

*Khaleej Times*

Special Report

# Ras Al Khaimah the emerging emirate



**10** **RAK**  
FREE TRADE ZONE  
YEARS

**10<sup>th</sup> World Free Zone**  
Convention **2010**  
& Exhibition  
November 2-3, 2010  
Ras Al Khaimah  
United Arab Emirates

**10<sup>th</sup> World Free Zone**  
Conference & Exhibition  
**2010**  
Convention



continued to enjoy a steady increase in new company registrations and revenue, which grew by 10 and 11 per cent respectively, as compared to 2008, joining the ranks of top-performing free zones in rebuilding confidence in the world economy. The free zone's stellar management team carefully implemented an action plan which saw it through the crisis – including increased visibility in the local and international markets and a heightened focus on small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

RAK FTZ's efforts to enhance its visibility internationally and reach new markets involved 158 activities in 2009 alone, which mainly targeted key markets, such as Jordan, Syria, India, Lebanon, Pakistan and Egypt. Of the total of 1,935 new company registrations in 2009, India led the way, with 37 per cent of new companies registered, followed by the United Kingdom, with 12 per cent. In the Middle East, Egypt topped the list of new registrations, with 6 per cent.

In the past few years, in line with its ongoing objective to strengthen its brand by meeting

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and exceeding the needs and expectations of existing and future clients, RAK FTZ organised a number of camaraderie-building activities to promote friendship, open communication and a steady exchange of ideas among its members; introduced a number of value-added services; launched *Free Spirit* the bi-monthly magazine, which includes news on the most recent companies to join RAK FTZ, upcoming activities, the best tourist spots in and around town, and much more; and delved into the realm of social media by establishing a presence on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, where it actively shares its latest news and announcements and interacts with current and prospective clients and other interested parties.

As a direct result of all these efforts, Ras Al Khaimah Free Trade Zone Authority has received significant recognition and numerous accolades from around the world and, today, is acknowledged as one of the fastest growing and most cost-effective free trade zones in the UAE, home to more than 4,000 active companies from 106 countries around the globe. Its reputation for affordability, flexibility and broad geographical reach have served it well, and it is rapidly emerging as the preferred business hub in the region, from which investors of all industries and origins can easily access and expand into key emerging markets.

The future holds a lot of promise for the free zone as it continues to strengthen its positioning as a business hub geared at helping SMEs connect to emerging economies, target new key markets such as Turkey, Russia, South Africa and the USA, improve its products and services, increase registrations, and prove that it is, indeed, what its slogan states – 'The Home of Business'.



## From a sparkling vision to a vibrant reality Ras Al Khaimah Free Trade Zone

By William A. Tolbert, Chairman/CEO, Meneren Corporation

This year we formally celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the formation of the Ras Al Khaimah Free Trade Zone, whose establishment was announced in May 2000 by a decree of late His Highness Shaikh Saqr Bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, former ruler of the emirate, may he rest in peace.

As one looks back at the beginning of the development of the RAK Free Zone in 1996, one realises that it was the birth of a sparkling vision for the people of Ras Al Khaimah by a far-sighted Ruler.

In 1996, the first step in making Shaikh Saqr's vision a reality was the creation of the RAK FTZ by Shaikh Faisal Bin Saqr Al Qasimi and the completion of a preliminary feasibility study and a general marketing assessment

by a Dubai firm. This study attached greater value to Shaikh Saqr's vision and led to the creation of the Ras Al Khaimah Free Trade Zone Authority.

The early goal of the free zone was to

accelerate the commercial development of Ras Al Khaimah by stimulating the growth of the local economy for the benefit of the people of RAK. Hulaylah Island was designated as the initial location for the new free zone, and the work to realise Shaikh Saqr's vision began in great earnest.

In 1997, our international free trade zone development firm was retained to help design a 'strategic development plan' for the new free trade zone, one that would optimise the use of the natural resources and hidden potential of RAK, while adding strength to the UAE.

At that time, the drive to RAK FTZ Authority from Dubai was a long one that led to a newly organised free zone planning office in a small blue building. The office was in the same





building it currently occupies, except that there were only open fields around it for many blocks.

At that time, the RAK Free Trade Zone Authority had very few staff members, working under the direction of Shaikh Faisal, and his new energetic Free Zone Manager, Oussama El Omari. It was an exciting time of study and planning by a team that enjoyed working together. During the lunch hours, one of our free zone teammates, Geoff Dawson (the former captain of the English National Cricket Team) would go into the open fields by the FTZ office to teach the local RAK youth how to play cricket, while other staff watched and ate their lunches.

Working together, our team created a "Strategic Vision" for the new free trade zone that incorporated the strengths of RAK, including the existing Ras Al Khaimah Airport, the Port of Mina Saqr and the land available on Hulaylah Island. But we all realised that to succeed, the RAK FTZ would have to include innovative and creative components that would complement other existing UAE and regional free zones.

The "Strategic Profile" that was created was that of a diverse free zone, one that included three free zone sites: A Business Park in Nakheel, an industrial park on Hulaylah Island, and a Technology Park in an area to be selected later.

The innovation component of the plan was in the Business Park, which was to include the first "Business Incubator" in the Middle East. This unique anchor building in the Business Park would allow foreign businesses to set up in RAK very quickly and easily, using the shared infrastructure and services of a true Business Incubator. It would also allow locals the means to quickly and easily start up businesses and form joint ventures with foreign businesses.

This free zone vision was innovative enough that it captured the imagination of Lady Margaret Thatcher, former prime minister of the UK and an international leader known for her support of business innovation, who came as the guest of honour for the inauguration of the FTZ in 2000.

It was a wonderful ceremony at Hulaylah Island, where a special marquee had been erected to host all attending dignitaries and visitors. Lady Thatcher also planted a special



tree to commemorate the ground-breaking, while local tribesmen put on a brilliant display of tribal dancing.

After the ground breaking, the investment of hard work and infrastructure began in earnest and has continued up to today. A short 10 years after its formal establishment, the original vision has expanded to include a Business Park with five state-of-the-art multi-storey buildings; an industrial park covering areas of 128 hectares and 223 hectares along

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the coastal road, which accommodates heavy industries and warehouses; a 100-hectare technology park located opposite the Al Hamra Village and Resort, which accommodates light industries and quality lifestyle projects; a 75,000-square metre Aviation Park to accommodate Maintenance,

Repair and Overhaul (MRO) operations; and an Academy Zone (Education Park), which offers academic programmes to the RAK and broader UAE communities.

And if that wasn't enough progress, in a reflection of its original vision of business innovation and creativity, the RAK FTZ now has business innovation centres in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, and international offices in India, Turkey and the United States. All together, over 4,000 businesses have been registered in RAK FTZ since its inception and thousands more have benefitted from its creation.

In 10 short years, RAK Free Trade Zone has gone from a visionary idea, to a three-dimensional, vibrant reality, with international reach – all of which have benefitted the people of Ras Al Khaimah and reinforced the position of the UAE as a leader in international Free Trade Zones.

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