



CULTURE AND INFORMATION

The Arab media should be a means for enlightenment and change – not a way of ignoring, suppressing, or distorting the truth.

(Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister of Information and Culture)

MEDIA AND INFORMATION

THE STATE OF THE MEDIA IN THE ARAB WORLD was recently reviewed by the UAE's Minister of Information and Culture, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, in a speech made at the ECSSR in Abu Dhabi. The Minister stated that the era of change in which we live requires a re-assessment of Arab information as a whole, both internally and externally. The first step in this re-assessment involves a complete and comprehensive re-evaluation of the laws governing press and publications in the Arab world. This should not be a question of mere amendments, or of cosmetic changes, but of new measures that take into account developments in information technology and changes in the speed and ease of flow of information. The UAE's aim is to enhance transparency by guaranteeing free access to information unless such information is protected under the law.

With regard to internal reform of the media, progress is largely dependent upon media personnel themselves and their ability to strike a balance between professional needs and responsibilities in terms of the way they deliver their message. This issue is being addressed through enhancement of a better understanding of the role of the media in communicating information in a credible manner, based on truth and accuracy. Innovative thinking and dialogue are being encouraged and the media is free to question government and criticise its policies – if there is something to be criticised. In this way the media is better able to serve as the conscience, eyes, and voice of public opinion. In so doing it is earning the confidence of the public and ensuring a more buoyant future for its own services.

Attention is also being focused on the development of personnel so that they are better equipped to utilise information technology, enabling them to work more efficiently in the new Information Age.

PROTECTION OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

A core issue in the UAE's focus on the media is ensuring proper protection of intellectual property rights. The Government operates a strict enforcement policy of its piracy and patent laws, seeing the protection of creativity as a necessity in itself and essential to attracting foreign investment. A member of the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), the UAE acceded to the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property in 1996, following the implementation of three intellectual property laws in 1993.

Whilst the task of obliterating copyright piracy is far from over, considerable progress has been made and the country is widely regarded as a regional model for effectively reducing software piracy through stringent legislation, efficient enforcement and public awareness campaigns. Intensive raids by the Ministry of Information and Culture, in accordance with policies of the Arabian Anti-piracy Alliance (AAA), are aimed at protecting intellectual property and combating the illegal use of software. The raids send a clear message to all parties involved in selling or using pirated software that the UAE Government will not tolerate any violation of laws that set out to protect the national economy. The message has been heard and understood by the market and the UAE currently has the lowest level software piracy rates in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) and is the only Arab country among the 20 lowest-piracy countries in the world. The UAE's piracy levels, at 34 per cent, were lower than those of some developed countries such as France at 45 per cent, Greece at 62, Ireland at 38, Portugal at 40, and Spain at 43.

But software piracy still exists and UAE authorities have stepped up efforts to protect Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) by intensifying its campaigns against this criminal activity. The UAE Ministry of Information and Culture, AAA and Dubai police recently launched an anti-piracy campaign entitled 'Stop Street Vendor Piracy'. To curb the increasing problem of hawkers selling pirated CDs and DVDs, a special hotline has been set up with the number 04-2661228. Meanwhile, law enforcement officers continue to raid suspect premises, frequently seizing thousands of pirated CDs and DVDs.

It is widely recognised that the UAE's efforts to eradicate software piracy are entirely genuine and have been very successful. Business Software Alliance (BSA), the international association established by the software industry to promote a safe and legal digital world, has also strengthened its cooperation with the UAE Ministry of Information and Culture to protect Intellectual Property Rights. This was announced on the occasion of the World International Property Rights Day in 2005. UAE federal laws have made it mandatory for companies and end-users to use original software and to maintain evidence of the original software within their IT systems.

Copyright is protected under the terms of the Federal Author and Copyrights and Parallel Rights Law No. 7, issued in August 2002, which gives copyright protection to authors and artists not only during their lifetime but also for 50 years (an increase from 25) after their death, making the UAE fully compliant with the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) requirements. Variations exist in the case of joint copyright and community copyright. Works of non-national authors are protected subject to reciprocal treatment by the foreign state, or subject to international conventions to which the UAE has acceded. The new law lists the works of art entitled to protection as well as those falling beyond the scope of protection. It defines holders of parallel rights and public performers and stipulates under what circumstances the Court of First Instance may suspend the reproduction, show, display or performance of a work of art, or impound the original work of art, together with any copies. The law covers photography (defining the rights of both photographer and person photographed), the misuse of software and their applications, as well as databases. Copyright violations in general attract fines and/or terms of imprisonment varying according to the severity or frequency of the infringement.

A number of ministerial decisions on copyright and related rights were issued in March 2004. The decisions, 131/132/133 and 134 for 2004, regulate the registration, import and distribution, collective management, and mandatory licensing of copyright in line with Federal Law No. 7 for 2002. Decision 131 states that works shall be registered at and a copy of the work shall be retained in the UAE registration office so as to safeguard the rights of the owner in the event of any dispute involving copyright. Decision 132 governs the import and distribution of copyrighted works and is aimed at preserving the rights of authorised importers and distributors, as well as the rights of copyright owners. The significance of the decision stems from the fact that it regulates the process of circulation of intellectual works in the country in a manner that will make it harder for unauthorised parties to circulate, sale or distribute works without prior permission from the owner. Decision 133 on collective management of rights enables copyright owners – be they authors, artistes, performers, audio-recording producers, radio institutions or otherwise – to authorise other parties to manage their works on the basis of authenticated agreements. These parties shall be responsible for collecting revenues generated by the works. They shall also be entitled to take necessary administrative, legal and arbitral measures to protect the rights of their clients. Decision 134 regulates the issuing of mandatory licences, specifically for copying and translation of copyright works. The licences shall be issued by the Ministry of Information and Culture as stipulated by Article 21 of the federal law.

The Internet has brought numerous challenges to protection of copyright and intellectual property. A draft law on cyber crimes proposes a maximum 15-year

prison sentence and a fine of up to Dh100,000 for crimes such as interception, modification, data theft, interference and sabotage of networks, hacking and virus distribution. The law, which includes 29 articles, incriminates acts breaching the privacy of Internet users or abusing the Internet, e-correspondence and websites. It also toughens penalties for Internet-related crimes, including child sexual abuse, or abuse of the Internet to promote terrorism, contravening public order and ethics and money laundering. Other offences, such as Internet fraud, hacking credit cards, identity theft, computer intrusions and acts involving the use or targeting of computers or networks also carry heavy penalties.

The related e-commerce law regulates electronic transactions such as e-mails, e-signatures, electronic records, conditions required for electronic documents to be treated as a written document and/or original document, and conditions required for the electronic information to be accepted as evidence. The law aims to improve transfer of electronic documents to corporate and government bodies and to thus enhance the availability of related services via reliable e-mail connections. It facilitates and promotes e-commerce and online transactions by use of e-signatures to limit forgery and amendment of e-correspondence.

Patents are protected under Patents Law No. 17 of 2002, which was issued in accordance with the international conventions and treaties to which the UAE is a signatory. Under the law, non-nationals from countries having reciprocal agreements with the UAE are treated as UAE nationals in terms of protecting their patents and rights. UAE patents' law now complies fully with World Trade Organisation (WTO) requirements. Patents will be granted to applicants for any novel invention or creation, or development of an existing one available for industrial exploitation, whether in respect of new industrial products or means. The term of the patent is for 20 years and that of the certificate for ten years from the date of filing the application. Annual fees are payable by the patent owner, failing which the patent and relevant certificate may be deemed void. Biological research on reproduction of plants and animals, excluding micro-organisms, will not be covered by patents. Similarly, diagnosis, treatment of diseases and surgery for human beings and animals, as well as mathematical theories and ideas or, indeed, inventions affecting propriety will not be granted a patent. Patent owners may be deprived of their exploitation rights if they fail to properly exploit their invention within three years.

