

# Expert calls for more investment in education

ARAB WORLD SHOULD CONCENTRATE ON CULTURE OF QUALITY ASSURANCE: DEMOCRACY FORUM TOLD

**DOHA** • The Arab world is in need of strategic plan that could address education development and to concentrate on a culture of quality assurance, said Dr Joseph Jabbara, President, American University of Beirut, Lebanon.

"We are witnessing a quantitative increase in education institutions in the Arab world rather than qualitative increase. We don't have a culture of quality assurance that must govern the educational process. And the result of that we lack in technology education and if we do have technology available to us we do not have the expertise to adapt it to our schools and universities. Moreover, we don't have effective research centers," he said.

He was presenting a paper titled "Building Arab Capacity Through Education", at the ongoing 7th Doha

Forum on Democracy. The session was moderated by Dr. Mohammad Abu Hamour, former Minister of Finance and Chairman of Executive Authority for Privatisation in Jordan.

Jabbara said that it was important for the region to invest in education, because graduates will participate in economic growth and in turn will provide for the research centres and contribute in findings and in creating knowledge, especially in the scientific field.

In the context of globalisation which is so intense because fueled by unprecedented technological advances, accumulation of wealth and by a desire to accumulate more and more wealth, non-market spheres such as health and education have become open for commercial activities, he said.

He added that as a result the students have become consumers; customers rather than participants in the process of education.

Sheikha Hanadi bint Nasser bin Khalid Al Thani, Vice-Chairperson and Managing Director of Amwal, who addressed the session devoted to harnessing the potential of Gulf population noted that good governance is largely a matter of tapping into the potential of the country's population.

"We have hidden reserves of talent in the region, a centre of spirit of creativity and resourcefulness. Our leaders are charged with creating an environment in which these reserves of human energies can be harnessed," she said.

Sheikha Hanadi also spoke of the changes that took place in region

since the discovery of oil and its economy later becoming increasingly dependent on oil revenues subject to fluctuations in the market.

She said that when it comes to finding ways out of oil dependency and to diversify the economy and integrate into the global economy, the region needs to foster technological development and open its borders to trade and investments, develop our human capital and encourage entrepreneurship, foster a broad consumer base and boost the level of productivity as fast as possible.

Dr Fadhil Mahdi, ESCWA, Lebanon who presented a paper at the session on the impact of globalisation in Developing Countries noted that there is a general consensus that opening up markets for developing countries exports has been good for

development and growth in those economies.

However, he said, there is an ongoing debate on whether the sudden liberalisation of developing countries' imports promote growth or causes recession and sometimes even depressions. In the wake of developing countries in particular, this leads to severe competition, to decline of manufacturing outputs and to unemployment and poverty generally.

In the question and answer session a participant from the University of Washington remarked that in terms of diversification, job creation and development it is not any more correct to assume that only manufacturing is the key and that there many other sectors that can meet those needs.

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## Mideast most violent region: UAE scholar

**DOHA** • The Middle East is the most violent region in the world and hosts the maximum number of tyrants, a speaker from the UAE told a conference on democracy, development and free trade here yesterday.

Citing figures, Dr Abdul Khalik Abdullah, from the University of UAE, Al Ain, said that while the region accounts for only four cent of the world population, its share in violence is 36 per cent of the world's total.

These are 2006 figures, Abdullah said. "We have a surplus of violence. People are being killed every day in countries like Palestine, Somalia and Iraq... This is one of the biggest challenges the region faces in introducing social and political reforms."

Abdullah said he saw violence continuing at least over the next five years, if not more, and political reforms will be hard to achieve over the coming 10 years.

There are 22 Arab countries and none of them is ranked as a free country. Some 300 million Arabs are living in a big prison, he said. The region is full of tyrants and notorious for large-scale violation of human rights.

The irony is that the future of the re-

gion is decided not by its people but outsiders, said the professor.

It is Israel's ploy to divide a wedge between Iran and the Arabs on the nuclear issue, warned another speaker. "Israel is trying to suggest that Iran is a threat to Arabs. They are trying to dodge us," said Dr Clovis Maksoud, Director, Centre for Global South American University, Washington.

Yet another speaker describing how oil had become a strategic product over the years said what explains the interest of most advanced and emerging economies of the world in this region is that they are oil and gas importers.

The outside interest in the Middle East is expected to grow with the passage of time, said Ghassan Salameh, Lebanon's former culture minister. Among the industrialised countries, Russia remains the only oil and gas exporter, he added.

Dr Ali Fakhroo, former education minister of Bahrain, cited history, heritage, social and tribal division in the Arab world as factors that were hindering the onset of democracy.

Colonialism, Zionism and the com-



Panelists at the discussion on political reform at the Forum on Democracy, Development and Free Trade here yesterday.

ing in of international oil companies have aggravated the problems in the region, he said.

He said economic benefits depended largely on people's loyalty to the powers that be in an Arab state. The region has no future without democracy, cautioned Fakhroo.

The moderator of the panel discus-

sion on 'Political reform: National Programmes and External Projects' was Professor Gerd Nonyman, from Lancaster University in the UK. He has worked on reforms across the world with specific reference to the Gulf.

A highlight was that during the question and answer session, a for-

mer federal minister from Pakistan explained how the region came to be historically dominated by ultra-conservationist rulers and not popular leaders like Gamal Abdul Nasser. This helped breed religious fundamentalism, said Sartaj Aziz.

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