

The UAE and China: shaping global progress



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The UAE and China are building a deep strategic partnership, anchored in trade, investment and shared priorities. High-level diplomatic engagements and strategic agreements across diverse policy areas have driven significant progress towards common goals.

In November 2024, President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and President Xi Jinping of China exchanged congratulations to mark 40 years of diplomatic relations. Over four decades, the ties between the UAE and China have evolved into a cornerstone of both nations' global strategies. Bilateral trade reached a record \$101.8 billion in 2024, according to China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, around 800 times the volume when ties were first established in 1984. The UAE is firmly established as China's largest export market in the Middle East, and second-largest trading partner in the region, while China remains the UAE's largest trading partner – a relationship that has only strengthened since the agreement of a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2018.

Investment ties have also deepened. Over 15,000 Chinese firms now operate in the UAE, according to Ministry of Economy figures, while the recent formation of the UAE-China Investment and Economic Cooperation Working Group is designed to pave the way for new areas of cooperation. Major projects under China's Belt and Road Initiative – such as COSCO's terminal at Khalifa Port and the China-UAE Industrial Capacity Zone – position the Emirates as China's Gulf gateway, facilitating seamless logistics and industrial capacity that underpin regional supply chains and global trade routes.

A wealth of recent high-level diplomatic engagements demonstrates the growing depth and scope of UAE-China ties. In May

2024, Sheikh Mohamed paid a two-day visit to Beijing to meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping, during which wide-ranging agreements spanning areas including energy, technology and joint Belt and Road investment were announced. That was followed, in September, by Chinese Prime Minister Li Qiang's visit to Abu Dhabi, where he met with the UAE President to discuss further efforts to boost the two countries' strategic partnership and attended the China-UAE Business Forum.

In 2025, two visits to the UAE by China's Special Envoy for Middle East Affairs, Zhai Jun, have seen further advances in the relationship. During his January visit, Zhai met with key UAE ministers to discuss strengthening bilateral cooperation, while his April engagement included talks with senior officials where he underscored China's commitment to implementing previously agreed accords and accelerating cooperation in energy, infrastructure and technology. Beyond these headline exchanges, regular diplomatic delegations at all levels have maintained a robust and ongoing dialogue between the two countries.

Financial collaboration is also advancing. Abu Dhabi Global Market's roadshow in Shanghai and Hong Kong attracted more than 75 Chinese financial institutions, spotlighting efforts to deepen regulatory cooperation, develop capital market synergies and expand bilateral investment flows. The follow-up UAE-China summit, held as part of Abu Dhabi Finance Week in December, brought together policymakers and sector

Ties between the UAE and China have evolved into a cornerstone of both nations' global strategies.

experts in a show of further economic and financial cooperation. Underpinning all of this are the people-to-people connections that reinforce

diplomatic and commercial ties. "UAE-China relations are based on mutual trust, mutual respect and common interests," Sheikh Mohamed said during his 2024 visit to Beijing. With those common interests extending across strategically critical areas from energy and infrastructure to digital innovation and green technologies, the partnership is set to shape a new era of mutual development that will deepen economic integration and foster sustainable growth, exemplifying a model of international cooperation in a shifting geopolitical landscape.



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见解 (INSIGHTS)

The UAE's dynamic economy and forward-looking vision are driving a comprehensive strategic partnership with China – one characterised by alignment in key policy areas and a shared commitment to innovation, technology and sustainability. Here, leaders across education, entrepreneurship and real estate highlight the strength of bilateral ties and the factors driving the UAE's global appeal.



“We are enriching the academic experience and strengthening ties between the UAE and China.”

H.H. Sheikha Bodour bint Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, President & Chairperson, Board of Trustees, American University of Sharjah



“Considering the ties between China and the UAE, it is clear that China is a strategic partner at all levels.”

H.E. Sara Belhaif Al Nuaimi, CEO, Sharjah Entrepreneurship Center (Sheraa)



“People are drawn to the UAE because it is peaceful, safe and governed exceptionally well.”

P.N.C. Menon, Founder, Sobha Group

PRIME HEALTHCARE



“We want everyone who interacts with us to feel like they are part of a family.”

