

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

IN THE MORE THAN 30 YEARS OF ITS EXISTENCE, the UAE has undergone profound social, demographic and environmental change. Revenue from oil, allied to a strong vision for the country's future, has allowed for the swift creation of a country rich in education, medical expertise, housing and infrastructure.

POPULATION

Because of the nature of that oil-driven economy, the UAE has experienced a rapid and unprecedented change in the size and structure of its population. Between 1965 and 1995 it increased fifteenfold and was estimated to be 3.48 million at the end of 2001, with expatriates and their dependents accounting for a substantial percentage of its inhabitants. The Ministry of Planning forecasts that this figure will have risen to 3.75 million at the end of 2002, an increase of around 7.6 per cent. A noteworthy feature of the population in 2001 was its age structure. The 25–29 year age group was the largest, at around 481,000, followed by the 30–34 year age group at 456,800 and the 35–39 year age group at 426,000. Those in the 10–19 year age group, at 504,578, comprised around 15 per cent of the entire population, a figure which underlines the necessity for job creation through continued economic growth. Those under the age of 50 accounted for 95 per cent of the total population. In the age groups between 20 and 49 years, males accounted for nearly three times the number of females.

With the UAE's low incidence of infant mortality and a life expectancy rate similar to that of other developed countries, further population increase looks inevitable. However, according to *Dubai's Statistical Yearbook 2000*, the rate of that increase may be slowing down. A survey carried out on 4760 national married women, widows and divorcees in the urban and rural areas of Dubai revealed a fertility rate of 4.04 births per national woman, but that rate had fallen by 0.16 compared to the census figures of 1993. It also showed that the fertility rate among illiterate women was more than twice that of women graduates.

Another possible tool in tempering of the speed of population increase is the UAE's policy of emiratization as the country actively seeks both to reduce its reliance on foreign workers and to preserve its own cultural and religious ethos. The desire to provide a skilled workforce from within its own national population has powered a tremendous expansion in the provision of higher education, with Higher Colleges of Technology accounting for a major part of that growth.



Despite the rapid growth in its population, the UAE retains one of the highest per capita incomes in the world, standing at around US\$19,000 in 2001.

SOCIAL SERVICES

The UAE has, from the outset, been determined that all its citizens should share in the wealth of the country. The sustained effort to ensure essential services to all citizens has placed the UAE at the forefront of Arab countries in terms of its social services. In 2000, the value of social services amounted to one fifth of the UAE's gross domestic product (GDP). Expenditure covers housing, health, education and social aid for nationals besides private investments in schools, medical centres, social programmes and other facilities.

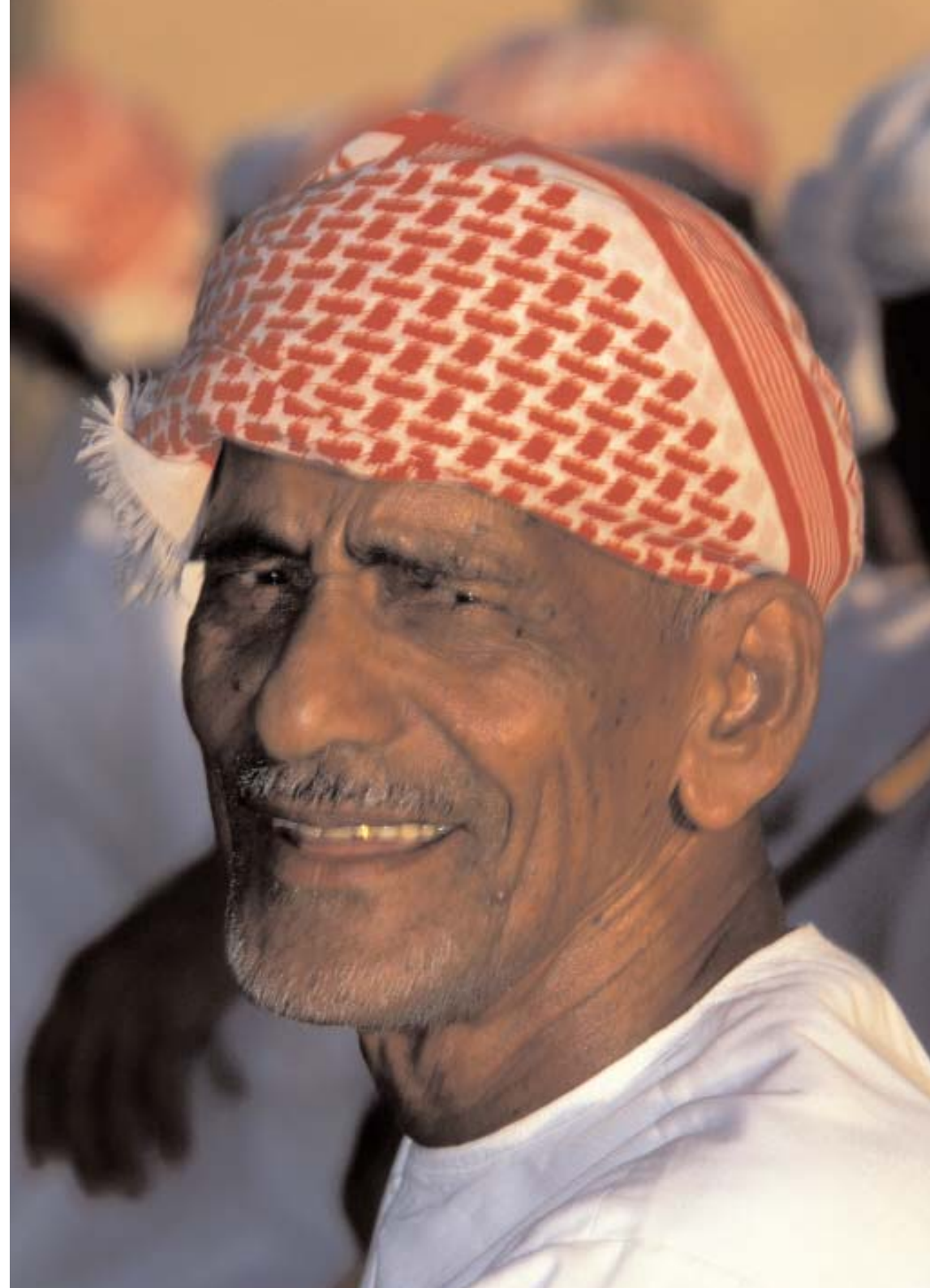
SOCIAL BENEFITS

Despite the broad distribution of wealth that has taken place in the seven emirates, there are those who, for a variety of reasons, remain at risk. The UAE welfare system exists to assist those burdened by intractable problems and to help the vulnerable to realise their full potential as productive members of society. The system is currently administered by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, but the Cabinet has recently given its approval for the establishment of a new authority for development and social welfare.

In July 1999, the Federal National Council approved new legislation regulating social security benefits. Under the law, those entitled to monthly social benefits include national widows and divorced women, the disabled and the handicapped, the aged, orphans, single daughters, married students, relatives of jailed dependants, estranged wives and insolvents. Also eligible for social security benefits are widowed and divorced national women previously married to foreigners.

