Geographical features

The United Arab Emirates which lies on the southern shores of the Arabian Gulf, with the eastern coastline on the Gulf of Oman. It is bordered on the west by the state of Qatar and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the south by the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The UAE lies north of the equator between latitudes 22° and 26.5° and longitude 51 and 56.5 east of Greenwich in the dry tropics. The climate therefore tends to be hot and humid in the summer and mild and fine during the winter.

The UAE covers an area of 77,700 sq. kms. about 3.3% of the total area of the Arab Gulf Co-operation Council countries. The Emirates range in size from Abu Dhabi, by far the largest with an area of some 67,340 sq. kms. (i.e., 86.67% of the whole UAE), to Ajman, a mere 259 sq. kms., Dubai is 3,885 sq. kms. in area, Sharjah 2,590 sq. kms. and the other three Ras Al Khaimah, Fujairah and Umm Al Quwain are all under 2,590 sq. kms.

The entire area of UAE may be divided into three geographical sections. (1) There is the land lying along the coast of the Arabian Gulf. The coast itself is characterised
by numerous islands, reefs and shoals, making navigation hazardous; and the land along it is for the most part low-lying, barren and monotonous, especially in the south, around Abu Dhabi. Further north, however, around Ras Al. Khaimah, it does support a degree of cultivation, (2) There are the inland plains, which are made up almost entirely of sandy desert. These run into Rub al-khali on the south, and into a hilly area on the north, near Ras Al Khaimah. (3) There are the mountains in the coast. These run north from Oman, through the UAE for about 80 kms. to the Musandam peninsula.

The creation of the United Arab Emirates in December, 1971, ended a century and a half of the existence of the Trucial states in special treaty relations with Britain. The treaty in 1820 was imposed on the tribal chiefs in the southern part of the Arabian Gulf by the British government of Bombay, which wanted to keep the Gulf route to India safe and open. Those seven states comprising Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al. Quwain, Ras Al Khaimah and Fujeirah known as seven emirates and formed a nation called United Arab Emirates. (U.A.E.).

The emergence of the UAE was accompanied by the rapid and comprehensive progress and significant accomplishments
were realized in building a modern society to a remarkable extent under the gracious leadership of His Highness Shaikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahayyan, President of the UAE and their Highnesses, Members of the Supreme Council and Rulers of the Emirates [9].

Standards rose in all fields including the economic, cultural and social sectors. The UAE assumed a distinguished position in the international community and established an excellent relationship based on constructive co-operation, mutual respect and reciprocity with most countries in the world.

Population

The UAE population stood at 1.884 million in 1990, up from 1.739 million in 1989 and 1.64 million in 1988 according to the planning Ministry of UAE [7].

The UAE's population is predominantly urban. The three largest cities - Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah - account for about 80% of the UAE's population. Larger towns such as Al-Ain, Ras Al'Khaimah Fujeirah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain, Kalba, Khor Fakkan, Dibba and Dhaid account for the greatest part of the remaining 20% [7].
Language

The official language and main language of communication is Arabic, although English is widely used by expatriate communities and in commerce.

Religion

The state religion is Islam, which also provides the underlying inspiration of the legal system. Minority communities of expatriates, Christians and members of other religious denominations are permitted to practise their religion freely and without hindrance.

Economy and commerce

The basis of the UAE's economy is its oil production, with proven reserves now well in excess of 100 billion barrels, and with an installed production capacity of over three million barrels per day. The bulk of this is in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, where the first commercial oil discovery was made in 1958, and which commenced oil exports in 1962. Dubai, Sharjah and Ras Al-khaimah followed suit. Exploration continues both in these oil-producing Emirates and in the others that have yet to find commercially viable deposits of hydrocarbons.
Production levels vary in accordance with the level of market demand, and within the guidelines laid down by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), of which the UAE has been a member since independence [4].

While petroleum and natural gas continue to provide the bulk of the country's national income, it has won an important place within the region as a centre for transhipment and trade.

Although the modern UAE was built on its oil wealth, the spark for business and commerce comes from a much older heritage of non-oil trade. Nevertheless, a steadily growing non-oil trade has made the UAE a commercial hub of the Gulf.

A heavy industrial sector has been developed, including down-stream projects in the oil industry, such as an oil refinery and fertilizer plant at Jebel Dhanna and Ruwais in Abu Dhabi Emirate, and other plants such as major aluminium smelter, DUBAL, and the cable manufacturer, DUCAB, in Dubai's industrial zone of Jebel Ali. Each emirate has got cement manufacturing plant. Altogether produce surplus quantity which is being exported to the neighbouring Gulf countries.
Small and medium size industry is now also growing, both within the Free Trade Zones established in several emirates notably at Jebel Ali and Fujeirah, and outside them, helping to meet local demand and also to provide a surplus for export markets.