DEFAMATION

Journalists have the right to publish any material or claim backed by facts so long as it is not intended to defame or malign any person or entity. The press can publish material if in doing so it is not contravening the Constitution or Articles 372 and 373 of the UAE Penal Code. Article 30 of the UAE Constitution allows the publication of any material, as long as publication does not breach the bounds of responsibility that goes with such freedom. Article 372 of the Penal Code

penalises any person who is proved to have published any material that causes moral harm to another individual. Article 373 holds that anyone who intentionally and maliciously defames a person without concrete evidence shall be subject to penalties stipulated in the Penal Code. According to the Court of Cassation's ruling, accusers must establish that words or phrases of any published or broadcast material actually amount to defamation. The court must also ascertain that the defamation complaints are not a distortion of the facts before issuing a final ruling.

EMIRATES MEDIA INCORPORATED

Media organisations such as Emirates Media Incorporated (EMI) are playing important roles in development of the media in the UAE. EMI was set up under Federal Law No. 5 for 1999 as the legal successor to the Emirates Broadcasting Corporation and Al Ittihad for Press, Publishing and Distribution. As the largest and most diversified media corporation, not only in the UAE but throughout the Arab world, it has interests in all branches of media – television, radio, print, publishing and distribution, and the Internet.

While the government has relinquished formal control over EMI, ownership is still officially vested in the government and the corporation remains partially dependent on government funding. Nevertheless, EMI enjoys administrative and editorial independence and functions very much as a private company.

Revenues from its extensive audio-visual interests represent 35 to 40 per cent of Emirates Media's income. The remainder is generated by print media. Publications such as *Al Ittihad* newspaper and the magazines *Zahrat Al Khaleej* and *Majid* were well-established before EMI's re-incorporation. EMI's radio division has been developed and expanded to include Abu Dhabi Radio and Holy Qur'an Radio, Emirates FM, the Sound of Music, Urdu Service Station and Emirates FM English stations Radio 1 and 2. Abu Dhabi Television – one of EMI's television stations, producing nearly 90 per cent of its own broadcasts – received worldwide exposure during the Iraq crisis and is rapidly gaining an international reputation. Abu Dhabi Sports Channel, a pay channel carried on the Showtime platform, has established itself since its launch in 1996 as a leading channel throughout the Arab world. EMI's Emirates Channel, available through terrestrial and satellite transmission, is aimed at a UAE and Gulf audience, concentrating on cultural issues and issues of identity and heritage, as well as political issues. EMI's Internet service provides another instant medium of contact with the public and includes streaming audio. Finally, in addition to its commercial operations, EMI has a training and development role to play in media in the UAE, particularly in relation to the fostering of local talent.

Following an agreement between EMI and BBC Arabic, the BBC is broadcasting on two FM stations in the UAE, one based in Abu Dhabi, the other in Dubai (reaching Sharjah, Ajman and Umm al-Qaiwain). BBC Arabic broadcasts news

and current affairs programmes to the region as well as several interactive discussion programmes that enable listeners and users of www.bbcarabic.com to take part in the discussions. It also broadcasts throughout the Arab world on short wave and medium wave frequencies.

EMI recently established a new printing and publishing company in conjunction with Arab Media Company and Saudi Research and Publishing Company. The new venture, United Company for Publishing and Printing, has a paid-up capital of Dh300 million of which EMI is contributing 40 per cent, while Arab Media Company and Saudi Research and Publishing Company will contribute 35 per cent and 25 per cent respectively. The publishing house will be based in Abu Dhabi and will concern itself with publishing of newspapers and other publications. This is in addition to rendering commercial printing and publishing services.

THE EMIRATES NEWS AGENCY

The Emirates News Agency (WAM) was founded in 1976 to provide news in Arabic and English, together with pictures and news video clips, to all subscribers. It has kept pace with rapid changes in communications technology and now makes extensive use of the Internet. Its easily navigated, revamped dual-language website (www.wam.org.ae) presents news text and pictures online without requiring any registration or subscription.

During 2004 and 2005, WAM upgraded its services, both for recipients and for its external offices, and new methods for transmitting and receiving news are now in place. In a cost-effective use of Internet technology, File Transfer Protocol (FTP) provides subscribers with news and photos in real time, removing the necessity for dedicated telecommunications links, while Virtual Private Network (VPN) facilities are available for its reporters and offices. Direct contact is thus maintained with the WAM Head Office in Abu Dhabi and with the agency's offices elsewhere in the UAE and abroad. Its travelling correspondents also have easy access to other Arabic and international news agencies' feeds through a fully computerised news management system.

Ever since its establishment WAM has provided local and international television stations with news video clips and it is the first regional news service to have done so. Recently, as part of its development cycle, WAM has upgraded its news department to utilise an advanced digital editing system with a fully integrated transmission system for sending news video-clips by fibre optic cable in the UAE and through satellite and Internet links at very low cost to recipient stations overseas.

WAM has a staff of 180 employees within the UAE and 28 reporters widely dispersed outside the country, covering places as far away as Cairo, Beirut, Washington DC, Islamabad, Sana'a and Brussels. It has fully-equipped branch offices in all major cities in the UAE. It has cooperation and news exchange

agreements with more than 20 Arab countries and is a member of the Group of Gulf Cooperation Council News Agencies, the Federation of Arab News Agencies (FANA), the Islamic News Agencies Union, the Pool of Non-Aligned News Agencies, ANSA-med and the Organisation of Asia-Pacific News Agencies (OANA). Originally set up to cover topics of national interest, WAM has now broadened its remit to cover topical news events worldwide.

NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES

There are thirteen daily newspapers, seven Arabic, *Al Ittihad*, *Akhbar al-Arab*, *Al Fajr* and *Al Wahda*, published in Abu Dhabi, *Al Bayan* and *Emirat al-Yom* published in Dubai, *Al Khaleej*, published in Sharjah, and six English, *Gulf News*, *Emirates Today*, *Khaleej Times*, *Evening Post* and *Seven Days*, published in Dubai and *Gulf Today*, a sister paper of *Al Khaleej*, published in Sharjah. Many overseas newspapers also circulate in the country, benefiting from the free-market approach adopted by the Ministry of Information and Culture. At the latest count, there were 158 magazines and journals published by local and national organisations, cultural centres, chambers of commerce and educational institutions, while many international magazines also circulate. Sixty-five of the UAE-based publications are in Arabic and 93 in English. Many of these publications also have active websites where an online version is available.

JOURNALISM

The profession of journalism in the UAE has continued over the last couple of years to make considerable progress, with a growing number of UAE citizens, both men and women, taking up posts in both the written and the broadcast media and with the government actively encouraging a more dynamic press corps. Various courses are held at universities, many in cooperation with media organisations such as Dubai Press Club (DPC).

UAE journalists have benefited from the emergence of Dubai, in particular, as a regional media centre. DPC provides a forum for discussion of media issues in the Arab world and promotes communication and liaison with the international press. DPC and Zayed University's Media Centre, in association with Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry, offer a series of workshops on basic journalistic skills such as 'The Art of the Interview', 'Story Structure and Story Mapping' and 'Language of Reporting', designed primarily for journalists. On completion, students receive a certificate from Zayed University Media Centre.

