

Abu Dhabi to build world's first zero-carbon city



Visitors look at the project model of Masdar City during the opening ceremony of the World Future Energy Summit in the Emirati capital Abu Dhabi. The oil-rich Gulf emirate of Abu Dhabi will start building the world's first zero-carbon city next month, developers said today.

Construction work on the world's first zero-carbon city housing 50,000 people in a car-free environment will begin in the oil-rich Gulf emirate of Abu Dhabi next month, the developers said on Monday.

In Masdar City, which will be run entirely on renewable energy including solar power to exploit the desert emirate's near constant supply of sunshine, people will be able to move around in automated pods.

"This is a place that has no carbon footprint and will not hurt the planet in any way," Khaled Awad, director of the Masdar project's property development unit of the Abu Dhabi Future Energy Company (ADFE), told AFP.

"At the same time the city will offer the highest quality of life possible for its residents," he said on the sidelines of the World Future Energy Summit in Abu Dhabi, capital of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Once completed in 2013, residents will be able to move around the six-square-kilometre (2.4-square-mile) city using a light railway line and a series of automated transport pods.

"They're like a horizontal elevator. You just say where you want to go, and it takes you there," Awad said of the pods.

Unlike the gleaming towers of nearby Abu Dhabi, a model of the Foster and Partners-designed Masdar City displayed at the summit showed only low-rise buildings with solar panels on each roof.

The city will be sited to take advantage of sea breezes, and a perimeter wall will protect it from the hot desert air and noise from the nearby Abu Dhabi airport.

Abu Dhabi sits on most of the UAE's oil and gas reserves, ranked respectively as fifth and fourth in the world. Proven oil reserves on their own are expected to last for another 150 years.

But like most oil-producing countries, the UAE also wants to diversify to ease its traditional economic dependency on oil.

The zero-carbon city, part of the wider Masdar Initiative launched by the wealthy Abu Dhabi government in 2006, is also a flagship project of the global conservation group WWF.

Masdar chief executive Sultan al-Jaber described Masdar -- Arabic for "source" -- as an entirely new economic sector fully dedicated to alternative energy, which will have a positive impact on the emirate's economy.

The Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed al-Nahayan, pledged 15 billion dollars to

Masdar at the opening of the three-day summit on Monday.

"Rest assured, the Masdar initiative and Abu Dhabi will continue to play its part" in developing alternative energy sources, Sheikh Mohammed told some 3,000 delegates gathered for the annual event.

Masdar has also announced plans to build a 350-million-dollar 100-megawatt solar plant, which will later be boosted to 500 megawatts to help ease peak-time pressure on the national grid.

The initiative is also founding a university for future energy studies in collaboration with Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Despite its constant access to sunshine, only parking meters in the UAE are currently powered by solar energy. Even solar water-heaters -- popular in several hot-climate countries -- are seldom seen.

Other Gulf countries have a similar poor record in exploiting solar energy.

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