The amount spent on social assistance has increased steadily since 1994, the total amount allocated during that period being Dh6.27 billion. In 2002, 78, 663 beneficiaries received a total of Dh656 million allocated as follows: Dh174.4 million for beneficiaries in Abu Dhabi, Dh140.6 million for Sharjah, Dh60.177 million for Fujairah, Dh18.5 million for Umm al-Qaiwain, Dh133,600 for Dubai, Dh105 million for Ra's al-Khaimah and Dh33.5 million for recipients in Ajman. An increase in the number of social assistance recipients in 2002 is a result of the broadening of categories under the new law.

The Ministry also attributed a total of Dh2.28 million among nationals whose properties were affected by natural disasters, including Dh174,000 in the form of emergency relief received by 58 beneficiaries in Ra's al-Khaimah and Fujairah because of the losses caused by earthquake in addition to giving Dh273, 000 to 47 beneficiaries



in Fujairah whose properties were destroyed by the collapse of a sand block, besides Dh1.3 million compensation to citizens whose houses and boats were burned.

SOCIAL WELFARE ASSOCIATIONS

Social welfare associations, of which there are more than 100, receive substantial financial aid from the Government. According to the Statistical Abstract of Social Affairs released in late 2002, this amounted, in 2000, to more than Dh6.3 million, of which the greatest amount, Dh2.1 million, was allocated to folk societies. Women's organisations received Dh1.235 million, professional bodies Dh1.010 million, theatre groups Dh810,000, humanitarian associations Dh570,000, cultural bodies Dh540,000 and religious bodies Dh570,000. By the end of the year 2000, the number of social welfare associations had reached 107 with 89 branches and 18,829 working members and 12,849 associate members. The ministry does not grant aid to the 17 licensed expatriate community societies (which include socio-cultural organisations and women's groups representing the many different nationalities present in the UAE).

The Red Crescent Society (RCS)

The RCS, recently set up as an independent authority, is renowned for its international activities (see section on Overseas Aid in the chapter on Government and Foreign Affairs). It is also a major provider of humanitarian relief within the UAE. Its operations (which are diverse) are typical of the tasks carried out by many of the associations and organisations working in the country. In 2002, for instance, it distributed relief in both cash and kind to 400 families in Qarya village in Fujairah as part of its annual charity campaign to help low-income sectors of the community. In the same year, it opened a publishing house in Abu Dhabi to produce Braille books for the blind, and established a computer workshop to give blind people access to the latest technical developments. It undertakes other tasks for those in need and cooperates with local authorities in rural areas.

The Al Ihsan Charity Centre

The Al Ihsan Charity Centre, which opened three years ago to assist families in Dubai and the Northern Emirates, has completed a new medical facility that will offer free treatment to disadvantaged patients from all over the country. A team of doctors from the public and private sectors will operate a rotational system, and an ambulance will also be available. Plans are in train to build a hospital and school for the centre.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CENTRES

As the result of an agreement between the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1978, 12 social development centres were set up in various areas of the UAE, including four in Sharjah and the Eastern Region. The centres are under the control of the Department of Social Development Centres (established in 1990). Their main focus has been on improving

living conditions for disadvantaged families by encouraging small income-generating projects, upgrading educational and recreational services for youngsters and enhancing women and childcare programmes. As well as running special awareness programmes which help children to absorb sound values and attitudes, the centres also provide families with seminars, lectures and films on health and social issues.

THE ELDERLY

A study published by the Zayed Centre for Coordination and Follow-up (ZCCF) notes that caring for the elderly is one of the new activities the state has found it necessary to undertake. Traditionally, the elderly have been looked after by their own families, but rapid social and economic changes have compelled state intervention in order to meet their needs. Not only are more women, upon whom the task of looking after the elderly would normally fall, entering the workforce, but, because of greatly improved healthcare, people are living longer. It was estimated, in a proposal for the setting up of day care centres for the elderly, that the number of aged citizens will reach 83,000 in 2005, increasing to 150,000 in 2015. To provide for these elderly people and their families, day care centres are to be built throughout the country. Such facilities, along with mobile service units and social and cultural centres, will allow the elderly to remain within the family. A national committee has been charged with integrating appropriate policies for the elderly into the national development strategy.

DISABILITY

The disabled are given specific protection under Article 16 of the UAE Constitution, and, as the Arab Decade for the Disabled (2003–2013) is about to begin, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has revealed the draft of a major new law further safeguarding their rights and increasing their benefits. A new identity card for the disabled will open up many facilities and free services to the holder. Card holders will be entitled to a variety of benefits, including 50 per cent reductions on air and land tickets for themselves and their companions. Five per cent of public transport vehicles are to be modified to accommodate the disabled, and the disabled are to be exempted from all service charges. National authorities must set aside 2 per cent of their budgets to provide new or renovate existing housing for the disabled. Disability cannot be a criterion to deny an applicant a job. Private sector companies with not less than 50 workers must allocate at least 2 per cent of their jobs for the disabled. Failure to do so will (unless no disabled were available for employment) give rise to penalties which offending companies must pay into a central fund for the disabled. Employers employing more than the 2 per cent quota will be rewarded by the Government. The public sector will also be required to allocate 2 per cent of available jobs to the disabled. The law lays out educational rights for the disabled. Finally, 15 per cent of funds raised by private charities will go to the disabled.

The opening of a centre for autistic children in Sharjah during February doubled the numbers of such centres in the UAE. A new Sharjah Autism Centre is planned within the next two years.

ORPHANS

A non-profit, semi-government body offering comprehensive care to orphans, both national and expatriate, is to be set up in Sharjah. The first of its kind, the Social Empowerment Foundation will provide social, psychological, health and financial assistance to orphans living in Sharjah. It is to be run, not as an orphanage but as a support system which will help those in its care to achieve their potential. The facility will be affiliated to the Sharjah City For Humanitarian Services. Although a location for the Foundation has still to be found, it has already begun to operate through the women's committee of the Sharjah Charity International.

EDUCATION

The UAE sees quality education as the main tool for human development. It therefore provides free education to its citizens at all levels of the system. In the academic year 2001–2002, approximately 322,250 students were being educated in 747 government schools, and a further 234,250 in 426 private schools. A further 3784 students attended the 18 centres administered by the General Women's Union (GWU). By comparison, in 1971, the year the UAE Federation was established, there were 74 schools with 32,800 students. The vibrancy of the UAE's education sector is reflected in the record numbers of students who enrolled for higher education courses at the beginning of the 2002–03 academic year. The 11,108 new entrants represented a 5 per cent increase in numbers over the previous year. The expansion in education has been fuelled by enormous investment – around Dh5.4 billion was allocated to education for 2001 alone. It has also been fuelled by the rising expectations of the UAE inhabitants. Women, in particular, are filling university and college places in record numbers, new entrants to the HCTs for the 2002–03 academic year standing at 3768 compared to the figure of 2733 for their male counterparts.

EDUCATION 2020 STRATEGY

Education 2020 Strategy is a series of five-year plans, designed to introduce advanced education techniques and improve innovative skills and the self-learning abilities of students. A Planning, Development and Evaluation Office devises the plans and uses model schools to implement them. The National Centre for the Development of Curriculum and Methodology reviews curricula and developments in educational methodology. All developments take place within the Strategy's framework.