Inflation was brought down and economic indications confirmed that it will drop from 10.5% in 1982 to around 4% in 1989 with a rate of real growth in GDP of not less than 6%.

The income per capita in the UAE averaged in 1987 (according to the World Bank) US $ 19,270 which was one of the highest in the world [2].

In 1989 the UAE's economy grew 9% in terms of GDP. A surge in foreign trade during 1988 and 1989 coupled with higher oil prices lead to mini boom in construction. The government renewed spending on infrastructure, particularly in Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

Trade as a tradition

Given its strategic location as a local point between east and west and its 1,448 kms. of coastline, it is no surprise that the inhabitants of the UAE have an almost legendary link with trade.
Today residents of the UAE continue to make trade the backbone of their nation's economic development by specializing in re-export, or import of goods, and reselling for export. Indeed during 1989 the UAE's re-exports and exports excluding oil totalled US $ 15.6 billion [5].

For the international businessmen, the UAE is host to numerous international trade exhibitions and conferences each year. The Dubai World Trade Centre, for example, the largest exhibition facility in the region, houses about fifteen international trade shows per year.

Today cargo or container ships docking in the UAE can choose between any of seven major seaports for rapid loading-unloading or transhipment. Along the Arabian Gulf are Mina Zayed on the island of Abu Dhabi; Port Rashid and Port Jebel Ali in Dubai, Port Khalid in Sharjah and Port Saqr in the emirate of Ras Al Khaimah. On the Gulf of Oman are Port Khor Pakkan in Sharjah and Port Fujeirah in Fujeirah.

Port Fujeirah and Port Rashid are among the world's top container ports. They are estimated to have handled 400,000 and 700,000 containers respectively during the year 1990.
Banking sector

The UAE banking sector with over 45 banks and total customer deposits of $46.3 billion (160 billion Dirhams) has matured over the past 20 years. Historically banking in the UAE is divided into two periods.

The first period from 1973 to 1980 saw UAE banking's first test. This was the period in which major infrastructure were built, financed by oil revenues, which created an unprecedented economic boom. In turn, growth was triggered in the banking sector. Bank management was tested during this period for its ability to create strong based banking business. Lending included many speculated investments and banking expanded.

The second period from 1980 to 1989, was a period of consolidation in which banks had to find solutions for the classified accounts inherited from the lending of the previous period.

The banking sector is currently entering a new phase, with a new test. The years ahead are not expected to be easy, since the global financial climate is heading for a major change.
The areas of concern are the foreign banks, local banks (including national banks) and the Central Bank. Some foreign banks are well established in the UAE market. They will either continue, based on selective business or remobilize and centralize regional operations. Local banks have UAE or Gulf citizens as majority shareholders. The national banks have the government as majority shareholder.

Most local banks perceived 'ECB' as 'Leader of last resort', even though the structure of the UAE banking sector does not allow for this. Instead, each Emirate has primary responsibility for local banks incorporated within it. The ECB, therefore, is a purely regulatory and supervisory body.

During the present and anticipated problems, ECB will have to honour commitments on behalf of banks, which will re-introduce the much discussed concept of mergers. Such mergers will be one of the most important tasks to merge for ECB over the next few years. The ECB will evolve into a more authoritative body. It also will have more controls over the banking sector.

The era to come is not only going to be one of great renovation, but one which brings about a new type of UAE banking practice and a new generation of bankers.
Currency

The unit of currency in the UAE is the Dirham which consists of 100 Fils. Bank notes are issued in denominations of 500, 200, 100, 50, 10 and 5 Dirhams. Coins are in denominations of Dh.1 and of 50, 25, 10, 5 and 1 Fils although the 1 and 5 Fils are rarely in circulation. The Dirham has been fixed to the US Dollar at 1 Dollar = 3.67 Dhs., but exporters should check with the authorised banks for current exchange rates. There is no restriction on the import of foreign currencies.

Local time

Local time in the UAE is 4 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT).

