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DWTC BUILD

SHAIKH RASHID'S PLAN TO CONSTRUCT WHAT WOULD THEN BE THE TALLEST BUILDING IN THE MIDDLE EAST



Royal presence
Queen Elizabeth II with dignitaries in 1979.



Grand opening
Shaikh Rashid at the opening of the landmark tower.



Inauguration
Shaikh Rashid cutting the ribbon to mark a new chapter in the country's history.



Indira visit
Former Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi at the World Trade Centre.



Resources
Mobilisation of resources for the construction of the 39-storey building that took five years to complete.

A new chapter in the emirate's history began in 1979 with the completion of the Dubai World Trade Centre. It has become the region's nexus for regional and international business networking and has undergone numerous expansions, and more are in the pipeline.

[T]he first show ... was Middle East Construction ... We created a large-domed permanent tent ... [with] large ceiling fans to cool the area"

David Domoney
President, Arab Lab Group

When the Dubai government decided to build an exhibition facility and a tower in the 1970s, no one knew how this sector would contribute to the future economy of this one-time fishing settlement. They did not know where to develop the facility in the first place and where to start.

So, when the late Shaikh Rashid Bin Saeed Al Maktoum, then Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, announced his intention to build what would then be the tallest building in the Middle East, the reaction was one of pure incredulity.

Building a 39-storey tower was a tall order for Dubai then.

Many people asked "Why? Why a building of such grandeur for Dubai?" and "Why in Zabeel?" — which at the time was in the middle of the desert.

Post-independence, Dubai was still a sleepy town, graduating from a fishing settlement to a mere trading outpost — trying to cash in on the first oil boom and a thriving trade. By the mid-1970s, electronics and home appliances had replaced spices and other commodities in trade.

However, sophisticated business sectors such as exhibitions, conferences and event management were not on the radar of the business community and officials — except for one person — the late Shaikh Rashid.

Scenarios debated the odd choice of location on the sandy strip of desert along the Abu Dhabi highway, quite removed from the busy Dubai Creek. Clearly, Shaikh Rashid's vision stretched beyond the obvious.

His response was, "Why not? Why not create a new catalyst for Dubai's expansion? Why not build the foundations of what would evolve into the centre for global business in the region?"

1974: Work begins

In September 1974, work commenced on the Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) complex, one that would eventually include a tower, hotels, exhibition halls and serviced apartment blocks.

The tower itself was a brilliant expression of structural ingenuity, then-modern engineering and traditional Islamic architecture.

Five years later, on February 26, 1979, the Dubai World Trade Centre was opened. A new chapter in the emirate's history began to unfold.

When the Trade Centre opened in 1979 I organised the first show, which was Middle East Construction that coincided with the Queen's inauguration of the Centre," David Domoney, president of the Arab Lab Group, who organised the first exhibition at the Trade Centre, said.

"When we did the show at the Trade Centre, we created a large-domed permanent tent with iron girders covered with canvas and large ceiling fans to cool the area."

"Hall One at that time also existed and its where the current stock exchange now sits, but for the construction show we required larger space."

In 1981, the first Gulf Information Technology Exhibition (Gitec) took place in Hall No 1 — which currently houses the Dubai Financial Market — with 46 exhibitors and 3,038 participants.

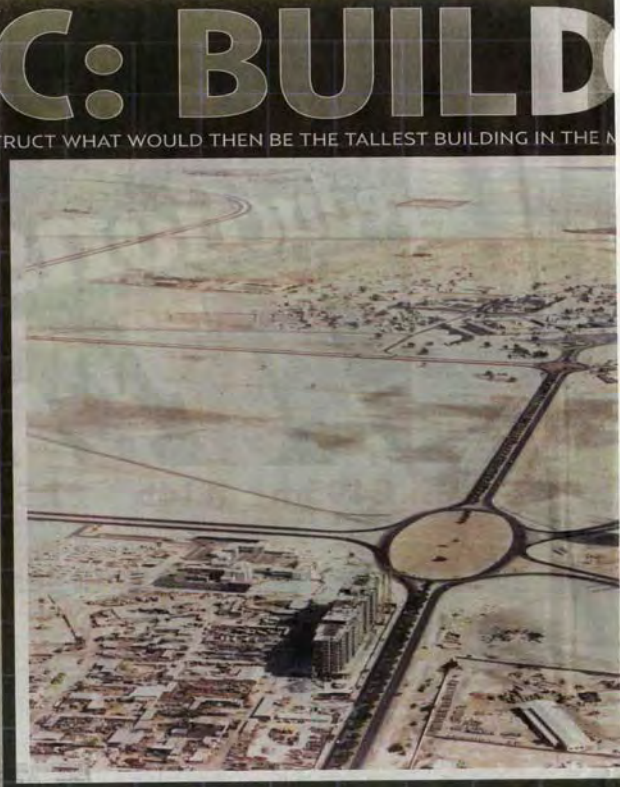
Two years later, Hall 2 was built with a capacity of approximately 1,500.