ARAB JOURNALISM AWARDS

The Arab Journalism Awards are presented each year at the Dubai Press Club, under the patronage of General Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum in cooperation with the Arab Journalists Union. The awards are judged on the basis

of transparency and objectivity with equal opportunity for all journalists. The 2005 Award was supported by ten partners in the form of Nakheel, Dubai International Financial Centre, Shell, Samsung, Emirates airline, Emirates Telecommunication Corporation – Etisalat, Madinat Jumeirah, Dubai Cultural Council, Al Arabiya News Channel and Dubai Media City. Winners were as follows. Best Business article: Sahar Mohammed Musbah from *Al Riyadh* newspaper KSA; Best Children's article: Ahmed Umar from *Majid* Magazine, UAE; Best Cultural article: Mohammed Mahmood Ali Shuair, *Akhbar Al Adab*, Egypt; Best Investigative article: Dr Jamal Hussain Ali, *Al Qabas*, Kuwait; Best Interview: Mohammed Munir Yousuf from the publication *Nusf Al Duniya*, Egypt; Best Caricature: Faris Qurah Bait from *Al Raya*, Qatar; Best Columnist: Khairy Mansour from *Al Khaleej* newspaper, UAE; Best IT article: Abu Al Hajaj Mohammed Bashir Othman from *Lugat Alaser* magazine, Egypt; Best Sports article: Usama Al Sheikh from *Super Magazine*, UAE; Best Political article: Salah Salem from *Al Ahram*, Egypt; Best Photo-Journalism Award: Mohammed Jadallah from *Al Mustaqbal*, Lebanon; Best Environmental article: Mohammed Abdul Latif Mohammed Abdul Rahman from *Sawt Al Umma* newspaper, Egypt and finally the 'Media Personality of the Year Award' went to Raja'a Naqash from Egypt for his valuable contribution to Arabic media.

TELEVISION

The UAE has numerous indigenous television channels. Some focus on Arab culture and identity, others on business and sport. Broadcasting in Arabic and English, these include Abu Dhabi TV, Emirates Channel, Abu Dhabi Sports Channel, Dubai 33, Sharjah Channel 22 and Ajman Channel 4. Despite their national epithets, many of the UAE's television broadcasts are available internationally, via satellite. The Abu Dhabi Channel, for example, is officially described as a 'General Entertainment, Free-To-Air, primarily Arabic Language satellite channel covering the Middle East, Europe, North and South America, Australia and New Zealand'.

Emirates Cable TV and Multimedia (E-Vision), a subsidiary of Etisalat, the only digital Cable TV service provider in the UAE, provides over 70 channels which include two executive channels, e-junior (kids channel) and e-xplor (documentary channel). With a variety of channels that offer programming in over 14 languages and the availability of premium packages from ART, Showtime and B4U, E-Vision is currently available throughout Abu Dhabi and Dubai and will be available throughout the entire UAE within the next five years. Following a decision to provide wireless technology through Wireless Broadband Network (WBN), Etisalat is endeavouring to service all the Emirates through wireless, cable or a mix of both. E-vision's services to Al Ain and Ajman are entirely based on the wireless platform, while in Abu Dhabi and Sharjah services will continue to be provided by a mix of cable and wireless.

RADIO

Radio stations include popular English language stations such as Abu Dhabi Capital Radio, Dubai FM 92, Channel 4 FM, and Emirates 1 and 2 FM, along with UAE Radio Ra's al-Khaimah. The quality of programming is high and covers a very wide range of interests. Some radio programmes are also available on the Internet.

ADVERTISING

A vibrant media industry, coupled with a healthy growing economy, support a highly competitive advertising industry in the UAE with many of the world's top agencies having local or regional offices. Advertisement spending grew 41 per cent to Dh2.32 billion (US\$632 million) in 2004 compared to Dh1.64 billion (US\$446 million) in 2003. This places the UAE second in the Middle East region in terms of volume of advertising expenditure, after Saudi Arabia, and industry experts expect the UAE to take the lead in this field by 2007 or 2008.

According to statistics issued by the Arab Research and Studies Establishment, newspapers were top earners with US\$345 million (Dh1.27 billion) in advertising revenue, accounting for 55 per cent of the total advertising expenditure in 2004. Television took second place at US\$122 million (Dh447.7 million), accounting for 19 per cent of the total volume of advertisement expenditure, followed by magazines at 18 per cent and US\$111 million (Dh407.4 million). Outdoor advertising had a 5 per cent share, attracting a spending of US\$34 million, followed by radio at 2 per cent and US\$13 million (Dh48 million) and movies 1 per cent and US\$7 million (Dh26 million).

DUBAI MEDIA CITY

Dubai Media City has become an international centre for media-based operations. It is now a thriving media community with a sophisticated infrastructure that hosts broadcasting companies, TV channels and numerous associated media production companies and individual freelancers. Key global companies in DMC include Reuters, CNN, CNBC, MBC, Sony, Bertelsmann, BMG, the Associated Press and McGraw Hill. CNN runs its Arabic news website and regional news bureau from DMC. Pan-Arabic broadcaster MBC has relocated its international headquarters from London to DMC and launched an Arabic news channel, Al Arabiya, which is competing with Al Jazeera and the Arab News Network (ANN). CNBC Arabiya also operates from its studio at DMC. Other significant regional companies include Lowe & Partners Middle East North Africa (the main advertising arm of the Lowe Group, ranked fourth among worldwide agency groups), Saudi Research & Publishing Companies (second largest publishers in the world after Time-Warner), Asianet Global, Taj Television Ltd (TEN Sports), Middle East Television (MET), Zee Network, and Al Majd Satellite Broadcasting Star Group. Satellite TV network Showtime opened its headquarters and transmission centre at DMC in 2004.

BMG International also established its Middle East and North Africa headquarters, BMG Mena, at DMC. It controls one of the largest music production libraries, which is used by audio-visual production companies and advertising agencies for content in commercials and corporate presentations.

DUBAI STUDIO CITY

Dubai Studio City (DSC) seeks to foster the growth of the broadcast and film production industry in the region. DSC is being built within the Dubailand complex and will offer a complete technical and community infrastructure for the film, TV and music production industries to flourish. An initiative of the Dubai Holding Group, DSC aims to build a large cluster of companies from across the industry. These include production companies, support service providers offering production and post-production facilities, animation studios and services like dubbing, make-up, costume designing, stage designing and building, casting, telnet agencies as well as telecine and lab facilities.

The new film hub will feature a Broadcast Centre housing offices and post-production studios and a Business Centre for freelancers. It will also have a Production Studio Complex that will accommodate pre-built studios, sound stages, workshops, backlots and stage areas. The infrastructure for the first phase of the project will be completed by the first quarter of 2006.

Studio City will provide similar investor benefits to those of other members of the Dubai Technology and Media Free Zone. These include 100 per cent tax exemption for 50 years, 100 per cent ownership of the business, 100 per cent repatriation of capital and profits and no currency restrictions, serviced offices, land on lease, a one-stop-shop of support service and simplified licensing and incorporation.

INTERNET

As discussed in the chapter on Economic Development, the UAE has a very high Internet user-base. The media potential of this has been greatly increased by introduction of broadband, which has taken a little while to spread. In July 2005 at least 50,000 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) were still using relatively inefficient dial-up connections as their primary means of Internet access. Meanwhile, the total number of broadband users has experienced a surge, from 149,719 users in 2002 to 602,399 in mid-2005. By that time about 12,000 UAE businesses were using broadband and it is expected that by the end of 2007 or early 2008 broadband will surpass dial-up in terms of number of users.

The state's focus on e-governance and the prevalence of emerging technologies like cable Internet access, Internet via TV, ISDN LAN, fixed broadband Internet and the iZone wireless network, which will allow users to wirelessly connect

to the Internet at broadband speeds from selected public locations (hotspots), will also help boost web-user numbers. The eCompany (formally Emirates Internet and Multimedia), the Internet service arm of Etisalat (see section on Telecommunications), has been the instigator of most of these developments. Moreover, the fact that Dubai Internet City (part of the TECOM Free Zone) houses a range of leading ICT companies has helped to create a climate where digital accessibility is the norm.