SCHOOLS

Recognising the crucial importance of keeping abreast with the Information Age, the UAE places great emphasis on Information Technology (IT) literacy at all levels of education, from kindergarten upwards. It is highly innovative in its approach, moving with ease between teaching information technology as a subject and using the technology as a tool of learning and the dissemination of information. The student/computer ratio is 10:1 in kindergarten, 5:1 in primary school, 2:1 in preparatory school and 1:1 in secondary school. Education authorities are switching from textbooks to compact discs – a move which will lighten the physical load for schoolchildren. The move is part of a strategy aimed at upgrading the school curriculum and those who teach it. A teachers' guide to effective presentation of material is also to be put on disc, and this, along with a series of training courses, will provide a complementary upgrading of teacher skills. A questionnaire incorporated into each schoolbook will seek feedback from teachers on the revised curriculum. Another move, which will also lighten the load for children (though not likely to be so popular), is the decision to ban the use of mobile phones by both pupils and teachers in all UAE schools.

Even less popular with schoolchildren will be the reduction in the summer holiday to two months and an increase in study days to a total of ten months currently under consideration by the Ministry of Education and Youth (MoEY).

Primary and secondary education is provided for UAE citizens in a four-stage process and is compulsory at the primary level. The four stages are: kindergarten (ages 4–5); primary (ages 6–12); preparatory (ages 12–15); secondary (ages 15–18). Technical secondary (ages 12–18) provides an alternative to the preparatory and secondary route. Law No. 185/1, 2001, provides special streams whereby gifted students can complete their education in a shorter timeframe. It is planned to change the number of grades at primary and elementary level, reducing those at primary level from six to five and increasing elementary grades from three to four.

Existing student/staff ratios at 17:1 for kindergarten and primary levels and 10:1 for intermediate and secondary levels are well within the government target of 20:1 at kindergarten and primary level and 15:1 at secondary level. In a move to combat teacher shortages in subjects such as English, and Computers and Physics, 1400 new teachers, 691 of whom were UAE nationals, were appointed for the 2002–03 academic year. The move formed part of a five-year plan to create a supply of qualified UAE national teachers sufficient to fill vacant positions.

The MoEY intends to devolve some of its authority to the nine educational zones in line with its decentralisation policy. Under the proposed Act of Authorisation, schools, both public and private, will report directly to their own educational zones. The Act gives wide powers to the individual zones, including the right to prepare their own budgets and those of the schools under their control. They will, additionally, control the issuing of licences to private institutions. The zones will be



authorised to oversee the running of schools, assessing requirements in terms of expansion or replacement, monitoring feedback from the curriculum, and organising training courses. Sport and health programmes are to be drawn up by the zones, while cultural and technical activities will also come under their remit. The Act will give zones the right to implement new admission criteria for nurseries and to suggest specific numbers of nurseries for each emirate.

In 2001, new by-laws covering private education were introduced to implement Federal Law No. 28 of 1999. The by-laws give priority in appointment of teachers and administrative staff in private schools to UAE nationals, as well as to Arabs and expatriates living in the country. Schools are required to segregate boys and girls from class five onwards, with exemption for non-Arab schools where the majority of students are non-Muslims, provided that they obtain permission from the Cabinet. Student numbers in kindergarten should not exceed 25, while those in higher classes should not exceed 30. All private schools must teach Islamic studies, Arabic language and social studies as compulsory subjects in accordance with the approved syllabus of the MoEY. Non-Arab students are to study Arabic according to the Ministry's special syllabus for non-Arabs. Schools may offer their own social studies course according to the curriculum they follow.

Decree No. 4443 for 2001 is a detailed guide for equating the high school diplomas issued by private schools in the UAE with the Ministry's own secondary school certificate.

In 2002, the MoEY introduced a regulatory manual for private education institutes and training centres. The manual contains details of the rights and duties of employees and employers and specifies the fines for violations. The MoEY has also, as part of its 2020 Strategy, finalised a code of conduct for students in private institutions.

LEARNING FOR FUN

Opening up the avenues of creativity and adventure in education is vital to the encouragement of intellectual exploration. Dubai Municipality's new Dh77 million Children's City offers exciting stimulation for young minds. Lauded as the world's fifth largest infotainment centre, the city boasts a bewildering array of facilities, from a state-of-the-art planetarium, educational facilities and exhibition sites for the applied sciences like telecommunications to exhibitions on the country's cultural, historic and literary treasures. The three-storied futuristic structure will be the venue for year-round educational programmes and workshops.

The Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid IT Education project was launched in 2000 with the long-term aim of equipping all public secondary schools with computer laboratories, each laboratory to be identical in both design and function. This summer, the project set up an e-Zone at the Modhesh Fun City (one of the most popular attractions of Dubai Summer Surprises) which attracted large numbers of children

and parents. The brightly decorated 500-square-metre area was filled with 24 high-end personal computers (loaded with e-games) – and children! A highly-qualified technical team was in attendance to answer queries and to help the children work with Microsoft Office and Web Technology tools.

GSSC RESULTS

A total of 26,792 students took the General Secondary School Certificate (GSSC) examination in 2002. Of these, 10,139 were in the science stream, 16,055 in the arts stream and 598 followed the technical diploma courses. Pass rates were high: 91 per cent in science and 80 per cent in arts. In 2003 the science and arts branches are to be combined to ensure that all students are equipped with a broad-based education.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education is provided by two government universities, 11 Higher Colleges of Technology, as well as numerous internationally accredited institutions and the many specialised colleges, such as that established by the Armed Forces, the Emirates Institute for Banking and Financial Studies (providing highly popular short training courses and two banking diplomas) and the new, online Dubai Police's Electronic Total Quality Management College (eTQMC). Generous grants for overseas courses are available from the federal Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and from other bodies. Over 3000 UAE citizens are currently receiving such scholarships.

In line with the trend in previous years, female students seeking higher education continue to outnumber male students. For the 2002–03 academic year, the UAE University in Al Ain admitted a total of 3972 students, of which 2742 were female, while in the 11 HCT, women comprised 3768 of the 6501 new admissions. The overall intake of students for the HCT showed an increase of 30 per cent over the previous year. Zayed University for women admitted 635 students to its two campuses at Abu Dhabi and Dubai, an increase of 12 per cent on intake for the previous year.

The Universities

UAE University (UAEU), which celebrated its silver jubilee in 2002, comprises nine colleges, the most popular of which, in terms of student admissions for 2002–2003, is the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. The College of Business and Economics, which admitted 510 students (269 were male), became, in 2000, the first business school in the Middle East to be accredited by the American Association of State Counseling Boards (AACSB), and one of only a small number anywhere outside the US to earn accreditation. It also offers a new MBA programme in Global Leadership and Management.

As part of the silver jubilee celebrations, the College of Information Technology organised a two-day International e-Learning Symposium in 2002, with the purpose of exchanging ideas and formulating a strategy for e-Learning in the GCC countries.

The First International Conference on Food Systems is to be hosted by one of UAEU's newest colleges, the College of Food Systems (formerly the Faculty of Agriculture), in April 2003. The Conference will bring together food scientists, producers, food traders, environmentalists, nutritionists, educators and policy makers to discuss concepts and issues of food systems, such as food security, food safety, nutrition, the environmental impacts of food systems and the economic, social and technological trends within food systems.