30 years on

Today, exactly 30 years later, the scene is totally different. What started as a dream and vision in the early 1970s, has now become a major player in the emirate's economy.

Over the years, the DWTC has been the region's nexus for regional and international business networking. The complex has undergone numerous expansions to its facilities and offerings aimed at making Dubai "the 21st century destination for corporate meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions."

Today, the Dubai World Trade Centre complex includes the original Trade Centre Tower, nine additional exhibition halls, ten conference halls, and 39 meeting rooms housed in the adjacent Dubai International Convention



and Exhibition Centre (DICEC), part of the DWTC.

It can accommodate more than 6,500 delegates in just one of its multipurpose halls.

The complex also boasts a 13-storey Convention Tower, two on-site business hotels, and the Dubai International Hotel Apartments, all within walking distance.

Gitec welcomed an impressive 129,884 visitors and the consumer show at Airport Expo, Gitec Shopper, attracted over 132,000 buyers last year. Gulfood retained its status as the premier event for the food and hospitality sector, with a 52 per cent growth in show space, taking up over 60,000 square metres in 2008 and continuing that trend in 2009.

"In 2008, we welcomed 1.1 million visitors to exhibitions, conventions and conferences at our venues, a further 10 per cent increase from the previous year and a validation of the continued growth and sustainability for the region's events industry," Helal

Saeed Khalifan Al Marri, Chief Executive of the Dubai World Trade Centre, says.

Dh800m impact

At a rate of \$200 spend per visitor, this translates to a whopping \$220 million (Dh800 million) direct impact on the emirate's economy, the GDP of which last year was estimated to have reached \$54 billion (Dh200 billion).

It aimed to be the destination to deliver "better experiences" to people from every country and network, to explore trade opportunities and grow their business.

Handsome reward

Shaikh Rashid's foresight in selecting this site paid off handsomely as this was a pivotal step towards creating today's Manhattan.

"We are working to sustain our target of 1 to 1.5 per cent contribution to Dubai's GDP on par with global benchmarks such as Singapore and Hong Kong."

Helal Saeed Khalifan Al Marri
Chief Executive, Dubai World Trade Centre

style urban skyscraper corridor of Shaikh Zayed Road — a welcome relief for congestion in Dubai's commercial centre. The tower, a centrepiece of the D100 landmark, soon became one of the most recognised structures in the region.

"We are commencing work on the extension of our venue very shortly to now cover 1 million square feet of exhibition space, as announced by our Chairman — clearly an indication of our forecast growth in business. This project will be completed by the end of the 2009," Al Marri says.

He said the world-class facility contributes to the emirate's economy handsomely.

"Ensuring that Dubai remains a hub for exhibitions and trade events despite prevailing global economic conditions is a long-term government strategy. We are working to sustain our target of 1 to 1.5 per cent contribution to Dubai's GDP on par with global benchmarks such as Singapore and Hong Kong in the events and exhibitions sector," Al Marri says.

Economic climate

This year will no doubt pose significant challenges as economies, industries and businesses all over the world are facing the impact of the recession. In this context, no sector is likely to be immune, Al Marri admits.

The events sector will naturally also feel the impact to some degree.

"But with this sector specifically, the value-add is on a tangible level, as it provides a platform for face-to-face networking and extends the potential to penetrate wider markets, leading to enhanced opportunities for business growth," he says.

No other medium offers the same opportunities to meet with cus-

1974
Construction begins on World Trade Centre

1979
Shaikh Rashid Tower and Hall 1 (where the stock exchange presently sits) completed

February 26, 1979
Inauguration with Shaikh Rashid and Queen Elizabeth II

March 1979
First Construction event held in large pavilion

Shaikh Rashid escorted the Queen to the 37th floor of the Shaikh Rashid Tower, where they both signed a register. They then went to the viewing area and looked out at the city

1981
First Gitec computer show, takes place with 46 exhibitors and 3,038 participants

1983
Hall 2 built with a capacity of about 1,500

1986
The World Chess Competition is held in Halls 1-4

Mid-80s
Halls 3 and 4 completed

90s
Halls 5-10 completed

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IMAGINATION DREAM

MIDDLE EAST WAS MET WITH INCREDULITY



Landmark
Dubai World Trade Centre stands tall in the middle of the desert.



Present
DWTC becomes a destination by itself — 30 years later.

SERENDIPITY

Dubai was my destiny

Fate brings event organiser to the city

By DAVID DOMONEY
Special in Gulf News

Dubai My career in Dubai began by coincidence. I was originally invited by the Lebanese tourist office to travel to Beirut and explore exhibition opportunities there. On my first night in the city, the side of the hotel was blown out and I was escorted to the airport by the military. The only plane out of Beirut at the time brought me to Dubai.

Imagine a European arriving in Dubai in the late 70s and trying to promote the idea of an exhibition to a very traditional marketplace. I was successful in my endeavours and duly organised the first ever exhibition in Dubai, which was held in a tent near the Creek.