Business hours

Friday is the official day of rest. Government offices generally work from 7.30 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. (Saturdays-Wednesdays). 7.30 a.m. to 12.00 noon (Thursdays). Private offices work mostly two times: Morning from 8.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. and evening from 4.00 p.m. to 7.00 p.m.
The first modern school was opened in Sharjah in the mid-1950s. Today the United Arab Emirates boasts a fully integrated educational system catering to almost half a million pupils and students. [8]

Education has been a priority of the UAE since its inception. President Shaikh Zayed is actually aware that while oil may have provided the means whereby the Emirates have been able to launch themselves into the modern age, the federation's real future lies with its people and especially its youth. A key to this strategy has been the programme to eradicate widespread illiteracy which was a feature of the population when the British departed. Considerable progress has been made since 1971 and today, the UAE is on the verge of achieving a completely literate population; a remarkable achievement in less than twenty years. Formal education in schools, colleges and university has grown at an equally impressive rate. During 1985-86, there were over 250,000 pupils enrolled in state institutions or private schools, including the university. Over 375 state schools were in operation throughout the country, with 10,777 teachers employed. These were augmented by about a hundred and fifty private schools attended by about 90,000 students, some of
which are geared for particular nationalities of expatriates. In addition, several thousand students attend special schools run by the Ministry of Defence, and at least 6,000 students attend the Emirates University at Al Ain. Over half of the students at the University, which was opened in 1977 are girls studying the same curriculum as their male counterparts but attending separate lectures. Tuition, books and accommodation are all free, ensuring that those who have the ability are not prevented from achieving their potential. In the field of adult education, the efforts of the UAE Women's Federation in providing literacy classes for woman folk are of considerable significance [1].

Fifty-five new schools were planned for construction in 1986-87 while higher educational facilities were also being developed including the opening of the University's medical facility.

To train the national manpower in the fields of business, science and technology, the UAE University started "Higher College of Technology" during 1988-89. Subsequently to provide broad base, those colleges were brought under the umbrella of "Ministry of Higher Education" on which a draft law has been approved by the Cabinet during April, 1991. As per the draft law: The Ministry will be
responsible for the general planning of higher education, issuing licences for setting up higher centres of learning, laying down guidelines for government run institutes, formulating admission policy and rules for scholarship and developing facilities for scientific research [6]. The tasks of the Ministry of Higher Education are: Creation of a national Master Plan for higher education, to ensure the work of the National Committee for manpower planning, setting priorities and directions for scientific research, application of the research should be stressed, research efforts must address the needs of society and they must be accessible to potential users, within the public and private sectors, scientific and technological research must be within the economic, cultural and social context of the country [3].

Ajman University College of Science and Technology, in the tiny emirate of Ajman, north of Dubai, is another example of a higher College of Technology. It provides students with a specialization of humanitarian or polytechnical science. It is also the UAE's first private educational institution to offer a fully accredited US Master of Business Administration (MBA) Degree from South-eastern University in Washington D.C.
The Ministry of Education also sponsors around 2,500 UAE students in undergraduate and post-graduate training in University and Colleges abroad.

The educational sector extends to the various training schemes being run by some of the country's major institutions. The Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC), for example, trains new entrants into the oil industry, while the Emirates Banking Training Institute performs the same service for nationals entering the sphere of finance.

Given the resources available to it and the lack of any previous significant educational programme, the UAE has achieved wonders in this field and seems set to meet its objectives of creating an informed and well-trained population, providing a sound basis for its future growth.

Health

In the sphere of health, progress has been swift and dramatic with the country well on the way to meeting its stated goal of reaching the World Health Organization objective "Health for All by the Year 2000".

Latest figures from the Ministry of Health suggest
that the country now enjoys high service ratios for its population; with one doctor for each 933 people, one nurse for every 350 and one bed for every 329. Twentynine government hospitals with their 4,150 beds, 89 clinics and nine child care units are served by 5,330 nurses and technicians. Five special dental clinics are staffed by nearly ninety qualified dentists.

In addition to the public sector, there is a smaller, but thriving private sector, which is carefully supervised by the Ministry to ensure the maintenance of high standards. Eight private hospitals, with 153 in-patient beds are complemented by 44 multipurpose polyclinics; 385 clinics and 71 dental surgeries, with 872 private doctors in practice. There are also 122 licensed pharmacies.

In the past, even the simplest of operations needed treatment abroad, but now, thanks to the improvement of local services, often in collaboration with top international bodies like Britain's Royal College of Surgeons, even complicated treatment can be carried out locally, like kidney transplants, laser treatment and open-heart surgery, as at the ultra-modern Mafraq Hospital, some 45 kms. north-east of Abu Dhabi.
Considerable efforts have also been made in the sphere of preventive medicine both through simple health and hygiene education and through vaccination and other programmes. Ailments like tuberculosis and malaria, once common, are being eradicated, infant mortality rates have been slashed, and the average life expectancy of the population has shot up sharply to rates similar to those of European countries.