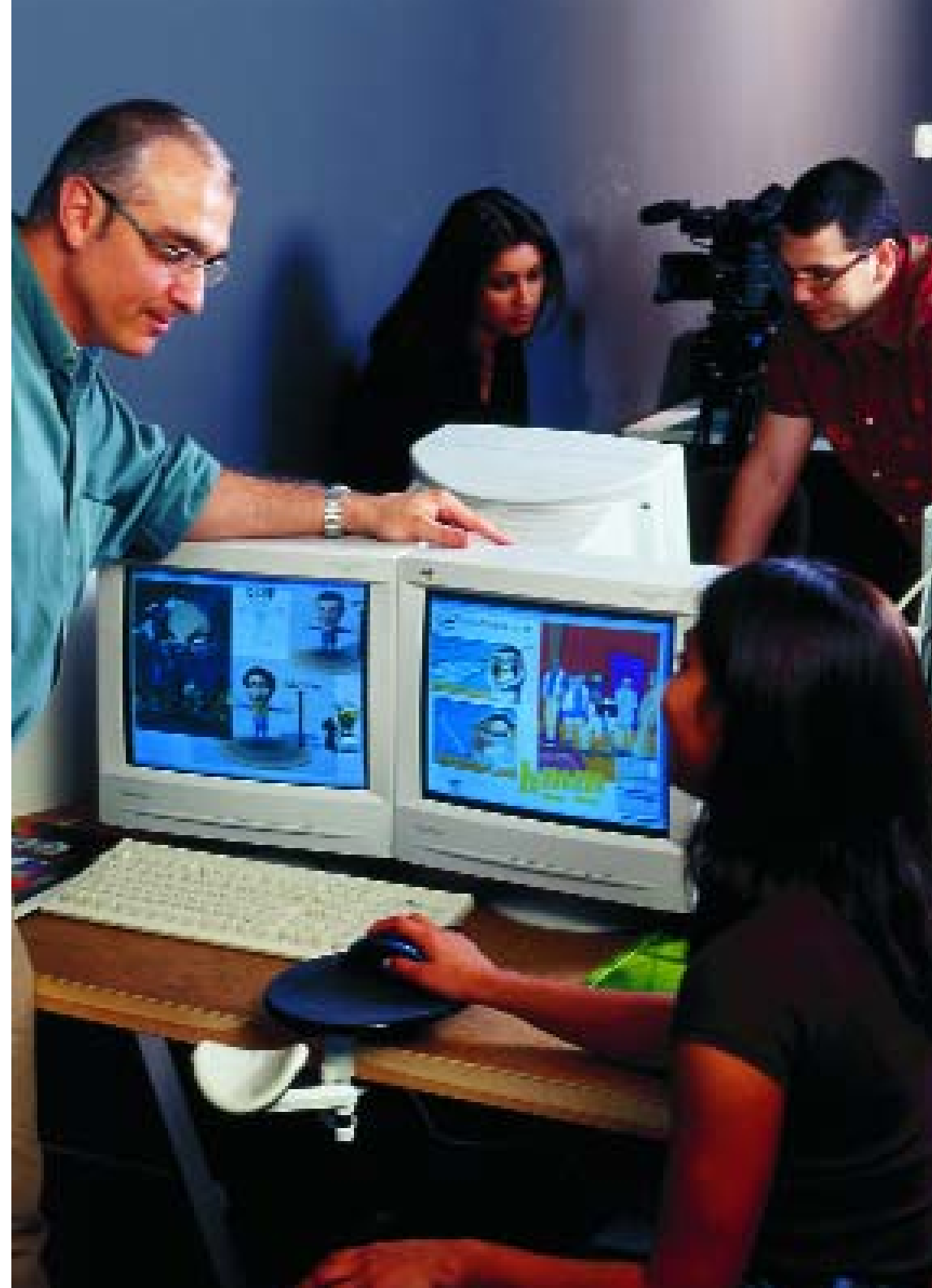
Zayed University (ZU) was founded in 1998 to meet the needs of human resources development in the UAE. Like its fellow institutions of higher education, ZU continues to forge links with government and private bodies for their mutual benefit. The Institute for Technological Innovation (ITI), for example, is the result of a partnership between Dubai Internet City and ZU, set up in response to an identified need amongst new and developing businesses for innovation in the area of IT. Recognising that scientific, engineering and entrepreneurial skills are all required to harness the full potential of IT applications for the continuing success of the UAE's business market, the initial focus of the ITI's three programmes will be on IT and e-Commerce with emphasis on the building of problem-solving skills. In response to needs expressed by the wider community, ZU has established a Centre for Media Training and Research within the College of Communication and Media Sciences. The Centre will offer training courses and workshops for media and communication professionals in the UAE as well as fostering research into practical issues facing the media in the country and the wider Arab region. The university offers an executive MBA in Managing e-Business, and its International Computer Driving Licence (ICDL) programme is to be certified by the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). The programme has been applied worldwide and is currently recognised in 50 countries.

ZU also recognises the importance of fostering international links. The university has been selected as the location for the GCC branch of the International Council on Education for Teaching (ICET) – the first branch to be established in the Middle East. ICET, founded in 1953, is an association of policy and decision makers in education, government and business dedicated to global development through education.

A National Research Foundation to be established at ZU will enhance its role in both the academic and wider communities.

The Private Sector

Higher education is also well-served by the numerous private institutions which have sprung up in answer to the diverse needs of the complex community of people that is the UAE. Institutions include the American Universities of Sharjah and Dubai, Sharjah University and the Ajman University of Science and Technology, while several foreign universities have opened up branches or distance-learning centres within the UAE. The American University of Dubai and Dubai Media City



have a cooperation agreement, as part of a strategy to cultivate local talent and provide training for those wishing to take up careers in the media. Many of the private institutions teach in English, as do the government institutions for some courses. Expatriates and citizens alike are benefiting from the increased opportunities for excellent education within the country.

Higher Colleges Of Technology (HCT)

In 1988 a system of government-funded colleges offering a more technically oriented education was devised. The four founding HCTs began the new experiment with an enrolment of 239 students. Demand for the type of education provided has been so high that by the end of the 2001–02 academic year more than 11,550 graduates had received awards from 11 HCTs. With a workforce recruited from over 38 countries, the HCTs offer a diverse study environment and an education noted for its commitment to excellence. Throughout the HCT system, over 950 qualified educators are the backbone of this educational experience, producing graduates who are highly regarded for their IT and communication skills, and their industrial experience, as well as for their strong work ethic. The HCT has formed extremely successful partnerships with industry and more than 85 per cent of its graduates are currently either employed, or studying, or both.

The Centre of Excellence for Applied Research and Training (CERT) – part of the HCT system – has become the location for Intel Corporation's first solution centre, the Energy Competency Centre (ECC). The Centre, a joint venture with IBM, provides access to breakthrough technologies and technical knowledge transfer and is expected to host education forums on how to develop, manage, optimise and exploit distributed computing models that can be used for the oil, gas and energy industry. Exploration and development companies will be first to benefit from the facility. Such initiatives open the way to enhanced communication between industry and educators, allowing each to articulate and assess the needs and the capabilities of themselves and the other and to develop mutually desirable solutions where possible.

In a major initiative for the 2002–03 academic year, 19 online courses have been added to the HCT curriculum. Such courses will allow flexibility for students who would otherwise be unable to participate in further education, perhaps because of their family/work circumstances, or because of their geographic location.

