

New Dubai city pushes for green revolution in desert

DUBAI: Fenced off by a wall of trees, about 20 km from the high rises towering over Dubai's city center, there lies a small solar-powered settlement aiming to become a green oasis in the desert. Renowned for its glitzy skyscrapers, air-conditioning-blasting shopping malls and indoor skiing facilities, the emirate of Dubai has long been the antithesis of sustainability to environmentalists.

But the United Arab Emirates (UAE) plans to change that reputation, with a range of projects aimed at having more than 40 percent of the country's energy come from renewable sources and cutting consumption by the same margin by 2050. Opened to the first residents in 2016 and to be fully completed next year, the initiative dubbed Sustainable City is a private settlement on the outskirts of Dubai designed to use as little energy and water as possible.

Comprising 500 low-lying villas that are home to nearly 3,000 people, as well as commercial spaces and a mosque, the city aims to be a "net-zero" settlement, producing all the energy it needs from renewable sources on site. "The Sustainable City is a living laboratory for testing future technologies and solutions," said Karim El-Jisr, head of SEE Institute, the research arm of the city's developer, Diamond Developers. When the project started six years ago, building a zero-energy development "seemed a bit like a dream", he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "Today it is not difficult anymore, tomorrow everybody will have to do it," he added.

From neighboring Masdar City to the Qatari capital Doha, it is one of several developments launched across the region in recent years that aim to serve as a model for environmentally-friendly living in the Middle East. Houses, offices and other buildings are responsible for about 40 percent of planet-warming

emissions globally, according to the think tank World Resources Institute (WRI).

Green desert

The issue is particularly relevant in the UAE, said Emma Stewart, who leads WRI's urban efficiency and climate program, with World Bank data showing that the country has one of the highest per capita carbon footprints in the world. About 75 percent of all electricity produced in the UAE is sucked up by buildings, mainly to fuel air-conditioners that keep locals fresh during the scorching summer months, Stewart said. "They have an immense need for cooling to keep the population within their comfort range," she said in a phone interview.

In the Sustainable City, residents zigzag through the streets on bicycles or aboard small electric carts, under the shade of the palm trees flanking the strips of square, white houses. Cars are banned from most of the area. All buildings and parking spaces are topped by solar panels which feed the energy they produce into the grid, allowing residents to pay only the difference between what they produce and consume, according to the developer.

Residential units designed to avoid direct exposure to the sun and covered in paint that reflects sunlight to keep the heat out, while wastewater is recycled to irrigate green areas, Jisr said during a visit to the site. Resident Belinda Boisson said she paid more rent than the Dubai average but, besides sustainability, the development offered a family-friendly environment and sense of community that was rare to find among Dubai's high rises. "(Children) can play outside without me worrying about my daughter being hit by a car,"

said Boisson, a 46-year-old expat from South Africa.

Zero-carbon wave

The Dubai settlement is the first in the region - which is particularly vulnerable to extreme heat, droughts and rising sea levels, according to the World Bank - to become fully operational, says its developer. In neighboring Abu Dhabi, the state-sponsored Masdar City was touted as the world's first emissions-free city and designed to house up to 50,000 people. After breaking ground in 2008 the settlement remains behind schedule and sparsely populated.

In Qatar, the Msheireb area of Doha is also undergoing a carbon-cutting makeover. Developers of the 76-acre regeneration zone, which aims to become "one of the largest sustainable cities in the world", are outfitting it with green features, from rainwater harvesting to shady overhangs that make walking outside cooler. A similar city extension based on the Msheireb project is being planned in Muscat, Oman, while Diamond Developers is building another "sustainable city" in the emirate of Sharjah which will be about twice the size of the one in Dubai.

This second green city hopes to improve on the first, where not everything has worked according to plan, Jisr said. A grey-water system set up to use water from showers and washing machines to feed the city's artificial lake was decommissioned when developers realized the phosphates from the soap were fuelling unsightly blooms of algae, he said. The water is now used for irrigation, but the city still relies heavily on water from Dubai's energy-intensive desalination plants, Jisr added.

And the settlement still consumes more energy than

it produces, he explained. In a bid to reduce consumption, new motion-activated lighting is being installed and the developers are looking for new ideas to improve efficiency, said Jisr. "It is not enough to design, build and then walk away," he added. "You always have to make adjustments."

Testing ground

Low-carbon projects like Dubai's Sustainable City are useful testing grounds for cities looking to go green, said Abdulla Al Basti, the head of Dubai's executive council. But they are no magic bullet against global warming, said Alessandro Melis, an architecture professor at Britain's University of Portsmouth. "They are good experiments that can tell us many things, but at this moment in time it would be more important to focus on how we can transform the urban fabric that we already have," Melis said in a phone interview.

Stewart of the WRI agreed, saying that building new developments, however sustainable, can be less efficient than retrofitting existing ones. Construction works account for on average about 10 percent of all emissions generated by a building's lifecycle, she noted. However, by showing what is possible, new builds could inspire policymakers to take bolder action, she said.