At the same time, the UAE's medical authorities are keen to ensure that they keep abreast of the latest innovations and discoveries in medicine, through specialized training programmes and seminars and through the sponsorship locally of major conferences to which top experts from abroad are invited.

Industry blooms in the desert

Ever since the formation of UAE's federation in 1971, its oil revenues from Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah have paid for installation of the UAE's current state-of-the-art infrastructure. But just as the rest of the industrialized world seeks to reduce its dependence on petroleum imports, the UAE works to reduce its heavy dependence on oil and natural gas exports.
The first UAE industrial projects involved downstream development of the oil and gas industries. These included the UAE's two refineries at Umm Al Naar, near the city of Abu Dhabi and Ruwais in west of Abu Dhabi, liquified gas plants in Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Jebel Ali in Dubai and Das Island and fertilizer plant at Ruwais.

One prime example is that, the government of Dubai has invested US $2.5 billion in Jebel Ali Free Zone and Port Authority which have spread over 25,000 acres of land on the coast of Dubai. This vast industrial complex was established in 1985 to attract business and investment from world wide industry, trading ventures and multinationals.

Jebel Ali reflects the combination between trade and industry for which Dubai is traditionally known. So far Dubai is able to attract 300 companies from all over the world involved in various businesses.

The companies at Jebel Ali of which about 40% are in manufacturing and the remainder in warehousing and distribution have invested roughly US $600 million in private capital. Although many free zone occupants are from India and Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) nations, in dollar terms, American companies have collectively made the largest investment in Jebel Ali.
With only 5% of the zone's vast area in use, there is real growth potential. Now authority of the zone is interested in contracting only big companies who want to set up big facilities, so that the interest is more and more in manufacturing.

Elsewhere, there is a small export oriented industrial area in Fujeirah and an Industrial Free Zone is under study in Abu Dhabi.

Aiming the most industrially diversified of the Emirates is Sharjah, which enjoyed an 80% increase in applicants for new licences during 1990. There are more than 3,000 companies in Sharjah because the Emirate offer more facilities to industry. Those include a large subsidy for electrical power and land rents, no control on import-export or repatriation of profits and no income taxes.

Telecommunication system

The United Arab Emirates is strategically placed astride one of the world's major shipping routes, down the Arabian Gulf and out through the Gulf of Oman to the Indian ocean. It is also strategically placed in a global sense, conveniently situated between Europe and the Far East. The years, since the setting up of the UAE in 1971, have seen
the country move rapidly to establish itself as a key point of communications on an international level.

At the time of independence of UAE, the country's ports were very few in number and largely restricted to regional trade. Today, however, the UAE has over a dozen ports, with over two hundred berths serving the world's shipping lines.

Air transport in general is another area in which the communication facilities of the country have grown dramatically. In 1971, there were only two civilian airports, at Abu Dhabi and Dubai, now there are five, while sixth airport is due to open in the inland oasis-city of Al Ain by the end of 1992.

The country also now has two international carriers of its own, Gulf Air, jointly owned with three other Gulf states, and Dubai based Emirates. Whereas in 1971 the country had not a single satellite ground station for telephone, telex and television links, today there are four, with access to the Indian ocean, Atlantic ocean and ARABSAT satellites.

Telecommunications authority ETISALAT has overseen the expansion of the number of telephone lines from a mere
9,000 in 1971 to 296,143 at the end of 1988, with the number now well over the 300,000 mark. Also rising sharply have been the number of telex lines, up from a mere 79 to over 6,250.

With the world becoming a "Global Village" where speedy communications have brought the continents ever closer together, the UAE is well placed geographically to play a key role as a hub of international transport and communications.

Due to the strategic location of UAE in the Asian continent, and natural wealth of oil and gas, above all the strong aspiration of H.H. Shaikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahayyan, President of the UAE and their Highnesses, Members of the Supreme Council and Rulers of the Emirates to build their country as self-sufficient and economically sound in the region, the UAE is making rapid progress economically, commercially, culturally, industrially, educationally, health care and the application of sophisticated telecommunications etc. Expatriate work force and the national locals are working harmoneously for the betterment of the country with competitive spirit since the governmental procedure are flexible and easy to communicate and join hands with external world in any aspects. Without much external appearance,
the libraries and information services are keeping the nation in every aspects of its development. Personal experience of the researcher during his stay in the country over a decade, it is strongly hoped to have an effective library and information service as a system and possible to make network of libraries and information services at the national level for better utilization of information for the development of the present and future.

All possible aspects are being dealt in the forthcoming chapters of this thesis and intends to provide a conclusion for establishing a better system of library and information services in the country.
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