UAE INTERACT

The official website of the UAE Ministry of Information and Culture, UAE Interact (www.uaeinteract.com) was first launched in 1997 and is one of the longest-established Internet sites providing news and information on the UAE. UAE Interact is actively managed on a daily basis. During 2005 the website received over 1.9 million distinct visitors who created over 51 million hits and over 6.7 million page views. This represents a growth rate of 11.7 per cent over the figures for 2004.

The user-base is roughly equal between North America (32 per cent), Europe (30 per cent) and Asia with 29 per cent of the total number of visitors. Top locations include the USA, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Germany, France, India, Australia, Hong Kong, Ireland and Canada, in that order. The most frequent referring search engine is Google where UAE Interact is usually listed as the number one website on the UAE. The site contains a substantial database of information that can be searched in a variety of ways. Major sections are as follows: News; Government; Travel Centre; Map Room; Arts Centre; Cultural Centre; The Past; Natural UAE; Educational Centre; Recreational Centre; Shopping and Books. Each of these sections offers comprehensive information sources. The news section, for example, provides a searchable database of over 20,000 news stories, together with links to breaking news and information on current and forthcoming events and government websites. The website also presents an art gallery featuring works by UAE artists, a virtual museum, a travel centre packed with information for people visiting the UAE, a fully searchable database on UAE hotels, and a shopping centre with information on what to buy and where to buy it. An online bookshop featuring titles on the UAE that can be purchased via a secure server is another advantage of the website. Past Yearbooks are accessible online. An e-book section is also available, with free access to full texts from major publications on the UAE. The virtual museum displays the UAE's finest artefacts in full 360 degree images that can be revolved on screen with the stroke of a mouse.

2006 UAE DVD

In late 2005, the Ministry of Information and Culture released an innovative DVD containing a large volume of information on the UAE in interactive format, including the entire 2006 UAE *Yearbook* in English, French and Arabic, and a

number of films on the country. The DVD is distributed by the Ministry of Information and Culture as part of its international information service. The DVD format has proved to be exceptionally popular among users and the Ministry has plans to extend use of this platform in future projects.

CULTURE AND HERITAGE

Culture and heritage are crucially important aspects on the UAE Government's list of development priorities. Since it is a relatively young country with a growing youthful population, its older generation is deeply concerned that the strengths of character and identity that were nurtured by the lifestyle, customs and traditions of the past could be lost as a result of a new affluence and the effects of globalisation. There is good cause for this concern, especially with the pervading influence of satellite television and the Internet, but there is also considerable cause for optimism: the context may have altered but core values have been preserved. As a visit to a local school or activity group is likely to confirm, cultural ethnicity is alive and well in terms of Emirati music, dance, poetry, story-telling, art and sports such as falconry, camel-racing, and sailing.

Part of the process has involved making sure that physical evidence of the UAE's rich heritage is not lost. Preservation of many of its unique archaeological and architectural sites and its manuscripts has been given top priority. Literature and customs are widely studied in schools, while museum displays, heritage villages and the rebuilding of vanished monuments (based on photographs, local memory and documentary evidence) have helped to create a context and feel for this cultural legacy.

More contemporary activities, such as theatre and film, also play important roles in nurturing the cultural side of Emirati society, feeding the soul and enhancing that widespread spirit of well-being that both Emiratis and expatriates enjoy in the UAE.

Playing a central role in guarding the nation's heritage and helping to stimulate cultural awareness are many cultural organisations. Prominent among these are the Emirates Foundation, the new Culture and Heritage Authority and the Emirates Heritage Club in Abu Dhabi, The Zayed Centre for Heritage and History (a subsidiary of the Emirates Heritage Club) in Al Ain, the Dubai Cultural Council, the Cultural and Scientific Forum in Dubai, the Department of Culture and Information in Sharjah, the Fujairah Cultural Organisation, the Studies and Archives Centre in Ra's al-Khaimah and the Juma Al Majid Centre for Culture and Heritage, also in Dubai. The new Culture and Heritage Authority was established in Abu Dhabi in October 2005, to oversee all aspects related to

culture and archaeology within the emirate. Other institutions of importance include the National Heritage Revival Organisation and the Marriage Fund.

EMIRATES FOUNDATION

The Board of Directors of the newly-formed Emirates Foundation was appointed in July 2005. The Foundation is chaired by Minister of Presidential Affairs Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, with the Minister of Culture and Information, Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, as deputy chairman. The foundation, whose mission is to establish a long-term, public-private partnership for the development and support of community-based initiatives, will be active in a number of core areas of interest, including education, research and development, society and culture, humanitarian development and the environment. Initiatives undertaken in these fields will be fostered, supported and maintained through the management and disbursement of an endowment fund. In the area of society and culture, the foundation will support and promote social and cultural hubs in history and heritage, arts, sports, and community services. The enhanced public-private partnership that Emirates Foundation will create is likely to have long term benefits for the nation by developing and supporting beneficial community-based initiatives.

CULTURAL FOUNDATION

Situated in the centre of Abu Dhabi, the Cultural Foundation, now part of the new Culture and Heritage Authority, is at the heart of the capital's cultural life. Surrounded by gardens and with an open courtyard with fountains, the main building is a dramatic white structure of arches and colonnades, within which are lecture halls, libraries and meeting rooms, as well as ample space on its three floors for displays and exhibitions.

Perhaps the most important part of the Cultural Foundation is the National Library, which has well over a million books, most in Arabic, although there are also collections in a variety of foreign languages. Most of these are available for consultation by the public, once a simple registration process has taken place, although some of the rarer items, including a fine collection of Qur'ans, can only be examined with special permission.

A special children's area is particularly popular, while there are a number of special events arranged for children, especially during the school holidays. An open area occupies much of the ground floor, this being used on a regular basis for exhibitions, which include displays of old photographs of the Emirates, paintings, handicrafts, archaeological artefacts and a wide range of other items. There are also rooms on the first floor suitable for smaller events.

Along the corridors are a number of small cases displaying a range of items reflecting the UAE's culture and history. These include postage stamps, coinage

used in the country before the UAE was established, silver bedouin jewellery, small carpets and rugs, highly-decorated wooden doors and other items.

The two large theatres are used for a range of cultural activities, including classical music concerts, some staged by the Abu Dhabi Music Foundation, which brings top artists and orchestras from Europe and elsewhere to Abu Dhabi, film shows, including regular film seasons from individual countries or directors, plays and meetings held by external organisations. The Emirates Natural History Group, the UAE's oldest non-governmental environmental organisation, has held its open meetings in the Cultural Foundation on a twice-monthly basis for over 15 years. Other voluntary groups also make use of the facilities, including a gardening group and chess enthusiasts, while the foundation's small and tastefully designed restaurant has become a popular meeting place.

Next to the building, an open area is used each spring for the Abu Dhabi Book Fair. Staged in a large tented compound, this brings dozens of publishers from the UAE and from the rest of the Arab world, as well as from further afield, to promote their titles at a specially-discounted rate.

EMIRATES HERITAGE CLUB

Established in 1993, Emirates Heritage Club (EHC) has as its core objective the preservation and dissemination of the country's heritage to the young generations that would otherwise be unfamiliar with the customs and traditions of their ancestors. EHC organises heritage exhibitions, oversees heritage centres and collaborates with all other UAE institutions sharing the same interests. Activities organised by EHC for all age groups not only cover traditional sports such as camel racing, boat racing and falconry and traditional skills like tent-building and coffee-making, but also contemporary sailing, equestrian, shooting and other sports. EHC is instrumental in organising competitive events in these fields, as well as youth camps on the island of Al Sammaliah, north-east of Abu Dhabi City.

Heritage research is conducted through its affiliate, the Zayed Centre for Heritage and History in Al Ain and environmental research through the Department of Environmental Research (DER) on Al Sammaliah. DER is primarily concerned with coastal biodiversity, conservation and sustainable development of coastal habitats. EHC formed the Amateur Astronomers Group (AAG) in May 1998 to spread astronomy awareness among all categories of society. Another affiliate, Emirates Sailing Academy (ESA-ESS), was set up in July 2000.

