

OMAN PARTICIPATES IN THE FIRST SINO-ARAB BUSINESSMEN FORUM CONFERENCE

The Sultanate of Oman represented by Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry took part in the first Sino-Arab Businessmen Forum Conference held in the Chinese capital Beijing on 12 and 13 April 2005, with an Omani business delegation led by HE Eng. Salem bin Said al Ghattami, President of OCCI and comprising 40 members representing the OCCI Board of Directors, Omani business

The conference was opened on the 12th of April 2005 under the auspices of HE the Chairman of the National Committee for the Political Consultation Conference of the People of China, who delivered a speech on the occasion in which he spoke about the Sino-Arab relation, the globalization phenomenon and the need to focus the efforts on maintaining mutual respect, expanding cooperation, exchanging expertise and boosting international cooperation to protect the rights and interests of the developing countries.

The opening ceremony was attended by a number of Chinese and Arab personalities including the Chinese Foreign Minister, Chairman of the Chinese Council for Promotion of International Trade, the Secretary General of the Arab League, Yemen's Minister of Commerce and Industry, presidents of the chambers of commerce and industry of Egypt and Bahrain and Secretary General of the Union of Arab Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture in the Arab Countries.

HE the OCCI President also delivered a speech at one of the sessions of the conference in which he spoke about the historical and economic relations between China and Oman. He also explained the investment rules and regulations of Oman and the excellent investment climate offered by the Sultanate for foreign investors, besides the investment opportunities available in various trading, industrial and tourist sectors in the country.

HE also pointed out that the Omani businessmen and investors were looking forward to establishing business relations with their Chinese counterparts. He said OCCI was keen to develop partnership with the Chinese private sector and he hoped that such business partnership and cooperation would be established soon.

The two-day forum reviewed policies and measures related to developing economy and trade between China and the Arab world, means of boosting cooperation on the basis of mutual benefit and finding mechanisms for enhancing mutual investments between the two sides.

The conference came out with a number of recommendations for stepping up cooperation between the Arab countries and China to wider horizons, as shown below:

- To increase knowledge, boost cooperation and to find appropriate mechanisms to widen economic relations between China and the Arab countries.
- To create conducive conditions to introduce investment and business opportunities available in both sides, through exchange of information.
- To strengthen contacts and cooperation between the governments and businessmen in China and the Arab countries.
- To encourage participation in exhibitions and seminars related to business and investment held in both sides.
- To establish multiple channels for trade exchange and cooperation between the private sector companies in both sides.

On the sidelines of the forum, OCCI in cooperation with the Omani Embassy in Beijing, held a seminar on "Investment Opportunities and Cooperation between Oman and China", which was attended by the Arab ambassadors accredited to China, members of the Omani trade delegation and a large number of Chinese and Arab businessmen.

The OCCI President delivered a speech on the occasion in which he spoke in detail about the friendly relation between Oman and China since

very old time. He noted that both sides had witnessed a remarkable increase in exchange of official trade delegations during the past years, which contributed in boosting bilateral relations. He said both sides should build on the excellent relation to achieve higher goals of cooperation and trade exchanges. Explaining the various advantages offered by Oman for foreign investors, the OCCI President urged the Chinese business community to invest in Oman in a number of promising sectors.

OCCI also presented a paper in the seminar on Oman's economy which reviewed the volume of trade exchange, investment opportunities and important industrial and tourist projects in Oman. A documentary film produced by OCCI under the title of "Let Oman Be Your Destination" was screened on the occasion. The film showed Oman's major historical and tourist landmarks and Oman's achievements during the blessed renaissance, besides the profiles of a number of Oman's major economic projects.

As part of its keenness on exploiting this important Sino-Arab gathering to market the Sultanate, OCCI in cooperation with the Omani embassy in Beijing, held an 'Omani Corner' at the forum premises, to introduce Oman's development landmarks under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. It also highlighted Oman's investment climate and the incentives offered by the government to investors and industrialists, besides the laws and regulations governing business and investment in Oman. Several booklets and bulletins on Oman and its economy and environment were distributed through the 'Corner'. OCCI also held a number of direct meetings between the Omani businessmen and their Chinese counterparts to discuss ways of cooperation, as a result of which several agreements, business deals and MoUs on commercial agencies were signed between the Omani and Chinese businessmen.

The first conference of Arab and Chinese businessmen was a serious beginning of



cooperation between the governments and business communities of China and the Arab countries. It also translated the intention of both sides for bonding their mutual economic relations. This is also true to Oman, but to achieve that, more concerted action is needed which would include the following:

- Intensifying exchange of visits by trade delegations between the two sides, to identify the promising investment opportunities available in the two countries.
- Encouraging active participation in trade fairs held in Oman and China.
- Exchanging trade and industry information and lists of investment and business opportunities available and the exportable products of both countries.
- Signing economic and commercial protocols, investment encouragement and protection agreements, double taxation avoidance treaties and smooth flow of goods and services

between the two countries.

- Promoting efforts at the government level to set up a free trade zone with China. (The free trade zone agreement with the GCC countries and China is still under negotiation). Oman can benefit from its geographical location on some other matters so that the Omani private sector can exploit the promising business opportunities in China and coordinate with the Chinese businessmen directly.
- Setting up of a commercial office of Oman in china to boost trade exchange. Concerned Government officials in both countries can cooperate in technical, scientific research, energy, training, health and other sectors to benefit from the Chinese expertise.
- Coordinating between the ports authority in Oman and the Chinese shipping companies to open direct shipping lines to reduce shipping costs and to encourage direct trade exchanges between the two countries.
- Negotiating with the Chinese Government and companies to set up some of their manufacturing units in Oman to boost the development of Omani ports and re-export business.

It is worth mentioning that Sino-Arab trade relations had witnessed, during the past years, remarkable development. Statistics show that China's imports from the Arab countries doubled during 2001-2003 period as the figure rose from around US\$ 7,500 million in 2001 to around US\$ 14,640 million in 2003. On the other hand, China's exports to the Arab countries showed a significant growth during the same period as the value rose from US\$ 7,225 million in 2001 to US\$ 13,048 million in 2003, registering a growth of 80.5%.

