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NATION

THE WORK + THE PEOPLE + THE LIFE = NEW BU:

e-Revolution in the Making

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DUBAI is at the forefront of the world's e-revolution, led primarily by His Highness Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai. Initiatives such as the Dubai Silicon Oasis, Dubai Media City, Dubai Internet City and the Mohammed Bin Rashid Technology Park have directly contributed to developing information and technology in the emirate.

"Dubai Internet City has played a crucial role in developing the region's ICT (Information and Communications Technology) industry," says Malek Al Malek, Executive Director of Dubai Internet City.

"Providing a business-friendly environment that extends to 100 per cent ownership and full tax exemption for knowledge-based companies, Dubai Internet City is in the forefront contributing towards building a sustainable economy in Dubai."

Shahla Abdul Razak, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Dubai Silicon Oasis Authority, adds: "We have established a series of industry-specific initiatives, including the Dubai Circuit Design Centre and the region's first design hub for the physical implementation of advanced integrated circuits. Furthermore, we've pioneered the implementation of green features in operations through the use of optimal technology facilities. We are currently evaluating how effectively we can convert the existing data centre – which is already equipped with the latest technology – to add green values."

The establishment of Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) is a case in point. RIT's presence at Dubai Silicon Oasis significantly adds to knowledge strength and diversity. Dubai's higher educational sector facilitates the creation of a pool of skilled and talented professionals, especially within the field of technology. Such policies contribute to Dubai's objective to grow into a full-fledged knowledge-based economy by 2015, as envisioned in the Dubai Strategic Plan (DSP).

"Clearly technology is the cornerstone of industry and has a direct link with a viable economy," says Dr Mustafa Abushagur, President of RIT Dubai. "Institutions such as RIT make this possible by helping the students acquire the right skills and even start their own businesses. Technology today is used in the service and well-being of people and makes life easier. E-governance makes governments more efficient, and impact future growth."

"E-learning, on the other hand, is a lifelong mission," he adds. "The Internet makes this possible with information at your fingertips. It will never substitute the traditional method of teaching, but only supplement the educational programme. RIT has different models to deliver. Students spend time with the professor and there is direct interaction. Different modes of technology are used on a daily basis."

FUTURE CONNECTION

Dubai is investing more in Internet mobility and wireless access is gaining ground as usage fee is reduced. Telecom operators Etisalat and du are constantly upgrading their equipment and services in an effort to provide quality services and connections.

Etisalat's Vice President-Marketing Khalifa Al Shamsi explains: "Most important is the emergence of 'customer-centric technologies' where technology is an enabler, providing 'life-enhancing' benefits to individuals and 'efficient solutions' to businesses. This year, a landline-to-mobile-voice convergence, where mobile switches your landline at home, accessing Internet, email or broadband video streaming on your television or video-on-demand on mobile, is quite possible. Fibre-to-the-Home (FTTH), 3.5G High Speed Packet Access (HSPA), Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP), Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) are fast catching on in the UAE and throughout the region."

In early June, for example, du started rolling out advanced fibre-optic services across all the prestigious housing

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projects of Shaikh Mohammad bin Rashid Housing Establishments. So far, it has wired 544 of the 1,468 villas in the Al Warqa'a, Oud Al Mateena and Al Barsha areas.

Farid Faraidooni, du's Executive Vice-President Commercial, says the tremendous growth of broadband in UAE can be seen in actual figures. "In 2006, there were approximately 241,000 broadband connections in the UAE, up by 86.8 per cent in the previous year. Though the market is still under-penetrated, the growth is overwhelming. With the advent of promising technologies like WiMax broadband in every home, this does not look like a distant dream."

Last week du began offering connection speeds four times higher than the existing UAE broadband. But some users question this claim.

Internet users arriving here from the United States and parts of Asia find the services quite slow. "A 4MB in the UAE is much slower than a 4MB in the US," one blogger says. "Unfortunately, you will also find that going for faster connections doesn't yield the result you would expect. If you have a 2MB connection and upgrade it to 4MB, you won't get twice the speed."

SMART ROADS

Outside the home and office, new technology also hopes to transform the daily commute on Dubai's clogged roadways.

The Road Transport Authority (RTA) is working to develop "integrated solutions" to keep motorists abreast of construction works in order to ease congestion.

According to Salah Al Marzooqi, Director of Intelligent Traffic Systems at the Traffic and Roads Agency, "Phase II will see the introduction of sophisticated systems to detect traffic accidents and congestions by using electronic devices, smart cameras and trip time calculation systems. Electronic traffic signs, lane and speed defining devices, and enhanced dynamic navigation systems will soon be in place. New channels will be established for communicating traffic information to the public via e-mail, SMS and any other possible means."

Whether such hi-tech gadgets have made the life easy for the motorist is in question. Electronic traffic signs do help motorists take an alternative route in the event of a traffic jam, but then the alternative routes become clogged. Speed-assessing devices have slowed the traffic and reduced accidents. But the introduction of Salik at Al Safa on Shaikh Zayed Road and Al Maktoum Bridge have added to the woes on toll-free roads.

Those who can afford to pay Dh4 for each crossing use the fast lane. Those who can't, are stuck in traffic. Tolls are being considered an added burden on the commuters, who are already weighed down by spiralling rents and escalating prices of essential commodities. On the other hand, there is stagnation in salaries.

TECHNOLOGICAL WONDERS

Around five million tourists visit Dubai each year, and the city is pursuing the ambitious figure of 15 million by the year 2020. An estimated \$100 billion worth of real estate projects are either under construction or in the pipeline, with much of it embodying the latest in architectural and green technology.

A good example is the Pixel Tower. Aimed at the young and the trendy of Dubai, it sports an unusual shape with attention-grabbing white facades that feature wave-like cut-outs up to the last few upper floors where they turn into circular bubble cut-outs.

Michael Michael, Branch Manager at Landmark Properties, developers of the Pixel Towers, says, "In the next 20 years, the UAE will make great strides in reducing its carbon footprints in order to contribute to the global efforts to reduce carbon emissions. This, in conjunction with the increase of its large areas of coastline that are becoming vulnerable to rising sea levels as a result of global warming have given the UAE today and the future of tomorrow the opportunity to make a difference."

Accordingly, UAE architecture has the tremendous potential to pioneer ecologically-efficient buildings and to become a world leader in devising cooling technologies that use the sun as the principal source of energy.

Michael adds: "We can expect to see new buildings all having double skins or 'envelopes,' wind turbines, arrays of solar panels, water treatment plants, shading panels that are aligned with the movement of the sun, and cooling systems that run deep below the surface of the ground, utilising the natural coolness of the soil. There would be no more need for cold air to be pumped in by costly air-conditioning systems. The concrete cores of the buildings would be cooled naturally and air flows would be created from the way buildings are designed."



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