Dr. Jamil Ahmed, Founder and Managing Director, PRIME Healthcare Group

**Q: How has your vision for PRIME Healthcare evolved?**  
We have been in operation for 26 years, since 1999. From the start, our motto—and the very DNA of our organisation—has been: “Personalised care, personally.” This is far more than a tagline. It holds deep meaning for every stakeholder in our ecosystem, whether patients, employees or partners. At the heart of it, we aim to build trust. We want everyone who interacts with us to feel like they are part of a family.

**Q: How does your emphasis on personalised care shape the way the group is perceived?**  
Any relationship that is truly personalised must be long-term. We make a conscious effort to stay connected with our patients through various channels. One key channel is direct follow-up by our nursing staff. This builds continuity and trust.

**Q: How are you catering to the Chinese market in the UAE?**  
For us, the most important factor

when caring for a patient from a different culture or nationality is establishing a sense of trust. Patients can be confident that when they walk into any of our facilities, they are placing their health in safe hands. Language plays a critical role in building trust as well. That is why we have made it a priority to recruit physicians who can communicate effectively with our diverse patient base in their native language.

**Q: What is your final message to readers?**  
The healthcare sector is rapidly evolving and here in the UAE, we have benefited from tremendous opportunities that have enabled us to grow. Given the remarkable growth and innovation taking place in China, this is an ideal moment for deeper collaboration between the UAE and the Chinese diaspora.

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Why invest in the UAE



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UAE 领域投资上

Became a BRICS member Jan 2024

N°1	UAE's trading partner
40+	Free Zones
4.5% ↑	Non-oil GDP growth (2024)
14.6% ↑	Non-oil trade growth (2024)

‘Today, three quarters of our GDP is non-oil and the sector continues to grow in a strong and sustainable fashion.’

Abdulla Bin Touq Al Marri,  
Minister of Economy

The UAE has emerged as one of the Middle East’s leading investment destinations, underpinned by political and economic stability, world-class infrastructure and a diversified economy. The country’s visionary leadership has set the goal of doubling GDP to AED 3 trillion –

around \$800 billion – by 2030, driven by economic and policy reforms. “The overarching strategy is to position the future sectors and emerging industries as the key pillars of our future economy based on knowledge and innovation,” explains UAE Minister of Economy Abdulla Bin Touq Al Marri.

A well-developed ecosystem supports that goal. The UAE offers more than 40 free zones designed to streamline foreign trade and investment, alongside advanced logistics hubs and trade links that leverage the UAE’s geographic position as a gateway to Asian and African markets. Membership of the BRICS group was confirmed in January 2024, providing a platform for the UAE to further expand its international partnerships.

Key policy reforms aim to facilitate economic diversification and inward investment. That includes the granting of 100% foreign ownership, long-residency programmes to attract and retain global talent and strengthening trademark protections to encourage innovation. The results are already visible. Non-oil GDP grew 4.5% in the first nine months of 2024, outpacing overall GDP growth over the same period. “Today, three quarters of our GDP is non-oil and the sector continues to grow in a strong and sustainable fashion,” says Al Marri.

Foreign trade is on a similar trajectory. According to government figures, non-oil trade grew 14.6% to a record high of \$815 billion in 2024 – with China, the UAE’s largest trading partner, accounting for 11.2% of the total. With each emirate bringing its own signature offering, such as Dubai’s ‘City of the Future’ positioning based on sustainability and innovation, or Sharjah’s reputation as a hub for technology and education, the opportunities on offer are vast. Says Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Department of Culture and Tourism: “From an investment perspective, the message is clear: invest now before it is too late.”



H.E. Abdulla Bin Touq Al Marri,  
Minister of Economy

UAE Minister of Economy Abdulla bin Touq Al Marri discusses the drivers behind the nation’s surging economic growth.

Q: How does the Ministry support the UAE’s economic growth and investor appeal?

Thanks to its geographic location, our country has always been a strategic global hub facilitating trade and logistics between different corners of the world. Today, it serves as a gateway to a vast consumer base exceeding two billion people in Asian and African markets. The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) programme, led by the Ministry of Economy, has had a tremendous impact on the unprecedented growth in the UAE’s non-oil trade. We have signed CEPA deals with 15 countries so far. As we pursue more deals, we expect further growth, moving closer to our goal to increase non-oil trade to AED 4 trillion (\$1.1 trillion) by 2031.

Q: What role does the UAE’s partnership with China play in national economic development?