THE ZAYED CENTRE FOR HERITAGE AND HISTORY

Officially inaugurated in 1999, EHC-affiliate the Zayed Centre for Heritage and History pays special attention to the preservation, documentation and publication of the heritage of the UAE. Realising that with the passing of an elderly generation, a wealth of knowledge concerning music, culture and society will be lost, it set

out to gather up the memories of those elderly custodians of much of the country's disappearing traditions. The result of those interviews is *An Introduction to UAE Folklores*. The 343-page book in Arabic (an English version is planned) provides a detailed look into the UAE's culture, traditional life and social institutions.

The centre holds two annual conferences, one on the archaeology of the UAE and the Gulf region and the other on the history and heritage of the UAE. The centre is also carrying out several important projects, including a study of the dialects of the UAE and a separate investigation of the oral history of the country. Besides these activities, the centre is actively engaged in training nationals to acquire the necessary skills to preserve with their culture and history. Among the centre's prestigious publications is the proceedings of the first International Conference on UAE Archaeology, *Archaeology of the United Arab Emirates*, published in English in 2003 and in Arabic in 2004.

THE EMIRATES CENTRE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The ECSSR, founded in 1994, is an independent institution dedicated to the promotion of professional research and educational excellence in the UAE and the Gulf area. ECSSR serves as a focal point for scholarship on political, strategic, military, environmental, economic, and social issues pertinent to the UAE, the Gulf, and the greater Middle East through the sponsorship of research and studies conducted by scholars from around the globe. The core of its work lies in identifying and analysing issues of vital significance, predicting future trends and devising management strategies to cope with such issues. As well as maintaining and training its own staff of researchers, it hosts conferences, symposia, workshops and lecture series renowned for the eminence of the participants and the quality of their content and influence. Integral to the success of ECSSR's research programme are the annual *Trend Assessment Reports* prepared in the centre's various units which, by providing a survey of major international and domestic developments and their possible implications, become a powerful tool in the task of prioritising the goals for the following year.

The ECSSR's publishing activities have made it a major source of specialised scholarly publications in the region. As well as publishing monographs in its *International Studies Series*, it also publishes the proceedings of conferences, symposia and lectures in *Emirates Occasional Papers* (an English series) and *Strategic Studies* (an Arabic series). In addition to these publications, ECSSR translates into Arabic works of importance to the centre and its audience.

Recent publications include *With United Strength: H.H. Shaikh Zayid bin Sultan Al Nahyan; The Long Road from Taif to Jeddah: Resolution of a Saudi-Yemeni Boundary Dispute; The Gulf: Challenges of the Future; The Religious Right and US Middle East Policy; The Gulf and US National Security Strategy; Liberalism and the Undermining of Islam's Sovereignty; Peaceful Settlements of State Succession in*

International Law; The Repercussions From the Afghan and Iraq Wars for the Arab Gulf Region; Human Resource Development in a Knowledge-based Economy; Socio-political Security and Communicable Disease and Nuclear Weapons in South Asia.

DUBAI CULTURAL COUNCIL

Dubai Cultural Council (DCC) was established in February 2004 under a 20-article statute defining the new body's functions and responsibilities. The DCC coordinates with the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture for promotion of the cultural movement. Chaired by prominent UAE writer Mohammed Al Murr, the DCC members will serve three-year terms.

JUMA AL MAJID CENTRE FOR CULTURE AND HERITAGE

The National Heritage Section at the Juma Al Majid Centre for Culture and Heritage in Dubai contains a substantial collection of books in both Arabic and English about the heritage of the UAE and the Gulf region, and a wealth of historical material, including documents from the British, American, Russian and Ottoman archives relating to the Arabian Gulf, dating from the European occupation of the Eastern Coast of Arabia up to the finding of oil. It includes reports by British political agents, letters between American ambassadors in the region and the US State Department, Russian books and letters covering topics that range from piracy to politics to oil. In addition, there are copies of the political, economic and military treaties that were signed between the countries in the past.

The centre's Al Qusais workshop is greatly respected for its expertise in manuscript maintenance, treatment and restoration – it has perfected the production of a particular paper for use in such work – and it is working with the Library of Alexandria to provide special equipment, restoration paper and technical training for the refurbishment of ancient manuscripts and books. A new agreement in 2005 involves provision of a complete unit for the restoration and maintenance of documents and manuscripts to the Royal Authentication Centre of Jordan. Bilateral assistance and cooperation covered the field of digital archiving of books and listing of assets with the information electronically accessible to both parties.

SHEIKH MOHAMMED CENTRE FOR CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

The Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding in Dubai aims to be a catalyst for social cohesion through communication and cultural exchange. Interactive programmes introduce expatriates to local culture, traditions and lifestyles. One of its most attractive amenities is the 'Home Visit Programme' through which expatriates are invited to share a meal with a UAE national family. A TV talkshow, 'Open Doors, Open Minds', and numerous cultural events, lectures and seminars form the nucleus of the centre's work.

SULTAN AL OWAIS CULTURAL FOUNDATION

Dubai gained a major new cultural landmark in 2003 with the opening of the purpose-built premises of the Sultan Al Owais Cultural Foundation. The ten-storey building is the home of the most valuable cultural prize in the Arab world, the 'Sultan Al Owais Awards', created in 1988 in memory of a prominent local poet and businessman.

The US\$600,000 prize money was shared at the 2004 awards by six leading Arab figures, Hasab Al Sheikh Jaafar, from Iraq, playwright and author Mohammed Khudeir, also from Iraq, Mustapha Abdo Nasif from Egypt, for his literary and critical studies, Mahmoud Ameen Al Alim, also from Egypt, for humanitarian studies, and Ali Ahmed Saeed from Syria and Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, for cultural and scientific achievement.

RESTORED FORTS AND OTHER BUILDINGS

Qasr al-Hosn, (often known as 'the Old Fort' or 'the White Fort.') was founded by Sheikh Shakhbut bin Dhiyab, ruler of Abu Dhabi, in 1795 and is the oldest building on Abu Dhabi Island, although it has been much enlarged over the last couple of centuries. Residence of the rulers of Abu Dhabi until the 1960s, it served for many years as the home of the Government's Centre for Documentation and Research. Surrounded by palm trees, and with old cannon outside its well-fortified door, the Qasr al-Hosn is now scheduled to become a national museum.

Al Ain has more than its complement of impressive forts and heritage structures, including the Eastern Fort, located within the compound of Al Ain Museum; Murabba Fort, which used to be the police headquarters and a prison; and Jahili Fort, the latter a large restored fort in the city centre that has a distinctive corner turret with four levels or terraces. Going back much further in time is a superb renovation of an important Umm al-Nar tomb from the third millennium BC at Hili Archaeological Park in Al Ain.

An agreement between UNESCO and Al Ain Economic Development and Tourism Promotion Authority, now part of Abu Dhabi Tourism Authority, has initiated a cooperative effort to protect the cultural and historical wealth of the city. Together, they will form a strategic plan that will incorporate all aspects of Al Ain's rich heritage, both man-made and natural, with a view to sustainable development of its assets in harmony with the growing value of cultural tourism.

The restored Al Fahidi Fort in Dubai was originally the ruler's residence; it subsequently became an arsenal, then a jail, and is now a thriving interactive museum with a wide range of archaeological and ethnographic exhibits. The underground section of the museum houses lifelike exhibits of an ancient souq, a Qur'an school, typical Arabic households and an oasis. There is also a display of the desert by night with interesting local wildlife.