Dubai Women's College (DWC), the largest college within the HCT, offers the only engineering programme (software engineering technology) for women in the HCT. The college aims to equip every student, tutor and administrator with mobile computers and 100 per cent wireless connectivity by 2003. The speed with which the programme is being implemented has put the students on a par or even ahead of many prestigious educational institutions in the world, according to microchip giant Intel. In keeping with its policy of creating strong links with the local community, the college encourages its students to participate in locally-based

activities. E-Commerce students and Dubai e-Government, for example, have had extensive exchanges with a view to the promotion of the government's e-services by the students.

Graphic Art students have been in the news this year, with two students from Sharjah Women's College (SWC) winning individual awards, while SWC Design students were finalists in the UAE IT Challenge–Visions website. The quality and originality of the work being produced by SWC design students has attracted the attention of high profile organisations such as Saatchi and Saatchi, Emirates Airlines, The British Council and the British Tourist Authority. Several organisations are undertaking a range of industry focused projects in conjunction with SWC design students.

In an interesting initiative, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research has signed a two-year Dh1.5 million deal with Reuters News Agency, allowing 30,000 students from ZU, the HCTs and UAEU to read the agency's round-the-clock international and local economic, scientific and political news.

A 'Virtual' College

One of the most innovative new ventures of 2002 has been the inauguration of the Dubai Police's Electronic Total Quality Management College (ETQMC). This 'virtual' college is an online, open study system and will be open to members of the public both within the UAE and abroad wishing to obtain degrees in total quality management. It will provide general training and academic studies, backed up by strong technical support and e-library facilities. It is intended that the college, which is a member of the British Quality Foundation and EFQM, a leading European body for quality, will be a nucleus for future higher educational institutions in the region.

Careers UAE 2003

In order to ensure that the UAE's highly-educated, young population has access to appropriate career information, the Dubai World Trade Centre, in conjunction with the HCTs and the National Human Resource Development and Employment Authority (Tanmia), runs an annual careers fair. Careers UAE 2003 is scheduled for 14–17 April. Tanmia, an organisation dedicated since its establishment in 1999 to ensuring the employment of nationals in all sectors, sees the event as a prime opportunity for those with a stake in the emiratisation process to share information and work in unity to increase the representation of nationals in the UAE's workforce.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

At the beginning of 2002, Dubai Technology and Media Free Zone announced the establishment of a Dh250 million Dubai Knowledge Village covering 650,000 square feet, an initiative aimed at building a connected learning community which will act as a catalyst for the growth of the new knowledge-driven economy. The Knowledge

Village will facilitate the sharing of the multi-faceted expertise of knowledge-based organisations and the synergy produced from such a sharing through its housing of a Media Academy, an IT Academy, an Innovation Centre, e-Learning institutions, graduate and post-graduate institutions, institutions for research and development, a multimedia library, corporate training institutions, scientific and technology institutes, certification and testing organisations, and incubators. With enterprises such as Reuters (who have recently taken on a group of ZU students as interns), CNN and Sony sharing their expertise on journalism, digital content and production with academics, the success of this venture should see an explosive harnessing of intellect to innovative and competitive ends.

LITERACY

Despite the phenomenal advances in education, some members of society, particularly those of the older generation, remain disadvantaged. Nevertheless, efforts to eradicate illiteracy, defined in the UAE as the inability to read or write in any language (though the multiplicity of languages within the UAE can add to the difficulty of assessing literacy levels accurately), are proving remarkably successful. Between 1995 and 2001, the rate of illiteracy dropped from 16 per cent to 7 per cent for those in the 15–45 age group. In 1972, there were only 54 centres for adult education; by 2001, this number had more than doubled to reach 118, of which 62 per cent were for females. In the same period, the number of teachers and administrative staff in adult education centres more than doubled to 2788 in 2001, of whom 59 per cent were females. The number of learners at the centres increased fourfold from a mere 4912 in 1972 to 19,855 in 2001. Although males outnumbered females in 1972, they comprised only 49 per cent of the total number of learners during 2001.

At present, adult education, which takes place at 122 centres throughout the country, is divided into four levels which correspond closely to the formal schooling system – literacy, primary, preparatory and secondary. In 2000, UAE nationals comprised 72 per cent of total numbers enrolled in adult education classes. Of the 21,461 learners in 2000, 11 per cent were registered in literacy classes, 10 per cent in primary classes, 29 per cent in preparatory classes and 50 per cent at secondary level. While national females outnumbered males at the two lower levels, this was reversed at the two higher levels. This trend is seen as reflecting the demand of the labour market in a country where high qualifications are a prerequisite. Some UAE females do not continue their higher level education because of their perceived social role as mothers and housewives.

To accommodate the changing needs of those seeking its services, plans are under way to upgrade adult education. Among projects is the education programme for illiterate adults working in government bodies whose jobs prevent them from

joining evening classes. The 2020 Vision for Education recognises the need to link education to productive work and to create more flexible programmes using modern, informal teaching techniques. It also recognises that, as well as providing literacy classes for educationally disadvantaged adults, it is vitally important to ensure that all children are enrolled for and complete their primary education.

WOMEN

Nothing could delight me more than to see women taking up their distinctive position in society. Nothing should hinder their progress. Like men, women deserve the right to occupy high positions, according to their capabilities and qualifications.

Sheikh Zayed may not have had Mount Kilimanjaro in mind when he referred to a woman's right to occupy high positions, but on 18 August 2002 one woman, Hafsa Al Ulama, became the first UAE woman to reach the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro, as part of a team that included ten Americans and a Palestinian woman. Undeterred by storms and temperatures which dropped to a low of -20°C, she made the journey to the top in seven days. Her magnificent achievement will act as an inspiration to women attempting to achieve their goals in spheres far removed from a 19,340-foot peak in Africa.

Her achievement, it could be said, was born out of Sheikh Zayed's support for the right of women to fulfil their potential which has been central to the progress of women in the UAE over the last 30 years. But women have been instrumental in their own success. From the beginning, they have been prepared to join cooperatively in ensuring their mutual social and educational development, in accordance with their own well-being and that of their families. Women are anxious to play their part in the development of what is still a very young country and, for many years, the General Women's Union (GWU), an organisation funded by the Government, has been the main focal point for the coordination of those efforts. The GWU was established in 1975 as the UAE Women's Federation, under the leadership of Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, wife of the President, in order to bring under one umbrella all the women's societies in the country. The Union, which has, amongst its many duties, responsibility for suggesting new laws or amendments to existing laws, researches matters pertinent to women and makes recommendations to the relevant ministries and government departments. The work of the GWU since its inception has brought to the fore many interrelated issues of concern for women, children and the family. It has been instrumental in introducing health education and literacy programmes throughout the UAE as well as undertaking classes in dressmaking and handicraft, household management and childcare, computer and languages. It has offered vocational training, job placement services, family mediation services and religious education.

As the needs of women have developed alongside their educational development, so the range and focus of the GWU's concerns have developed. In a significant move towards coordinating treatment of those concerns at country level, negotiations for the establishment of a Supreme Council for Maternity and Childhood Affairs in 2003 are currently taking place with the Cabinet. The main task of the new council will be to formulate policies and coordinate their subsequent implementation by the different authorities and civil sectors. It will also be tasked with raising public awareness on issues relating to maternity and childhood. It will assist in promoting relevant national strategies and integrated plans devised by the Government and will help to prepare statistics on the actual status of maternity and childhood in the UAE. The Council will also have responsibility for organising conferences, scientific meetings and publications and for strengthening relationships with Arab and international organisations.