In September, the UAE pledged that by 2030 all new buildings will produce no more emissions than they can absorb, and all existing buildings will meet that goal by 2050 - a promise Melis said was ambitious but technically feasible. And if a group of desert emirates can find a way to go green, it could prove a powerful example to other cities, said Stewart. "If this can be done in a desert environment that is difficult for humans to inhabit... it can be done everywhere," she said. — Reuters



HIROSHIMA: An undated handout photo taken through a microscope lens shows a Podocerus jinbe, a newly discovered shrimp-like creature found living in the mouth of a whale shark. — AFP

New species found in whale shark's mouth

TOKYO: A whale shark's mouth might not seem like the most hospitable environment for a home, but Japanese researchers have found there's no place like it for a newly-discovered shrimp-like creature. The tiny inhabitants - dubbed podocerus jinbe - are a variety of gammaridea, a species known for their hardy ability to live in environments ranging from high mountains to the deep sea. But lead researcher Ko Tomikawa, an associate professor at Hiroshima University, said he was "surprised" to find them living in the mouth of an animal.

"This creature, which is usually 3-5 centimeters long, is amazing because they can live in so many different kinds of environment," Tomikawa told AFP. "But I didn't expect we would find one inside the mouth of a whale shark." Gammaridea are a type of crustacean, a group that includes water fleas. The researcher said the new variety has a brown-colored body of about five mil-

limeters long and hairy legs, which help catch organic substances for food.

Whale sharks are known as jinbe zame in Japanese, inspiring their newly discovered residents' name. And Tomikawa said there were some good reasons the species might choose such an unexpected location. "The mouth of the whale shark is probably a good habitat because fresh seawater, which is necessary for them to breathe comes in regularly, and food flows in too," he said. "And it also provides a safe place without any predators."

The new variety was discovered after Tomikawa was contacted by an aquarium in southern Okinawa prefecture curious to know what appeared to be living in a whale shark there. About a thousand of the creatures were found inside the gills of the shark's mouth, he said. — AFP

Trump booed at World Series...

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Trump has been on the back foot for weeks as the Democrats push ahead with their impeachment inquiries, and as he faces widespread and bipartisan condemnation of his Syria policy. It was an unusual excursion for the president and first lady - who arrived earlier at the Nationals Stadium, and sat in a suite behind home plate - in liberal-majority Washington.

Prior to the Nationals-Astros showdown, Washington manager Dave Martinez said he hoped

Trump "enjoys the game". When asked if the team was excited for his arrival, Martinez replied, "We haven't really talked about it. We're focused on playing baseball." Trump later left the stadium an inning before the end of the game, which was won by the visiting Astros. Trump won just 4 percent of the vote in the District of Columbia in the 2016 presidential election. The US capital is hosting its first World Series since 1933.

Trump did not throw out the ceremonial first pitch at the game, as many previous presidents have done. That task fell instead to Spanish-American celebrity chef Jose Andres, a vocal critic of Trump's controversial immigration policies and Puerto Rico hurricane relief efforts. Andres also canceled plans to run a restaurant in Trump's Washington hotel because of Trump's disparaging comments about Mexicans, which led to a legal settlement. — Agencies

more than 150 percent in Lebanon and Sudan. "Having built over many years, the cost of public debt burdens has become sizeable, preventing investments critical to the region's long-term economic future," it said.

The IMF said that Iran, which is subject to crippling US sanctions, has entered a steep economic recession and faces a battle against spiralling inflationary pressures. The Islamic republic's economy is projected to contract by 9.5 percent this year after posting negative growth of 4.8 percent in 2018. Iranian authorities must align "the exchange rate close to the market rate and also reform the financial sector... and try to address some of the implications of the high level of inflation," Azour said.

As a result of the sanctions, Tehran is believed to be exporting only around 500,000 barrels per day of crude, down from over two million bpd before the sanctions. The IMF said that oil-rich Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, led by Saudi Arabia, are expected to grow by just 0.7 percent this year from 2.0 percent in 2018 due to lower oil prices and output. "GCC economies need to diversify and grow out of oil and this requires them to accelerate the reforms that have been started in the last four to five years," Azour said. — AFP

Octogenarian tries to burn mosque in France, shoots 2

PARIS: An 84-year-old man shot and seriously wounded two other men in their 70s when they surprised him trying to burn a mosque in Bayonne in southwest France, police said. The octogenarian opened fire when the two men, aged 74 and 78, came upon him trying to set fire to the mosque's door on Monday afternoon, the police department said in a statement. The victims were brought to a nearby hospital with serious injuries, while the suspected shooter was later arrested near his home. The mosque has been cordoned off for investigations. After the incident, Interior Minister Christophe Castaner offered his "solidarity and support to the Muslim community".

The incident came just hours after President Emmanuel Macron had urged France's Muslim community to step up the fight against "separatism" in the wake of the latest attack by an Islamist radical on French soil, in which a police employee stabbed four colleagues to death. There have been intermittent attacks on mosques in France since 2007, when 148 Muslim headstones in a national military cemetery near Arras were smeared with anti-Islamic slurs and a pig's head was placed among them.

