

Emulating Dubai

One of the aims of Jordan's ICT Forum is to provide an opportunity for ICT business leaders from all over the world to meet and openly discuss and evaluate what Jordan has achieved in ICT terms so far, to identify opportunities and to basically plan for the road ahead. To this effect, the 2004 ICT Forum was a success by all standards, but noticeably absent from this year's ICT Forum was the usual stocktaking process of the targets and recommendations set by the previous 2002 ICT Forum and an objective evaluation of what has been attained so far.

While Jordan's ICT march has so far been successful, comparisons with other players on a regional and even international scale are inevitable and the achievements of Dubai deservedly feature high in almost every formal or informal discussion of this issue. Interestingly enough, one is usually surprised by the number of misconceptions regarding Dubai's vibrant business environment. One must remember that Dubai adopted an open market economic policy and started attracting businesses long before the ICT revolution. They realized that bureaucracy and red tape cannot be reduced but need to be totally thrown out. As a result, first came the regional and international traders; technology based business simply followed through. In fact one can go as far as saying that very little technology development takes place in Dubai, but sizable technology based or technology driven business activities. Sadly, this is something that we have not been able to achieve even with the accelerated pace of economic reforms of the past five years. The basic questions still remain:

- Should we aim to transform our economic activities to emulate Dubai or Singapore?
- Can this transformation be realistically achieved?

In my opinion, the straightforward answer to both questions is a simple no. In fact, we can be neither. We can only capitalize on their successes and learn from their mistakes. We should concentrate on serious research and development as well as the patenting of new concepts, systems, software and applications. One only has to take a look at the financial consequences of the history of industrial development to realize that far more wealth was accumulated as a result of developing a good product and securing its patenting or intellectual property rights than marketing or selling the product itself. Our modern day ICT industrial revolution is no exception. Giant players like Microsoft, Oracle and many others are prime examples. Typically such players end up making more money every year than the combined income of all their international distributors and resellers.

Simply speaking, instead of targeting to become a Dubai #2 or a Singapore #2, we should strive to become a Jordan #1.