The GWU has strong Arab and international links with women's organisations and is affiliated with the Arab Women's Federation, the International Women's Federation and the International Family Organisation. The Gulf Committee for Regional Coordination of Women's Work has chosen Abu Dhabi as its permanent headquarters and 2002 heralded the beginning of the UAE's four-year term of membership of the Women's Committee of the 54-member UN Economic Council. In an interview with *Al Ittihad*, Sheikha Fatima called, on behalf of the GWU, for dialogue with European women and the convening of an Arab-International forum in 2003 for the discussion of common issues.

ARAB WOMEN AND MEDIA FORUM

In 2002, more than 250 Arab women attended the Arab Women and Media Forum (the GWU was one of the joint organisers). The Forum covered a wide range of topics, including the difficulties faced by women seeking a career in the media. The conflict between home and family responsibilities and the flexibility and mobility required for media work was highlighted, as was the tendency towards assigning women to 'women's issues'. One of the most important aspects of the Abu Dhabi Declaration produced by the Forum was the call for equality of opportunity in employment and promotion, and the opening up of issues, be they economic, technological or political, to coverage by both men and women. Sheikha Fatima is in favour of an Arab women's satellite channel – so long as it is not used to create divisions between men and women. The true status of Arab women is not currently reflected by the Arab media, participants in the forum felt, recommending the establishment of a women's channel, not only to present a corrective to the stereotypical image of Muslim women which is evident in the Western media, but to highlight issues of importance to women for home audiences and to publicise women's achievements in public life.

Shortly after that forum, the UAE was the first to sign the convention on the establishment of the Arab Women Organisation, which will come into being on its



endorsement by seven Arab countries. The agreement emanated from the Cairo Declaration made at the First Arab Women Summit in 2000 – forerunner of the Arab Women in Media Forum, 2002 – and is intended to reinforce Arab women's solidarity and coordination, raise their status and widen the scope of their contribution in various fields.

WOMEN AND EMPLOYMENT

As is apparent from the figures, women have embraced the opportunities for education. But advancement has not been confined to education alone. Women are now a potent part of the workforce of the UAE, comprising 41.5 per cent in the field of education, 34.2 per cent in the health sector and 19.7 per cent in social affairs. In fact, national female employees in 24 federal ministry departments account for nearly 28 per cent of civil servants. UAE national women working in the banking and financial services sector total 1776, or 57 per cent of the nationals working in this field. They also constitute 39.3 per cent of all women employed in the sector. Seventy per cent of UAE women employed in banking are also graduates, or those with higher degrees.

Interestingly, in light of the Arab Women and Media Forum, the executive manager of the Dubai Press Club is female. The Federal Armed Forces accepts women volunteers for its special women's corps – an innovation initiated at the time of the Gulf War – which participates in areas other than front-line combat, and women also form part of the police service. A female taxi service was approved in 2001. While women have been slow to reach senior positions, there is a female undersecretary in the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and a female assistant undersecretary for planning and evaluation in the Ministry of Education. In 2001, five women were appointed to Sharjah's 40-member Consultative Council and a female engineer heads the Sharjah Public Works Department.

It is the ambition of the GWU to see women appointed to the Federal National Council (FNC) legislative chapter (names of suitable candidates are being forwarded to the FNC), and Sheika Fatima would like to see women assume the responsibilities of ministerial office, given their constitutionally guaranteed right to participate in political life. The GWU is committed to ensuring that this right is fully utilised for the ultimate benefit of UAE society.

A study by Tanmia on the employment of national women revealed some of the disadvantages experienced by both women and their potential employers. Most of the women looking for jobs are in the 20–30 year age group, with half holding high school certificates, 20–30 per cent university degrees, and less than 20 per cent HCT qualifications. The study identified the need for national women to show a greater commitment towards work (economic prosperity makes work a matter of choice for most, rather than necessity) and to equip themselves with higher, more



relevant qualifications. Potential employers in the private sector found women lacked proficiency in the English language, computer skills and inter-personal skills. Given the customs and traditions in UAE society, these employers were also apprehensive of possible social problems which might arise in case of perceived misdemeanours in conduct. National women, for their part, saw the two-shift working schedule as one of the main barriers to their participation in the private sector, along with discriminatory practices between men and women, particularly in the area of promotions. Among suggestions for improvement were the provision of free training courses, the elimination of patronage in gaining access to jobs, the upgrading of language skills, reduction in the number of foreign workers and the establishment of a separate department for women in the Government. Nineteen per cent of female job seekers were prepared to set up their own businesses, while 27 per cent of businesswomen interviewed felt that national families needed to provide more support for female entrepreneurs. New technologies also open up possibilities for women to work from home.

The findings show that it will be difficult to woo national women into the labour market without serious consideration being given not only to equipping women with job relevant skills but also to current work practices which do not take account of the circumstances under which women must operate.

The UAE Businesswomen Committee, set up by the Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ADCCI) in 2001 to support the position of working women in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi and to widen the opportunities for cooperation between businesswomen in the Arab world, should help to remedy some of the shortcomings. Part of its brief is the provision of training programmes for women on the skills required in the labour market and improving the programme of emiratization. In 2002 the ADCCI had 1142 businesswomen, representing construction, tailoring, trade, contracting and other companies, on its register.

One of the main reasons for progress being made by women in the UAE is the attention that has been paid to safeguarding their rights, not only in the Constitution itself, but in laws drawn up subsequently to give practical effect to those rights. For instance, discrimination in salary between males and females is forbidden under Labour Law. Sexual harassment is also prohibited. Maternity leave has recently been extended from 45 days to six months – two months on full pay, two months on half pay and two months without pay. On the death of her husband, a woman is entitled to paid leave of four months and ten days, in accordance with Islamic Sharia law.

An issue which has assumed greater importance as more and more women join the workforce is the need for better crèche facilities in the workplace and, at the beginning of 2002, the Department of Family and Child Care undertook the ambitious project of building nurseries in all government departments.

Women in the UAE are trying to forge a future which allows for diversity and choice for themselves and their families. Many women choose to stay at home to



rear their own families, seeing that as their most important social function, but others want to use their education to take part in the forging of the society in which they live. Obstacles still remain in terms of career opportunities and social expectations (both traditional and new) for such women. But UAE women have grown confident in identifying the issues of central significance. While careers are important, of overriding importance is the ability to have not just the right but the means to combine that career with family responsibilities.

MARRIAGE

It was recognised in the early 1990s that growing numbers of UAE women were remaining unmarried. One of the main causes of this problem was the high cost of marriage. A dowry system is traditional to the UAE and, as the country's wealth soared, dowry expectations soared with equal rapidity, making marriage unviable for many young men and their families. The price of wedding celebrations themselves spiralled out of control – costs of US \$100,000 were not uncommon – adding an additional financial disincentive to any couple contemplating marriage. UAE men, to avoid the financial difficulties associated with marriage to women of their own nationality, were marrying foreign women, thus exacerbating the imbalance in the demographic structure of society. The Marriage Fund, administered by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, was set up in 1994 to combat this problem. Marriage halls were built to facilitate more economical ceremonies and the Government launched a campaign calling for a reduction in dowry size. Since then, an upper limit of Dh50,000 has been placed on dowry size and the prohibition on extravagant weddings can be enforced by legal sanctions: a prison sentence or a Dh500,000 fine for the couples concerned. In the words of Sheikh Zayed, 'Excessive dowries and extravagance in wedding celebrations and all matters that exhaust the youth at the beginning of their marital life are unjustified things which are against the teachings of Islam and our deep-rooted traditions.'