In June this year, a gunman wounded an imam in a shooting at a mosque in the northwestern city of Brest, but police ruled out a terror motive. In March, workers building a mosque in the small southwestern town of Bergerac found a pig's head and animal blood at the entrance to the site - two weeks after a gunman killed 50 Muslims in Christchurch, New Zealand, in a shooting spree at two mosques.

Tharoor expounds on politics...

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and we will be back next time'. So, the party was unprepared for his departure. And during those eight or nine weeks, the party was almost paralyzed and that did not do us much good," he said.

Tharoor said the best way to deal with structural flaws or problems within the party is through internal elections, as the party currently is in an anomalous position where even the so-called elected members of the working committee are nominated by the president. "But many in my party feel that this would only add to divisiveness and they prefer not to support this. At the moment, there is no sign of any proper election process taking place," he said.

Tharoor said the ruling party - the BJP - was able to sell hyper-nationalism during the parliamentary elections, but in the recent state assembly elections, voters thought much more about their daily lives. Asked if polarization is happening in India, he said it is only because the ruling party establishment wants it to happen.

"The ruling party still continues to attempt to polarize public opinion. But I would say most Indians prefer an inclusive India that celebrates diversity and truly believes in pluralism. I think that is the India the Congress party stands for. Certainly, 72 years of independence have been spent in celebrating India's inclusiveness, and to be honest, I remain a passionate voice for that because that is the India I value. I want to fight for that India within the Indian political space," Tharoor told Kuwait Times.

Asked about his interactions with Kuwaiti diplomats during his long tenure at the UN, Tharoor said Kuwaiti diplomats are very professional, extremely hardworking and great at people skills. "One of the things you need in international diplomacy is the ability to get along

Mosques were also targeted after the killing of 12 people at the Charlie Hebdo satirical magazine in 2015 by Islamist radicals. Dozens of mosques were attacked by arsonists, others with firebombs, grenades or gunfire.

Macron, a centrist whose main political rival at home is far-right leader Marine Le Pen, has sought to show he is serious in cracking down on Islamist radicalism in France. In a pre-recorded interview with RTL radio broadcast yesterday, Macron said he planned to fight, alongside Muslim leaders, against religious sectarianism and resistance among some French Muslims to integrate.

"It is a fact that a form of separatism has taken root in some places in our Republic, in other words a desire to not live together and to not be in the Republic," he said. "It is in the name of a religion, namely Islam," he said. Macron yesterday hosted representatives of the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM) to press for joint efforts between the government and Muslims to crack down on radicalism.

Castaner, who attended that meeting, told AFP Macron had urged the CFCM leaders to "fight alongside the state" against sectarianism and Islamism. The president told them he wanted to see a "change in rhythm" from the council, to wage a genuine fight against radicalism. CFCM Vice President Anouar Kbibech, who was present at the Elysee talks, said the council would now make "very strong announcements" on the fight against radicalism at an extraordinary meeting called for today.

There has been an ongoing debate in France in recent years about the role of Islam in a republic built on staunchly secular values where Muslims now make up some 10 percent of the population. The controversy intensified following a string of deadly attacks carried out by Islamist militants in 2015, including the massacres at the Charlie Hebdo satirical magazine and Bataclan music venue. — AFP

with people with various kinds of beliefs and points of view. And I must say that the Kuwaiti ambassador, for example, during the notorious time of the Iraqi invasion, was very skillful in working with all other ambassadors to get united condemnation and support for his country. I would say that Kuwait has had a succession of skillful diplomats and able people and whenever Kuwaiti diplomacy gets a chance to prove its worth, it does so very well. This is one of the reasons that Kuwait has no enemies around the world and has only friends," he said.

A voracious writer, Tharoor has authored 18 best-selling works, both fiction and non-fiction, since 1981. He recently completed a new book with coauthor Samir Saran. "I rarely write books with other authors. This one was partially because it has been a hectic year with elections and all that. The book is called 'The New World Disorder and the Indian Imperative', and it is about how the world has been organized and run since the Second World War," he said.

"The fact is that old governance models are no longer working and there are some real issues about allowing old systems to continue. We need to have a new approach including one in which India would play a bigger role. The book is coming out in January and we are looking forward to sharing it with readers in this part of the world as well, because you have been in many ways victims of the global governance model as well as beneficiaries of it," Tharoor pointed out.

Asked about his fascination of using obscure words like 'flocinaucinihilipilification', he said "it has become somewhat of a joke these days". "It is not a good thing as language is meant to communicate ideas, and if a certain choice of words contributes to unintelligibility, it's not doing the job. Growing up in an intellectual climate without the intrusion of mobile phones and new media, playing with words was something we did in college purely for intellectual curiosity. I have always sought out books for both entertainment and escape and these vocabulary influences come not through studying the dictionary but through extensive reading," he concluded.