If I then wanted to find another, more versatile location at which I could host a larger event and while standing at the old Dubai Chamber of Commerce Building (which was also next to the Creek) I asked the then executive director if he knew of anything suitable. He pointed to a very tall building, under construction — the only building one could see — the Shaikh Rashid Tower (now more commonly referred to as the Trade Centre Tower).

The Trade Centre opened in 1979 and I organised the first exhibition there on Middle East Construction, which coincided with the queen's inauguration of the building. When we held that show, we created a large domed, permanent tent with iron girders covered with canvas and large ceiling fans to cool the area. Hall One at that time was where the current stock exchange now sits, but for the construction show we required a larger space.

Originally, we used to stage these events in two shifts — the exhibition would begin at 10am and run until 1pm, and then the second shift would run from 5pm until 9pm. This suited the local schedule. As time went by, all exhibitions began to run through the day, starting at around 10am, and concluding at around 6 or 7pm.

Wet and wild

I organised the first water exhibition in Dubai with government ministers from all over the Gulf in 1984. While the officials were waiting for the start of the show and shading themselves under the palm trees, the sprinkler system came to life and managed to wet a number of people.

Although this was completely unplanned, and potentially disastrous, one minister approached me and said that it was the best opening to a water expo that he had ever witnessed.

Now Dubai is a very sophisticated marketplace and the exhibition facilities are comparable to the infrastructure anywhere in the world. From my point of view (and that of other organisers that promote exhibitions in the emirate), most people are sold on exhibiting here due to the cosmopolitan nature of the city and the state-of-the-art facilities. Most of our exhibitors expect this level of quality and service in Las Vegas, London or Paris and were quite pleasantly surprised to discover that Dubai's exhibition market is comparable to — and in some cases surpasses — those others.

Dubai is now one of the foremost exhibition capitals in the world, a fact that is borne out by the city's events calendar.

David Domoney is president of the Arab Lab Group.

formers in an open forum, to showcase new products and innovations and to create new business opportunities.

In addition, businesses are looking to leverage this opportunity to expand their industry knowledge, through stimulating debate and conferences with industry pioneers and hence the quality and depth of content around the shows is becoming increasingly critical.

This region still represents growth across many sectors and structurally the economies are robust with ongoing development plans.

"Consequently, in times of global economic challenges and financial instability, it is even more vital for corporations worldwide to continue to engage and interact. The business meetings, conferences and exhibitions held at DWTC will remain the platform for this networking and will, in turn, stimulate opportunities that bring long-term economic benefits not only to Dubai, but to the wider Middle East region. We are a catalyst and a gateway to the wider region," Al Marri adds.

What's in store for the future? Imagination is usually explained by human limitations. Well, when it comes to Dubai, even imagination

Shaikh Rashid's foresight in selecting this site paid off handsomely as this was a pivotal step towards creating today's Manhattan-style urban skyscraper corridor of Shaikh Zayed Road.

seems to become unlimited.

Expansion plans

"As I am sure you are aware, DWTC has been working on building supporting infrastructure for the Meetings, Incentives, Conference and Exhibitions (MICE) sector with our two destination developments — Dubai Trade Centre Jebel Ali anchored on a state-of-the-art exhibition space. Our Chairman, Shaikh Hamdan Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Deputy Ruler of Dubai and Minister of Finance, announced the commencement of this expansion plan at the Gulf food opening earlier this week — the facility will be built next to Halls 1-4 at the DICFC with the most flexible spatial design to accommodate shows, events and weddings of various sizes. This will be completed this year.

"This will be another confirmation of the fact that Dubai retains its 30-year leadership in the sector and remains the "largest" hosting platform for exhibitions in the region.

1.1m visitors in 2008

129,884 visitors recorded at the Gitex 2008

132,000 visited the Gitex Shopper in 2008

1.5% contribution of the exhibition sector to Dubai's GDP

Standing tall
The tower for a long time reflected Dubai's economic prowess.

1999 DWTC oversees Airport Expo and the first Careers Show is held

2001 Construction begins on the Trade Centre Complex in preparation for the World Bank/IMF meeting to be held in 2003

2003 Trade Centre Complex completed, including the existing concourse connecting all of the original halls (Halls 1 and 2 were redesigned — now Shaikh Rashid Hall and Shaikh Maktoum Hall), Convention Tower and the Novotel and Ibis hotels

2003 IMF/World Bank meeting attended by finance ministers and leaders from all over the world — over 15,000 delegates. Dubai is now on the global map

2009 Construction begins on new extension to the Trade Centre. With this extension, DWTC facilities will provide 1 million square feet of overall exhibition space, further enhancing DWTC's position as the largest venue in the Middle East. "Our plans for expansion are a critical step that will ensure that DWTC continues to proactively provide enabling infrastructure to support regional MICE sector growth and our growing catering business."