Our two countries share a historical and strategic relationship characterised by continuous development of fruitful cooperation across all fields, particularly in the economy and investment. I attribute this growth to the shared commitment of both leaderships to

advancing constructive cooperation, stimulating investment exchanges and enhancing the growth of Emirati and Chinese companies in both markets. In 2024, memoranda of understanding (MoU) were signed between CCPIT Tianjin and the Abu Dhabi Chamber, Tianjin Pilot Free Trade Zone and JAFZA, and Tianjin Port Group and DP World, further deepening our economic collaboration. All these agreements facilitate trade and improve logistics, unlocking new investment opportunities and underscoring the pivotal role of both public and private sectors in our economic engagement.

Q: How does the UAE encourage Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI)?

The Chinese business community is a key economic partner of the UAE’s business sector. Today there are more than 15,000 business licences fully or partially owned by Chinese companies or individuals. Their investments in the UAE economy total \$6 billion, primarily in the retail, financial services, real estate and construction sectors. We are working in cooperation with our partners in the Chinese government to broaden collaboration in areas of shared interest, such as the new economy, entrepreneurship, tourism, aviation and logistics. We are also working to enhance dialogue between the business communities of the UAE and China, alongside establishing frameworks for the advancement of SMEs in both markets. The opportunities for economic collaboration between our two countries keep growing as the UAE continues to enhance its business environment and economic openness through progressive policies and global partnerships.

Q: How are you exploring cooperation in green investments?

The UAE’s growing investments in green and circular economies are creating more opportunities for collaboration. The latest partnership in this regard is the MoU between Masdar and China’s Silk Road Fund to explore potential co-investment opportunities in renewable energy projects in Belt and Road Initiative countries, primarily in the developing world and Global South.

UAE’s leading voices

UAE leaders share how innovation, research, and global partnerships — including fast-growing ties with China — are driving growth and opening new doors for international investors.

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF SHARJAH



“We are ensuring that AUS remains a leader in global academic and research excellence.”

H.H. Sheikha Bodour bint Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi,  
President & Chairperson, Board of Trustees, American University of Sharjah

President of the American University of Sharjah (AUS) Sheikha Bodour bint Sultan Al Qasimi highlights how research, AI, and partnerships with China are shaping the university’s global profile.

Ranked among the top ten Arab universities for over a decade, AUS has become a cornerstone of the Emirate’s innovation economy under the leadership of Sheikha Bodour bint Sultan Al Qasimi. “Education is at the heart of Sharjah’s progress,” she says. “AUS is not only an institution of higher learning but also a catalyst for research-driven solutions that address global challenges.”

This international focus extends to fostering academic part-

nerships that amplify AUS’s global impact. “Our collaborations with Chinese institutions are testament to this vision,” Sheikha Bodour says. The University has signed agreements with Tianjin’s leading institutions to promote joint curricula, exchange programmes and collaborative academic research, and launched a trilateral innovation partnership with the Shenzhen Institute of Advanced Technology and the Sharjah Research, Technology and Innovation Park (SRTI Park), which Sheikha Bodour also chairs. “By strengthening ties with institutions in China and beyond, we are ensuring that AUS remains a leader in global academic and research excellence,” she adds.

These links span high-impact sectors including artificial intelligence, robotics, biotech and smart infrastructure, aligning with Sharjah’s positioning as a regional hub for technology, research and innovation. Sheikha Bodour’s leadership roles within SRTI Park and Sheraa, the Sharjah Entrepreneurship Center, have facilitated an integrated approach, which also includes AUS’s newly launched AI Hub. The result is an ecosystem that encourages collaboration between academia, industry and government, provides greater market and investor access and enables startups to scale effectively. “Together, these initiatives are shaping a knowledge-based economy, attracting investment, and positioning Sharjah as a hub for innovation,” Sheikha Bodour says.

DUBAI DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE



“We are happy to see the involvement and presence of the Chinese in different sectors.”

H.E. Abdulrahman Saleh Al Saleh,  
Director General, Dubai Department of Finance

Dubai’s Department of Finance plays a central role in advancing sustainable growth, economic diversification and investor confidence across one of the world’s fastest-evolving economies.

As Director-General of Dubai’s Department of Finance, Abdulrahman Saleh Al Saleh oversees the financial framework behind one of the region’s most diversified economies. Rising to the long-term goal of moving beyond oil, Dubai’s growth model is built on a multi-sector strategy based on sound fiscal management and strategic public investment. “To build a growing economy and establish it as a hub, different sectors must complement each other,” Al Saleh says.

