

Editorial

Remember Peter Sellers' most inspiring movie 'Being there'. The President of the United States of America experiences very hard economic times. In distress he calls on an old friend who introduces him to a remarkable character, a certain Mr. Gardener. Unknown, quiet, kind and helpful Mr. Gardener hears of the President's predicament. "You know about the seasons. In Summer, everything is in bloom. In Autumn there is harvest. But in order for growth to recover, it must be Winter. Everything seems to die. But in Spring everything starts to grow again."

Indeed the world requires Winter. And rebalancing. Clearly the world before one season is not the same as after the other. But the depth and intensity of change differ according to exposure.

Countries with internal stability and indigenous economic strength appear to withstand the current global recession better. China, saving when others were spending, has started an energy focused shopping spree. Indonesia, criticised for its lack of globalisation now reaps the fruit of continued indigenous growth. Oman, working at its own indigenous strength through major infrastructural projects and new knowledge and educational centres, appears to withstand the economic Winter well.

Throughout the history of His Majesty's rule since the early seventies Oman has invited and introduced the best of all worlds into its own unique culture. While maintaining its internal balance and historic dignity it partnered with Danish shipping company Maersk to build one of the largest global hubs in Salalah in the South. Together with Port of Rotterdam up north Port of Sohar provides undisturbed access to the Gulf reaping in billions of investment. Belgian dredgers and Dutch engineers provide essential services to a Korean-Omani Joint Venture to develop a major ship repair port at Duqm. A new Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Singapore caused a trade increase of 127 percent. A similar impact is expected of an FTA with the US. Oman is at the helm of efforts to complete FTAs between the GCC and India and other Asian nations. Investment protection agreements with many countries, and since Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht's visit to Muscat also with Belgium, stimulate a steady flow of inward investment.

Oman's Minister of National Economy H.E. Ahmed Macki last month announced the Omani answer to the global crisis. Oman will have an 11 percent increase over last year's budget in 2009. This will stimulate further growth while signalling confidence to foreign investors. It is an added bonus that Shell and other companies could report

new oil and gas findings further delaying the moment that energy is reduced to a minor contributor to Oman's economy.

This is the country that received HRH Crown Prince Willem-Alexander and Princess Máxima late January 2009 with a considerable industry delegation. The visit was a huge success for both parties. His Excellency Maqbool bin Ali Sultan, Minister of Commerce and Industry, who accompanied the Royal Couple during their stay and who is the initiator of Port of Sohar including the strategic cooperation with Port of Rotterdam, was both delighted and excited over the Royal visit. As the power house of the Omani economy H.E. Maqbool sees many further opportunities to strengthen bilateral trade and mutual investment. Of course the energy sector continues to provide opportunities. The Dutch Government desires to create a so-called gas rotunda in Rotterdam. Recent scares over Europe's energy security following failed Russian-Ukrainian gas delivery and transit arrangements focused at Europe's requirement to secure both additional gas and entry points. Oman and other GCC States are taking an active interest in this development.

Next to energy the water sector is of crucial importance. Dutch Foreign Trade Minister Frank Heemskerk eloquently introduced the ancient yet high-tech Dutch water technology that can bring additional life to both human and agricultural development. Desalination, re-use of wastewater, storage, flooding protection are examples of potential areas for large-scale and intensive cooperation. Netherlands Water Partnership Chairman Jeroen van der Sommen spoke with H.E. Maqbool and H.E. Heemskerk. The three agreed that Dutch industries can immediately assist with optimised water management in the Port of Sohar. A potential Omani-Dutch pilot project may benefit not only Sohar but also other communities that engage in industrial development near residential areas.