One of Dubai's more recent heritage renovations is now the editorial office of an Arabic calligraphy magazine, *Huroof Arabiya*, published by the Culture and Science Association. The building which was constructed in four stages, from 1921 to the late 1960s, is graced with one of the heritage symbols of the UAE, a windtower. Another restored building in the Al Bastakiya heritage district, this time dating from 1939 and adorned with not one but two windtowers, has been handed over to the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) to be used as the UAE Project Office. The damaged windtower of a third building was reconstructed by the Historic Buildings Section of Dubai Municipality with the help of historic documents and pictures. This house is now the home of the Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding.

These renovations are part of Dubai's plan to restore all remaining historic buildings in the Al Bastakiya area to their former glory. Between 1991 and 2008, the authorities hope to have either renovated or reconstructed a total of 230 structures in Dubai Emirate. The Shindagha Heritage Area alone contains around 65 heritage sites. Al Bastakiya Quarter has around 55 heritage sites, about half of which were restored by 2005. Amongst these buildings are Sheikh Saeed house – an elegant late nineteenth century, two-storey building of Arabic design, complete with four windtowers, housing a unique collection of rare coins, photographs, stamps and documents; Bait Al Wakeel – Dubai's first office building dating back to 1934 and now housing a museum devoted to Dubai's fishing and maritime traditions; Al Ahmadiya School, Dubai's first regular school, established in 1912 and now a museum of education.

Sharjah's renovation and restoration of architecturally-acclaimed heritage buildings and an old souq in the Sharjah Arts Area and Sharjah Heritage Area have earned it international acclaim. Many of these fine buildings house art, Islamic and ethnographic museums, including the country's first national art gallery, and one is also home to The Emirates' Fine Arts Society. Nearby is Sharjah Fort or Al Husn. Built by Sheikh Sultan bin Saqr Al Qasimi in 1820, this carefully-renovated fort was the residence of the ruling family for many years. It was torn down in 1969, but the present ruler, himself a prominent local historian, has restored it with the help of old photographs and documents, his own notes and the assistance of elderly residents. It now houses a museum with exhibits on pearl fishing, education, and trade, as well as jewellery, weapons and old photographs. Al Mahatah Fort at the old airport site right in the centre of Sharjah houses aviation memorabilia relating to the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s.

The eighteenth century fort in Ajman switched in 1970 from being the Ruler's palace and office to housing the local police force. In 1981, it changed function once again to become a museum housing an interesting collection of archaeological artefacts, manuscripts, old weapons and reconstructions of traditional life. Another



fort which reinvented itself as a police headquarters was that of Umm al-Qaiwain. Subsequently restored as a museum, its upper floor includes a high-ceilinged *majlis* (a meeting room and a place to receive guests) elegantly decorated with carved wooden balconies.

Situated behind the Police Headquarters on Al Hosn Road in the old town, the beautifully-renovated Ra's al-Khaimah Fort, residence of the ruling family until the early 1960s, houses an intriguing collection of archaeological and ethnological artefacts, although plans are being drawn up for the construction of a purpose-built museum. An important series of surveys has been undertaken in Ra's al-Khaimah Emirate over the years, documenting mountain villages, towers, mosques, the old houses of the palm gardens of Al Nakheel and Shamal, and now the traditional buildings of Ra's al-Khaimah City. Archaeologists from the Ra's al-Khaimah National Museum are researching and cataloguing all traditional structures and the more important of them are being earmarked for restoration. Already, the museum has begun restoration of the old souq.

The Emirate of Fujairah also has its fair share of historical buildings, particularly impressive forts and other defensive structures on the coast and traditional routes through the major wadis. Work by the Department of Archaeology and Heritage on restoration of Fujairah Castle, begun in the late 1990s, was completed in 2000, while many of the adjacent buildings, including walled courtyard-houses once occupied by members of the ruling family, have also been restored. The whole area is to be surrounded by a new wall, within which a number of new buildings will be constructed to act as a focus for the heritage of Fujairah. These new buildings are expected to include a three-storey museum, an amphitheatre, a souq, a mosque, a restaurant and a children's play area.

The department also completed during 2004 the renovation of another major site at Awhala in southern Fujairah, where a Late Islamic fort sits on top of the foundations of a much larger Iron Age fortress. In 2005, work also began on restoration of the Late Islamic palace and adjacent buildings in Wadi Hayl, around 13 kilometres west of Fujairah City. Once the residence of a junior branch of the ruling family, this is one of the best-preserved sites of its type in the whole of the UAE.

HERITAGE VILLAGES

The renovated forts and buildings described above give a fascinating glimpse into the lifestyle of the UAE's urban inhabitants before the discovery of oil. However, to fully experience the traditions of urban and rural UAE, including its less permanent settlements, it is necessary to visit one of the many excellent 'heritage villages' that have been set up throughout the country. Stepping inside the perimeter of these establishments is like stepping back in time when the

pace of life was much slower and the tasks of the day centred around artisanal fishing, animal husbandry and date cultivation. These villages are just as instructive for UAE residents as they are for tourists.

Emirates Heritage Village is situated on a 1600-square-metre site with a magnificent view of Abu Dhabi Corniche. It aims to provide visitors with a glimpse into traditional life in Abu Dhabi before the discovery of oil. Traditional buildings within the complex house spice, weaving and pottery shops, dagger-making and glassblowing workshops and an agricultural section. In addition to bedouin tents, there are reconstructions of palm ('*arish*) and other houses, old fishing villages and traditional souqs. With its spectacular location along the seafront, maritime traditions are a special feature.

Of interest also is the reconstructed bedouin encampment behind Abu Dhabi International Exhibition Centre. Here one can also view a more elaborate mudbrick house and a mosque, shop in a traditional souq, take a camel ride and watch a demonstration of the age-old sport of falconry. Traditional handicrafts from woven fabrics and perfumed oils to basketry and pottery are kept alive at Abu Dhabi's Women's Handicraft Centre next to the Royal Stables and at the Women's Craft Centre on Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum Street.

In Dubai the Heritage and Diving Village, next to Sheikh Saeed Al Maktoum's House in Al Shindagha, celebrates the many intrepid divers that harvested pearls from the country's lucrative offshore pearl banks. Hatta, the mountain enclave belonging to Dubai, also has a relatively new heritage village near to the town's nineteenth century fort and watchtower.

Near Fujairah Fort, Fujairah's Heritage Village has a good selection of traditional houses ('*arish*) and fishing boats (*shashah*) made from palm fronds, providing an interesting backdrop to its living reconstruction of traditional life on the East Coast.

MUSEUMS

In addition to the large number of forts and heritage buildings that house museums, the UAE has a rich selection of purpose-built, modern museum buildings dedicated to specific subject areas, such as the discovery of petroleum, archaeology, natural history, science, popular medicine, astronomy, numismatics, philately, Islam, traditional jewellery, policing and aviation.

The Petroleum Exhibition in Abu Dhabi formerly displayed old photographs, film and interactive features depicting the emirate's oil-fuelled transformation from oasis life to modern, cosmopolitan city. This is currently closed while plans for a completely new exhibition in a purpose-built museum are being drawn up by companies within the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) Group, to take account of recent changes in the local oil and gas industry, including technological innovations.

Al Ain Museum, run by Abu Dhabi's new Culture and Heritage Authority, has an extensive archaeological and ethnographical collection, including some spectacular second millennium gold pendants and an important coin collection. Finds from excavations at Umm al-Nar and Qattarah are displayed and the museum also houses a reconstruction of the Great Hili Tomb with its distinctive rock engravings. Reconstructions of a traditional *majlis* and other aspects of life in the pre-oil era are also very interesting. A collection of gifts received by the former President from visiting statesmen and royalty is also on display.

Sharjah is well known for its museums, heritage and environment centres, which include a number of world-class displays, not only of local interest but also dealing more broadly with the cultures and science of the Islamic world. The emirate's Ruler, HH Dr Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, has devoted much attention to the promotion of this aspect of Sharjah, which has become, as a result, the unofficial cultural capital of the country.