With infrastructure development as a central pillar of that strategy, the Department serves as the financial engine for flagship projects like Dubai Airport and Jebel Ali Port, ensuring budgets match national priorities such as the D33 Economic Agenda. “We always support the plans for Dubai’s growth,” Al Saleh says.

Chinese engagement has become a key element of those plans. Al Saleh highlights how leading Chinese banks already have a significant presence in the emirate, including in the retail sector through hubs like Dragon Mart – one of the largest trading centres for Chinese products outside mainland China – and through Dubai’s range of free zones that facilitate the involvement of Chinese businesses in industries from finance to logistics. The specialised Dubai International Financial Centre, for example, is home to leading global institutions and an innovation hub that hosts over 1,200 growth-stage firms. “We are happy to see the involvement and presence of the Chinese in different sectors,” Al Saleh says.

High-level delegations to Shenzhen have also expanded cooperation with Chinese business leaders, particularly in FinTech. This outreach is helping to shape plans including the Cashless Dubai initiative, which aims for 90% of transactions to be digital by 2026. “We have to learn from the experiences of other countries, with China being on top in this space,” says Al Saleh.

DUBAI FUTURE FOUNDATION



“China and the UAE are investing in creating the most fertile ecosystems for talent.”

H.E. Khalfan Belhoul,  
CEO, Dubai Future Foundation

Dubai Future Foundation CEO Khalfan Belhoul outlines how foresight, innovation and partnerships with China are shaping Dubai’s position as a global innovation hub and ambitions for the future.

Dubai Future Foundation (DFF) sits at the heart of Dubai’s positioning as the City of the Future. Through collaboration with both public and private sector partners, DFF is designed to foster forward-thinking across multiple sectors. “Our leaders had the vision, 10 years ago, for an entity that owns the future foresight and pushes Dubai to be 10 years ahead,” explains CEO Khalfan Belhoul.

DFF operates as both a think tank and implementation arm, combining research, testing and policy development to help

shape Dubai’s economic trajectory. Key platforms include the Museum of the Future, which attracts global visitors with its experiential vision of what lies ahead, and the Dubai Future Forum – held at the Museum – which has become one of the largest gatherings of futurists in the world. A core pillar is DFF’s Sandbox Project, a proving ground where startups and industry leaders work with government to fast-track pilot programmes across a diverse array of sectors. “The Sandbox Project promotes the city as an agile testbed for the world,” says Belhoul. “Whether it’s autonomous mobility, biotech, or smart infrastructure, we provide innovators with support in areas from regulation to funding.”

China has become an increasingly important partner in DFF’s work. A 2024 memorandum of understanding with China’s National Innovation Center par Excellence paves the way for knowledge transfer between the two organisations and collaboration in innovation and tech adoption, while joint R&D institutes and centres of excellence are on the agenda, aiming to attract and support innovators. “What excites me is the like-mindedness of where the two countries are heading,” says Belhoul. “Human capital is the most important asset in focusing on the future. China and the UAE are investing in creating the most fertile ecosystems for talent to thrive.”

INVEST IN SHARJAH



H.E. Mohamed Juma Al Musharrakh,  
CEO, Sharjah FDI Office (Invest in Sharjah)

Headed by CEO Mohamed Al Musharrakh, Invest in Sharjah is leading the city’s transformation into a global investment hub. “Last year, we successfully attracted \$2.75 billion in FDI, and in 2025, we are striving to double this figure,” he states. The agency supports investors via the Saeed Centre – its one-stop shop – across seven specialised free zones, with strong activity in manufacturing, ICT and agriculture.

The agency is also gaining global recognition for digital innovation. “One of our landmark achievements was the launch of the world’s first AI trade licence, issued in under five minutes,” notes Al Musharrakh. Developed alongside Microsoft and the Sharjah Publishing City Free Zone, “this initiative represents a significant step in enhancing business efficiency,” he adds.

China, in particular, is a strategic priority for the agency. “Currently, more than 1,200 Chinese companies are registered with us, and we aim to double this number,” Al Musharrakh says. Invest in Sharjah promotes opportunities through roadshows, UAE–China CEPA engagement, and an active partnership with Shanghai-based Pan Asia Capital.

With advanced infrastructure, federal

alignment and sectoral diversity, Invest in Sharjah offers clients speed, scale and long-term potential.



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