As in every rapidly developing society IT facilities including education and training are required. This also applies to scores of vocational education serving the expanding water and marine oriented industries. Newly appointed Sultan Qaboos Academic Chair for Quantitative Water Management in Semi Arid Regions holder Prof. Dr. Ruud Schotting is set to play a vital role in this connect. His lecture at the Dutch water seminar in Muscat and his subsequent visit to Sultan Qaboos University demonstrated substantial potential both for educational and practical cooperation. Indeed that is what this Chair is about. Dr. Schotting's newly appointed colleague Prof. Dr. Maurits Berger who will teach Oriental Studies at the Sultan of Oman Academic Chair at Leiden University, completes a unique triangular relationship between Sultan Qaboos University in Muscat, Roosevelt Academy of Utrecht University in Middelburg and Leiden University.

The past and future of these centres of learning are now intertwined and so are those of the new International Maritime College Oman and the Dutch Shipping and Transport College in Rotterdam. This approach ensures that Omani and Dutch generations to come will find each other even easier.

HRH Prince Willem-Alexander and HRH Princess Máxima witnessed all of these elements and developments personally and they expressed their unequivocal appreciation for the work that His Majesty the Sultan and his people have accomplished in such a short period. The State Dinner hosted by His Majesty for the Royal Couple entirely reflected this deep and mutual respect. That evening, Omani networks highlighted two historic events: the first ever contact between the Omani Sovereign and the Dutch Heir Apparent at the one hand and the historic victory of the Omani national football team over Saudi Arabia in the Gulf Cup Final at the other hand. The Princess, dressed in Omani green, clearly enjoyed the occasion and television images showed a warm, welcoming and most interested Sultan speaking with both parts of the Royal Couple. Before the dinner, the Dutch Crown Prince had expressed a mild form of envy of an Omani place in any football cup final ("It is so long ago for us..."). No doubt the State Dinner conversation must have included football and whenever such issues are addressed it obviously leads to the type of personal exchanges that one would hope for but usually does not get between current and future leaders of nations.

The newly appointed Dutch Ambassador to Muscat, H.E. Stefan van Wersch, rightly marvelled over the success of the visit. In the first few months of his professional work in Muscat his address book is among the most complete that one can have in any country.

So the leaders of the Omani and Dutch nations have spoken. They wish to have ever broader and deeper relations in any aspect and element of the bilateral relationship. So it is up to industry, tourists, scientists and diplomats to follow through. We hope that this historic issue of EurOman Magazine will help do just that.

*Rio D. Praaning Prawira Adiningrat
February 2009*



Foundation News

On 2nd March 2009 Prof. Dr. Ruud Schotting, appointed as 'Extraordinary Professor of the Sultan Qaboos Academic Chair for Water Management in Semi-Arid Regions' at the Roosevelt Academy of Utrecht University in August 2007, is delivering his Inaugural Lecture in Utrecht. In the Auditorium of the University Hall Prof. Dr. Schotting shall speak about 'Water, the intangible element, a quantitative approach'.

Preceding the Inaugural Lecture, the Sultan Qaboos Academic Chair Foundation is organizing an international water seminar on 'Quantitative water management – relevant contributions to society and science'.

The seminar and Inaugural Lecture will highlight the early achievements, potential added value and remarkable diversity of the Academic Chair in contributing to national and international water management solutions. Among the topics are the aftermath of the flood disaster in the Netherlands (1953) compared to Oman's more recent flooding (2007), drawing valuable lessons for a more cooperative future. In particular, pleas will be made for closer international cooperation regarding water management and associated environmental issues. A detailed report will follow in the EurOman Magazine's next issue.

About the Sultan Qaboos Academic Chair

The Sultan Qaboos Academic Chair, sponsored by C. Steinweg Handelsveem B.V., Intercontinental Hotels Group, PA International, Shell Representative Office Oman and Schelde Naval Shipbuilding and co-sponsored by Alcan Inc., Vitol Holding B.V. and Van Oord, was established by the Foundation The Netherlands-Sultanate of Oman in commemoration of the 35th anniversary of the Sultan's reign.

The Chair focuses on research related to fundamental hydro(geo)logical problems and on specific problems of (semi-) arid regions. Typical examples are management of seawater intrusion to optimize protection of fresh water resources, industrial groundwater and surface water contamination, re-use of various sorts of water, e.g. for different environmental activities.



www.sqac.org