Young UAE nationals with limited incomes wishing to marry can apply to the Fund for a marriage grant of up to Dh70,000, usually paid in two instalments. Many couples are participating in mass weddings such as that which took place at the Fujairah Exhibition Centre at the end of June 2002. The ceremony for 45 UAE national couples, organised by the Fund, was the fourth such ceremony that year. To date the Fund has organised 38 group weddings.

The number of couples benefiting from Marriage Fund grants increased from 2036 in 1993 to 4027 in 2001. From the beginning of 2002 to the end of August in the same year, 3000 applications had been submitted to the Fund. A total of 60,000 young people will have benefited from the Fund by the end of 2002 at a cost of Dh2.3 billion. Because the applications far outweigh the Fund's resources, the Fund has a deficit. In light of this deficit, an annual budget of Dh300 million



has been proposed (compare this figure to that of 1993, when assistance from public funds was Dh80 million), along with a reduction in the size of the grant to Dh60,000.

Dubai's Statistical Yearbook 2000 showed a high rate of divorce among newly married couples in that emirate, with marriages of 31.85 per cent of local women breaking up within the first nine years. Figures from the Abu Dhabi Marriage Fund showed that in 1999, of 3351 marriages between nationals 21 per cent ended in divorce. This compared favourably with the 31.6 per cent rate of divorce for the 1111 marriages between national men and expatriate women in the same year. The Marriage Fund sees divorce as a very disruptive force in UAE lives and has planned an ambitious programme aimed at producing a divorce-free society. The programme will concentrate initially on the problems of those families who have received the Fund's marriage grant. The Fund is also to conduct courses for those applying for the marriage grant, designed to raise awareness of the negative impact of divorce on society. These courses may become compulsory. A database, monitoring divorce rates, will follow. Amongst the Fund's other plans for the next three years is a media campaign to increase awareness of the importance of family relations. It also proposes opening up a hotline for queries from members of the public.

In a separate initiative, the office of Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak has introduced a legal service to assist in the resolution of family disputes and other social problems without recourse to the courts. The service will be open to both nationals and expatriates, and will also be open to men.

PERSONAL STATUS LAW

The increasing complexity of family life is placing greater demands on the courts in the UAE. It is hoped that a new personal status law securing social rights for men, women and children, the draft of which is to be reviewed by the FNC, will allow the courts and other institutions to expedite services to citizens. The law is intended to give clear guidelines (within the precepts of Islamic Sharia law) guaranteeing the rights of the different parties in the resolution of family-linked court cases.

HEALTH

The UAE ranks highest among Arab countries in terms of life expectancy (75 years), a figure comparing favourably with that of high-income countries (79 years in 1998), according to the first Arab Human Development Report (AHDR). This is due in no small part to the excellence of its health service. The UAE has been classified by World Health Organisation (WHO) as achieving international health standards in terms of both quality/goodness (the best attainable level) and fairness (availability to all without discrimination).

The Ministry of Health (MoH), which manages a total of 30 hospitals, 115 centres for primary health care and nine centres for preventive medicine throughout the UAE, is planning to construct 17 new hospitals and 25 primary health care centres by 2005. In 2002, the Ministry announced that six new hospitals with a total bed capacity of 1830 are to be opened – a 800-bed general hospital and a 350-bed obstetrics and gynaecology hospital in Al Ain, a 200-bed general hospital in Umm al-Qaiwain, a 180-bed obstetrics and gynaecology hospital in Ra's al-Khaimah, a 120-bed general hospital in Kalba and a 180-bed psychiatric hospital in Dubai. The Corniche Maternity Hospital in Abu Dhabi, run by the Abu Dhabi Health Care Department, is to be provided with a further 300 beds. In addition, three more primary health care centres are to be opened in Ra's al-Khaimah, Ajman and Dibba. This, along with the opening of a new centre for preventive medicine in Dhaid serving Sharjah's central region, shows that the MoH's overall plans for expansion are well under way.

The new hospitals will benefit from the assistance of the revolutionary high-tech tube robot for in-house transport and communication services (the US-made Swisslog Translogic), the first of which has just been installed in a government hospital in Abu Dhabi. The computerised system is connected to large plastic tubes which extend to all sections of the hospital. Items such as blood samples can be transported through the tubes to their destination in seconds.

To satisfy the demand for more nursing staff, five new nursing schools have been created. In 1989, only 30 nationals graduated from nursing school. In 2002, that number increased to 155. The expanded teaching capacity created by the new schools should lead to a considerable increase in those numbers.

Specialised healthcare units were established in 2000 to provide for such complex treatments as open heart surgery, organ transplantation and dialysis units, while comprehensive diagnostic and therapeutic radiological facilities, in addition to surgical treatment, are available at oncology departments in Tawam and Al Mafraq hospitals. Many public health institutions have units for endoscopy.

The Dubai Government is to establish Dubai Healthcare City as a global hub for specialised healthcare and a centre for medical education and research, servicing patients from the entire region. The project, with an estimated cost of US\$1.8 billion, includes a university medical complex which will provide specialised medical education and research and be instrumental in attracting medical specialists to the region.

The private health sector is also thriving throughout the country. At the end of 2000, there were 21 private hospitals, with a total of 827 beds, 265 general medical centres, 352 private clinics, and 250 specialist clinics, served by 685 doctors. This year American Healthcare Management Systems Ltd signed an understanding with Emaar Properties to build a 300-bed hospital at a cost of Dh250 million in Dubai.

A multi-million dirham fertility centre offering IVF and related services is to be set up at Zulekha Hospital in Sharjah.

VIRUS DIAGNOSTICS

Increased collaboration between research laboratories round the world is seen by the UAE's diagnostic centres as a key element in combating viral diseases such as HIV, sexually transmitted infections and various strains of hepatitis. A Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) research laboratory for AIDS has been established, and the UAE Health Department now has 12 reference and confirmatory laboratories for virus diagnostics, together with three other laboratories established specifically to conduct 'flow cytometry' techniques. The UAE is one of 42 countries participating in WHO's external quality assessment scheme, involving over 900 laboratories. Diagnostic tests for HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis B and C became available in the UAE at the beginning of 2002.

PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

The implementation of a broad programme for the further development of primary health care in the UAE is well under way. Pregnant women are receiving comprehensive care at nine medical and child health centres and more than 80 units at primary health care centres. The initiative's success is reflected not just in the low levels of infant mortality of 6.57 per 1000, a figure in line with that of other developed countries, but also in the very low level of maternal mortality (one in 100,000), a rate below that in many developed countries. Neo-natal services implementing the national immunisation programme, encouraging breast-feeding and providing nutrition advice have also been introduced. A national programme has already proved its effectiveness in the early detection of congenital and hereditary diseases. A screening programme for breast cancer has been launched to cover all women aged over 40 years, and a similar programme for the detection of cervical cancer is to follow shortly.

The school system is used as the basis for continuing primary care. Clinics set up in each school carry out periodical health checks, in addition to administering the continuing vaccination schedule. Pupils undergo regular dental inspections, and the rate of dental caries in schools has dropped by 80 per cent.