Located in Majaz near Sharjah Bridge in the centre of Sharjah, the Planetarium specialises in astronomy and celestial navigation. Sharjah Police Museum at the Police Headquarters in the northern suburb of Maysaloun has a good collection of armaments, riot and combat gear and models of old walls and forts.

Sited near the very distinctive Cultural Roundabout in the northern suburbs, the Archaeological Museum is a modern, lively interactive museum tracing the history of Sharjah from ancient times. A gold halter found with a ritually-slaughtered horse in a grave near Mleiha is particularly beautiful. The museum's library houses a range of archaeological and historical books, magazines, periodicals and specialised reports.

Situated in Halwan near Cultural Square, the Science Museum has 50 excellent interactive exhibits covering physics, chemistry, biology and astronomy, whilst the Discovery Centre on the Sharjah–Dhaid highway opposite the airport, the first interactive 'hands-on' children's museum in the UAE, is a very popular venue.

The grounds of Sharjah Desert Park, at Junction 8 on the Sharjah–Dhaid highway, contain the Natural History Museum, a Children's Farm, the Arabian Wildlife Centre and the Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife. The Natural History Museum opened in 1995 and was immediately very popular because of its high-tech exhibits. Lively with light and sound effects as well as interactive video displays, the exhibits deal with local habitats, plant and animal life, geology and marine life. Outside are wildflower gardens as well as formal gardens. The Arabian Wildlife Centre is an impressive modern zoo that displays local wildlife in replicas of their natural habitats. Most of the displays can be viewed from inside an enormous climate-controlled building. Exhibits include a reptile house, a huge aviary with free-flying birds as well as rock-hopping hyrax, a night house with many desert mammals, an 'Ibex Mountain' overlooked by the restaurant, and a corridor with huge windows looking out onto enclosures for hamadryas baboons and large predators such as wolves, cheetahs and the Arabian leopard.

The Breeding Centre is focusing on the breeding of endangered Arabian species with the hope of re-introducing some of the rarer species into the wild. This is where for the first time in the UAE captive breeding of the Arabian leopard was achieved. For obvious reasons, this particular centre is not open to the public.

Over on the East Coast, at Kalba, an enclave of Sharjah, the former house of the local ruling family has been carefully restored, as has a rectangular Islamic fort nearby, while work is also under way on the restoration of a larger fortress at Khor Kalba which may rest on the site of a fort built by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century AD.

THEATRE

'Now more than ever, people should focus on art forms such as theatre . . . it is a tough time for all artists including actors, writers, novelists, performers and all others who work in art. But we have to save our culture, stay in touch with our roots. It is important to do so for our country and its future, for if we leave our culture behind, we will end up following something that is not ours.'

Emirati society has a natural affiliation with the theatrical arts. Poetry, storytelling and dance are all part of the national character. It is only the context that has changed – modern living, removed from the informality of gatherings in *majalis* or around desert campfires, has necessitated up-to-date facilities where the arts can be celebrated and presented to maximum effect and in appealing comfort for the audience. Thanks to a number of progressive moves by government, the dramatic arts have found new space, walls, lights, sound systems and audiences.

Despite its long traditional affiliations, modern Arabic theatre in the UAE is a new phenomenon, tracing its roots to 1953 when scouting was introduced and plays were written for performing around scout campfires. One of the early participants was HH Dr Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah, who used to write scripts – one of his well-known plays is *Jaber Al Atharat*, which has its basis in Islamic history.

The founding fathers of the UAE, the late Sheikh Zayed and Sheikh Rashid, were both keen on theatre, understanding the role it could play in preserving culture and traditions. Early difficulties that were based on cultural norms, such as a general reluctance for women to appear on stage, have been largely replaced by the more open society of today, but the challenge to attract audiences is much greater than in the past, thanks to television and other forms of entertainment. Nevertheless, an interest in drama is still strong and drama studies have been introduced into some schools.

Following many years of steady development, the UAE now has award-winning playwrights, directors and actors and a healthy theatrical scene. In recent times the content of plays has undergone further change so that political issues with

a more regional and global thrust, the increasing lack of disregard for elders, environment problems and loss of cohesiveness in the family structure are to the fore. Such key concerns of a changing society can be explored through drama in a non-threatening manner that challenges people to consider them more deeply.

The UAE Theatrical Association is a non-profit organisation comprising top members of the theatre community. The association has developed and established awards that recognise and promote local talent over the years. National directors, actors and playwrights regularly win awards in various GCC and Arab festivals. The UAE itself has a serious drama season that is attracting a growing number of youngsters. Festivals held in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah and some other emirates have helped to boost interest in the theatre.

International theatre is also important in the UAE and a strong movement has been spear-headed by the Dubai Community Theatre and Art Centre, which has raised more than Dh7 million to build the Gulf's first, non-profit theatre and arts centre. The new premises on the roof of the Mall of the Emirates opened in late 2005. Accessible for all communities and cultures, it comprises a 550-seat, two-level theatre, a 150-flexible-seat studio theatre, rehearsal space for ballet, tap dancing and salsa classes, art galleries, a music school, library, café, and 16 studios and classrooms for art, sculpture, theatre, photography, creative writing, calligraphy and pottery. The centre's aim is to promote both Arabic and international art and culture in Dubai and the region. The project has received support from various artistic groups and cultural associations in Dubai, many of which organised fundraising and publicity events. Leading multinational and local corporations have also donated funds for the centre.

Donations were made through the structured Star Patron scheme, Diamond Star (Dh500,000), Gold Star (Dh100,000) and Silver Star (Dh50,000). Diamond Star patrons include Dodsai, Dubai Duty Free, Emirates, Fosroc, the Landmark Group and the National Bank of Dubai. Many individuals have also generously contributed to the centre through the Founder Patron scheme (Dh10,000), which includes the benefit of naming a seat in the theatre.

FILM

The second Dubai International Film Festival (DIFF) was held in December 2005. The event built on the success of the inaugural Dubai International Film Festival in December 2004, which included strong public participation with over 13,000 attendees, a line-up of 76 high-quality films, including features, retrospectives and shorts, and a warmly-received theme of cultural bridge-building.

The Emirates Film Competition (EFC), an annual event organised by the Abu Dhabi Cultural Foundation, showcases films made in the UAE. Its six-day programme, held in March 2005, maintained the local focus of previous years.

All the participants vying for the awards were UAE nationals. Their video entries had to feature a local theme. The competition also screened a number of Arab films, including animation presentations, experimental films and some international films that would probably not normally reach main film theatres.

As mentioned above, Dubai Studio City (DSC) should greatly impact on the local film production industry, offering a complete technical and community infrastructure for the film, TV and music production industries.

One of the international homes for film-making, Los Angeles, has chosen Dubai as its cultural sister-city. Talks have been aimed at promoting cultural exchanges and removing the stereotypical image of the Gulf.

ART

The UAE's artistic movement has been nurtured by both government and private support over the years. It is a developing movement with some very talented artists and some increasingly prestigious events. Art galleries are to be found in virtually every shopping area in the Emirates, many displaying works by national artists. The Ministry of Information and Culture has a dedicated Arts Department that focuses on promoting UAE artists and there are a number of artistic groups catering for special interests.

The Sharjah Biennial, under the theme of 'Belonging', celebrated its seventh event in 2005. Ever since its inauguration in 1993, the Biennial has attracted critics and artists from all corners of the globe and it is now regarded as one of the world's top ten biennials, the single most important artistic event in the UAE, and one of the cultural high spots in the Middle East diary. Participation by 70 artists from 36 countries in the 2005 edition is further evidence of the Biennial's maturity. It is worth mentioning that this and many other artistic and cultural initiatives in the UAE have received strong support from Dr Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Sharjah.

