programme should invest a portion of the value of the deals in local joint ventures. The UAE Offsets Group, which administers the programme, has continued over the last twelve months to guide the inflow of investment capital.

The underlying purpose of investment in the economic development of the United Arab Emirates is, of course, to improve the standard of living of its people. Over the past three decades or so, the country has changed dramatically as a result of a steady economic boom and, as part of that process, the population has risen from a mere 180,000 in 1968 to an estimated total of around 3 million in mid-2000. In order to cope with such a rapid rise and to raise the UAE from a state of under-development to become the modern society that it is today, huge investment has been required in sectors such as education, health and other social services. The United Nations Human Development Index for the year 2000, covering 174 countries, and assessing them on the basis of income, educational standards, life expectancy and health care, placed the UAE in forty-fifth place, an indication of success of its development programme since 1971.

Education and health accounted for 23 per cent of total budgeted Government expenditure for the year 2000. Access to education is provided free for all UAE citizens, from primary school to university, while several thousand UAE students

country's harsh environment only by ensuring that they live in harmony with nature, practicing a sustainable use of the available natural resources.

President His Highness Sheikh Zayed, himself a conservationist long before the issue of environmental protection became fashionable, has ensured that the issue has been accorded a high priority by Government. During the course of the year 2000, a number of major new initiatives have been taken to enhance conservation, including the introduction of stringent legislation to protect wildlife, both on land and in the country's seas. Early in 2001, a major international environment conference is scheduled to be held in Abu Dhabi which is expected to see two important initiatives, the issuing of an 'Abu Dhabi Declaration,' outlining an environmental conservation strategy for the whole of the Arab world, and the launching of the Zayed International Prize for the Environment, which will be the world's top environmental award.

Improved health services have had a major impact both on the reduction of the infant mortality rate, which has fallen from 65 per 1000 in 1975 to less than 10 per 1000, and on life expectancy, which has risen from 65 in 1975 to over 75 by the year 2000. Thus, while the population of the country has risen rapidly over the last thirty years, the Government's economic development programme has ensured that the expansion of services have not only been able to keep pace with the growth, but also to impart a real improvement to the quality of life of the UAE's inhabitants.

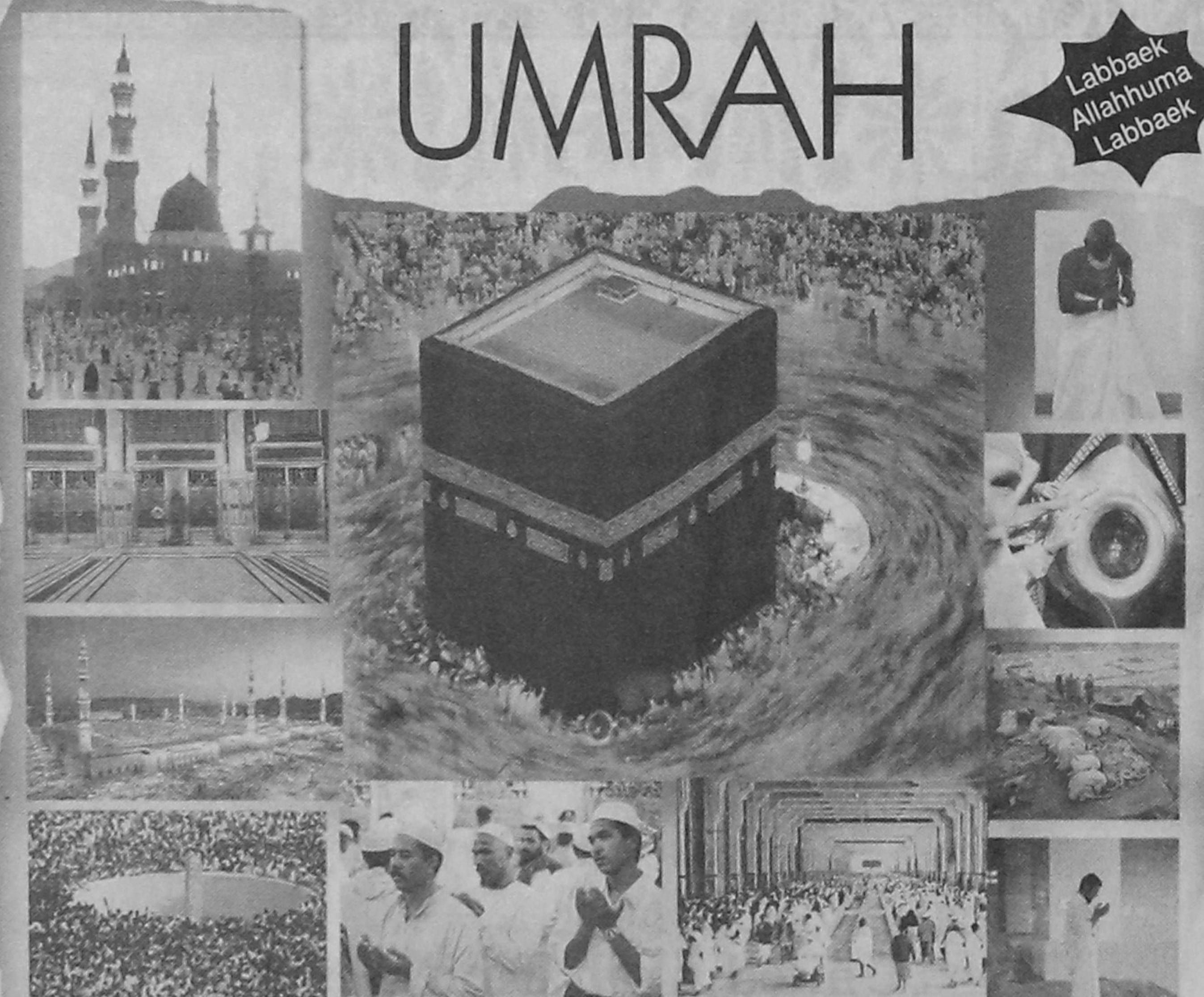
Caring for the human being is the major responsibility of Government. Over the last thirty years, however, the United Arab Emirates has also taken care to ensure that appropriate attention is paid to the conservation of the country's environment. Prior to the process of development that began with the discovery of oil over forty years ago, the people of the United Arab Emirates were able to survive in the

overseas and at home. The year 2000 has seen the United Arab Emirates make further progress. In the 29 years since the federation of the UAE was established, it has established itself as one of the most rapidly developing states in the world. With a strong economy, an educated population and a stable society, and with a wise leadership, it is well-placed to continue progress in the years ahead.

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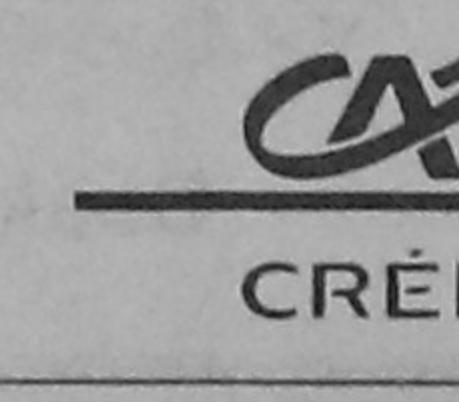
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