Although vaccination efforts have been under way in the UAE since the 1960s, the fight entered a new phase in 1981 with the launch of an new programme to eradicate childhood communicable diseases. This ambitious programme has been remarkably successful, with no cases of polio appearing since 1993, while 2002 should see the UAE achieve measles-free status. Children are routinely vaccinated against hepatitis B, whooping cough, polio, tetanus, diphtheria, measles and TB and in 2002 the authorities achieved 95 per cent vaccination coverage. The country was declared free of malaria in December 2002.

To control diseases being imported to the country, the UAE has entered into a tie-up with the Disease Control Centre, USA. Steps are also being taken to restrict the entry into the UAE of animals that might carry diseases that can affect humans.

A NATIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITY

The UAE National Environmental Strategy and Environmental Work Plan has suggested the creation of a national health authority to review laws governing contagious diseases, the quality of human food, animal health, and human capability. Within such an authority would be: a national public health institution to train labourers and health inspectors on all aspects of public health and safety; an environmental health authority; a body to review laws on contagious and transmitted diseases; and a new health department to study diseases common to animals and man. Also recommended were laws to regulate foreign labour, with a view to preventing the introduction to the country of transmittable diseases, and laws to guarantee the quality of human food.

BLOOD AND BLOOD PRODUCTS

The UAE will shortly become the first Arab country to pass a blood transfusion act. The Higher National Committee for Blood Transfusion Services (HNCBT) is currently drafting the final articles of the law, prior to submitting it to the legal department at the MoH. The final three chapters of this five-chapter act have already been completed. Chapter three deals with blood transfusion, its scope, rules and components, as well as with blood transfusion programmes for different pathological cases. Chapters four and five concern the patient to whom blood is transfused, blood transfusion interactions and diseases communicated through such a process. The first two chapters will cover administrative and technical aspects, matters related to blood donors and blood banks, blood donation programmes and policies on blood-transmitted diseases.

In a move to control the quality of its blood transfusion services, the UAE ceased the import of blood in 1983 and has relied on local donors ever since. This and the incorporation of advanced computer systems into blood bank work has caused a major qualitative shift in both safety and accuracy and speed of diagnostic procedures. All aspects of modern technology have been utilised in delivering a high quality product and the results of that effort are evident in the fact that the UAE is now listed by the American Blood Banks Authority on its Internet site as one of ten countries worldwide using safe means of blood transfusion. Along with the US, Canada, France, Austria, Ireland, Germany, New Zealand, Portugal and the UK, the UAE carries out leukocyte filtration of blood, offering 100 per cent filtered blood to all patients. The system of separating white cells from blood units has been applied gradually at Abu Dhabi Central Blood Banks, Sharjah Blood Bank and Tawam Hospital Blood Bank.

Sharjah is acquiring another, specialised centre for blood transfusion and blood diseases, while a brand new blood centre for the extraction of premature blood cells from human umbilical cords for the treatment of leukaemia and thalassaemia is planned for Abu Dhabi. The existing blood transfusion centre in Sharjah, along with its counterpart in Abu Dhabi, has been ISO-9002 certified for the past two years.

Artificial Blood Control

Artificial Blood Control, a product created from a mixture of chicken and human blood and used to calibrate blood haematology analysers, is a new success story for the UAE. Imported Artificial Blood Control used to cost the MoH Dh500,000 annually. Now, a locally manufactured product supplies blood banks and government labs as well as 54 haematology labs and the quality is so good that the shelf life of the product has been extended from 30 to 40 days. The move has been praised by WHO.

LIFESTYLE DISEASES

Unfortunately, the affluence which allows for high standards of healthcare poses other, insidious, risks. Lifestyle diseases continue to take their toll on the population, with the three major causes of death in the UAE listed as: cardiovascular disease, traffic accidents and cancer.

Programmes have been organised to prevent and control cardiovascular diseases, hypertension and diabetes, and the MoH has set up a national cancer committee which has been given the task of reducing cancer cases in the UAE by 40 per cent by the year 2020 and improving the cure and survival rates of detected cases by 50 per cent by 2010.

Smoking

That smoking and cancer are intimately linked is shown by the fact that 40 per cent of UAE cancer cases are related to smoking (of which 70 per cent end in death). According to a recent study, the total annual tobacco use and addiction related expenditure in the UAE is estimated at Dh545 million, of which Dh245 million is directly related to the treatment of diseases caused by tobacco use. (Revenue from smokers generated by hospital charges is, on the other hand, less than Dh30 million.) As part of efforts to reduce the use of tobacco, a national taskforce is currently drafting a federal law to ban the sale of cigarettes to those under 18 years of age. The draft also provides for strict control on tobacco advertising, a ban on smoking in public places and a heavy tax on the sale of tobacco.

While most countries try to reduce their smoking populations through deterrence alone, WHO, as part of the International Quit Smoking Competition, came up with the novel idea of tempting smokers to quit by offering a prize to those who could manage to refrain from smoking for a month. The UAE was chosen as one of 100 countries to take part in the competition because of its dedication to intensive quit smoking programmes.

Accidents

The economic and psychological consequences of accidents causing death and those resulting in disability are immense, and the MoH is formulating a comprehensive strategy to cope with the problem, in collaboration with the Traffic Departments of the Ministry of the Interior. The strategy addresses four primary factors: spreading

awareness and information, paying attention to vehicles and roads, enhancing medical emergency services and working towards prevention and legislation. Five fully equipped centres to check loads on heavy vehicles (overloading is a major cause of accidents involving such vehicles) are already in operation, and the Ministry of the Interior plans to set up ambulance and rescue units providing quick emergency aid to victims in all UAE cities. One new tool in the fight against speeding is a laser speed gun which cannot be recognised by radar detectors or jammers fitted in cars.

ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE

The use of herbs to combat medical conditions has been traditional in the UAE for thousands of years, but the scientific basis for their effectiveness has not been explored until recently. In 1996, the Zayed Complex for Herbal Research and Traditional Medicine was established by presidential decree and, as well as conducting research on hundreds of herbs and plants, it currently treats 13,000 patients suffering from chronic illnesses. Diabetic AI, used in the treatment of diabetes, is the latest in its range of medicines. In recognition of its success in producing, on a small scale, seven internationally standardised herbal medicines for the treatment of chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, joint inflammation, and ulcers, WHO named the complex as a regional centre for alternative medicine in the Middle East. Tests are under way to produce, for the first time anywhere in the world, antibiotics from herbs and ointment for acne, and the manufacture of medicines on a large scale is planned.

PHARMACEUTICAL PATENTS

Amendments to Federal Law No. 44 of 1992 (Patent Law) protecting inventions, industrial design and models have almost been finalised. The amendments will extend protection to all pharmaceutical products, and will extend a patent's life from 15 to 20 years.

NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE

As the cost and range of medical treatment increases, the need for a national health insurance scheme becomes more urgent. The MoH plans to replace the existing health card scheme with an insurance system, and has proposed the establishment of a health insurance authority, responsible for providing free health services to UAE nationals and cost-effective health services to expatriates, who in return must pay a health insurance premium. One insurance scheme under consideration offers three levels of health coverage – economy, standard and high end. Annual premiums would be Dh885, Dh982 and Dh1183 respectively. The economic policy entitles the insured party to free medical treatment at government hospitals for up to Dh2000 annually and covers in-patient hospital treatment for up to Dh25,000 annually. These entitlements rise to Dh5000 and Dh50,000 respectively under the standard policy, while the high-end policy guarantees coverage of Dh10,000 and Dh100,000.