When the UAE's Minister of Information and Culture, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, toured the 2005 Biennial he described works on display as 'rich and bold' and commented on the distinctive character of UAE artists' work and the sense of national identity that Emirati artists have retained.

The Biennial programme also included an international symposium titled 'Bienniality', which addressed the expanding phenomenon of Biennials, together with a number of student workshops that were organised in collaboration with the American University of Sharjah and the University of Sharjah's College of Fine Arts.

Considerable focus on the arts has taken place in UAE schools. Special needs children have been particularly encouraged to develop and express their artistic talents. One such initiative in this regard was an innovative drawing competition entitled 'Peace for Children', which attracted 1500 children of various ages from

22 special needs centres in the UAE. The children expressed their feelings about war and peace in the world and a book was compiled with all the submitted drawings.

Community participation in cultural activities, in general, and art, in particular, is the aim of all government initiatives and it is fully recognised that art is not something that can be imposed from above but which grows from the ground up, providing it is well nurtured. An excellent example of a community initiative to promote the arts in the UAE is The Dubai Community Theatre and Art Centre. In addition to its theatrical elements discussed above, the centre's art galleries and 16 studios and classrooms for art, sculpture, photography, creative writing, calligraphy and pottery will make a significant contribution to the artistic life of the country. The centre's aim is to promote both Arabic and international art and culture in Dubai and the region.

Another public-spirited art project in the UAE, aimed at raising money for UAE charities, was the 'Camel Caravan' that brightened up Dubai and Abu Dhabi with colourful camels in 2004. The huge success of this project led to the organisers launching a follow-up 'happening' in 2005, this time creating a special artistic celebration of the Arabian horse. This community public-art project brought together artists, art galleries, corporate groups, community groups, government departments, school and university students, children with special needs and charitable organisations to create a string of beautifully-painted horses. The graceful fibreglass steeds appeared at roundabouts, along highways, outside malls and hotels and even at the Nad Al Sheba Club.

As happened with the camels, the equestrian artworks were auctioned to raise funds for various UAE-based children's charities and art-related initiatives. Over Dh3 million were raised, with one horse selling for as much as Dh280,000. The biggest bid went for the final horse of the night, which was named 'In Memory of Sheikh Zayed' and the design was inspired by the poetry of General Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Dubai Crown Prince and UAE Defence Minister. It was bought by the Royal Mirage hotel. A key supporter of the event was Godolphin, which sponsored 50 of the 100 horses, enabling several academic institutions and charitable organisations to be a part of this creative project. Each horse is distinct and themes varied from 'Monarch', with the wings of a Monarch butterfly, to a horse covered with currencies of the world, appropriately exhibited adjacent to Emirates Bank. Many of these equine masterpieces depict the cultures of the various artists' countries. A special website, www.arabianhorses.ae, was established to provide information on the artists, their inspiration, the sponsors, and current location of each horse.

Almost every medium is exploited in Emirati art. One that is favoured by several well-known artists is glass and an eminent proponent of this skill is Obaid Surour Al Mas, who held an exhibition of his works, entitled 'Glass Works', in Ra's al-Khaimah



during 2005. His 70 small coloured glass pieces captured the magic and mystique of the local environment.

Art has always been encouraged among female Emiratis of all ages. A strong women's art movement has become established, thanks to support of the late President Sheikh Zayed and guidance of Sheikha Fatima, Chairperson of the UAE General Women's Union. Organisations such as Abu Dhabi Ladies' Club hold competitions that promote the work of female artists. 'Innovation Evolution' was one such exhibition and competition held in 2005, which attracted more than 50 oil, pastel and acrylic paintings by 18 women members of the Hobby Corner.

Many UAE artists have had their works exhibited internationally and have gained strong reputations. One of the better known among these is Abdul Qadir Al Reis whose paintings were showcased at Al Owais Cultural Foundation in 2005. Shortly after opening the exhibition, the UAE's Minister of Information and Culture, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, praised Al Reis for his remarkable artistic achievement, describing him as a 'pride of the UAE'.

MUSIC AND DANCE

The Emirates enjoys a strong tradition of music and dance, both of which played a vital role in people's lives. Singing and dancing was, and still is, an integral part of all national celebrations. Many of the songs and dances, handed down from generation to generation, have survived to the present time. Young girls would dance by swinging their long black hair and swaying their bodies in time to the strong beat of the music. Men would re-enact battles fought or successful hunting expeditions, often symbolically using sticks, swords or rifles.

The UAE maintains these traditions, firstly by teaching pupils, from primary level upwards, the traditional songs and dances that form part of national culture and, secondly, by supporting song and dance groups throughout the country. These groups are frequently called on to perform at national celebrations and they also attend overseas events. Considerable effort is made to maintain the purity and originality of the songs and dances.

An interest in music is, however, by no means confined to these desert roots. Almost every musical genre is catered for in the Emirates and festivals cover a full spectrum from traditional to classical music, and from jazz to a wide range of modern popular music. A key event on the classical music lover's calendar is Al Ain Classical Music Festival. The 2005 event, fifth in the series, coincided with the tenth anniversary of the Abu Dhabi Concert Committee (ADCC), the organisers of the event. This committee was established by an enthusiastic group of classical music lovers under the patronage of Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, UAE Minister of Information and Culture. It organises monthly classical music concerts in the city, the Al Ain music festival being the biggest and most prestigious in their

calendar. The 2005 festival was a three-day package of classical music concerts and historical site tours held in early March 2005 at the Al Ain Fort and the ballroom of the InterContinental Resort Al Ain. The star performers were the famed Sibelius Ensemble from Finland, which staged four concerts bringing alive the works of Chopin, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Sibelius and other famous composers.

The Al Ain festival was followed by the Second Dubai International Music Festival, which took place at the American University and was sponsored by Dubai Cultural Council and Dubai Media City. The Emirates Symphony Orchestra for Children played at the Sultan bin Ali Al Owais Cultural Hall and at the Abu Dhabi Cultural Foundation as part of the event.

The third Philips Dubai International Jazz Festival, 2005, in keeping with its theme of 'much more than jazz', featured diverse music genres such as blues, funk, swing, acid, rock, contemporary, modern, and fusion. More than 70 musicians from around the world performed. The expanded festival venue covered the entire Dubai Media City Lake Park.

POETRY

Since the days of widespread illiteracy, people have kept alive the memory of legends, stories and the much-loved local poetry (*nabati* poetry), because the spoken word has always been the superior art form of the tribal people who lacked the raw materials used elsewhere for more tangible forms of artistic expression.

Emotional events triggered Emiratis to express their feelings through poetry. Inspirational figures of the past are often celebrated in verse and among the most respected are poets themselves. Emirates Post decided to celebrate one of the country's most famous poets, Al Majedi bin Dhaher, by issuing a set of commemorative stamps. Born in the first half of the seventeenth century, Bin Dhaher is considered one of the foremost poets of his time. The stamps, which carry some of the lines of Bin Dhaher's poetry, known for their linguistic excellence, structure and lyrical depth, are available at all UAE post offices.

The late Sheikh Zayed, himself a great lover of poetry, has been celebrated in hundreds of poems since his death. The Abu Dhabi Cultural Foundation recently issued an audiocassette containing a collection of 30 poems on the former UAE president. This unique compilation, entitled 'A Eulogy to the Last Sage', contains works by local, Gulf and Arab poets, including pieces by General Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Dubai Crown Prince and UAE Defence Minister, Sheikh Abdullah bin Ahmed Al Thani, Mohammed bin Ahmed Khalifa Al Suweidi, and a galaxy of prominent poets. The poems, on two cassettes, are narrated by UAE poet Salim Al Zumar and pay tribute to Sheikh Zayed, his humanitarian works, his visionary leadership, his fatherhood, generosity and other aspects of his character and achievements.