



History MAN

AUTHOR, HISTORIAN AND FORMER MINISTER, QATAR'S SHEIKH MOHAMED AJ ALTHANI BELIEVES THAT ARABS NEED TO RETAIN THE LESSONS FROM THEIR PAST.

Sifting through his string of prayer beads, Qatar's HE Sheikh Mohamed AJ Althani is lamenting today's "spoiling era" — a time when modern technology, fashion and the English language are casting tradition and custom into the shadows, risking national identity.

Arab parents are now speaking in English with their children, sports fans are masquerading with flags of another country, while Qatar's history — albeit short — is being more and more condensed in schools, he tells *CEO Middle East*.

"It's a spoiling era for the children," he says. "It's just that the world has become more convenient for students now, with the internet and the reach of iPhones.

"I used to travel with my wife and see families around us from the Middle East. They all spoke Arabic. But now they deliberately speak with their children in English. That's a big problem.

"We all now take our children to a Western-influenced school. But if it was up to me I would leave the first years for children to really remember this part of the world; religion and culture are very important and if they miss out on that they get lost later as they grow up, so it's a big challenge. And that's something I'm worried about."

The issue has become a passionate topic during our interview hours before Sheikh Mohamed launches his second book, a biography of his grandfather, Sheikh Jassim Bin Muhammad Bin Thani, the acclaimed founder of modern-day Qatar.

One hundred and fifty years ago, Sheikh Jassim was a young and rebellious 23-year-old when he began a legacy of fending off the British, the Ottomans and Bahrain to protect a coastline linked closely to the pearling industry, and started on his vision to create what is now the wealthiest state in the world according to gross domestic product per capita.

All this at a time when Arabs still wended their way through the desert with little more than intuition and spiritual guidance.

"For a gentleman who thought 'this place can be a country' and look at what it is today, I think is intriguing," Sheikh Mohamed says, explaining his motivation to write *Jassim The Leader: Founder of Qatar*.