

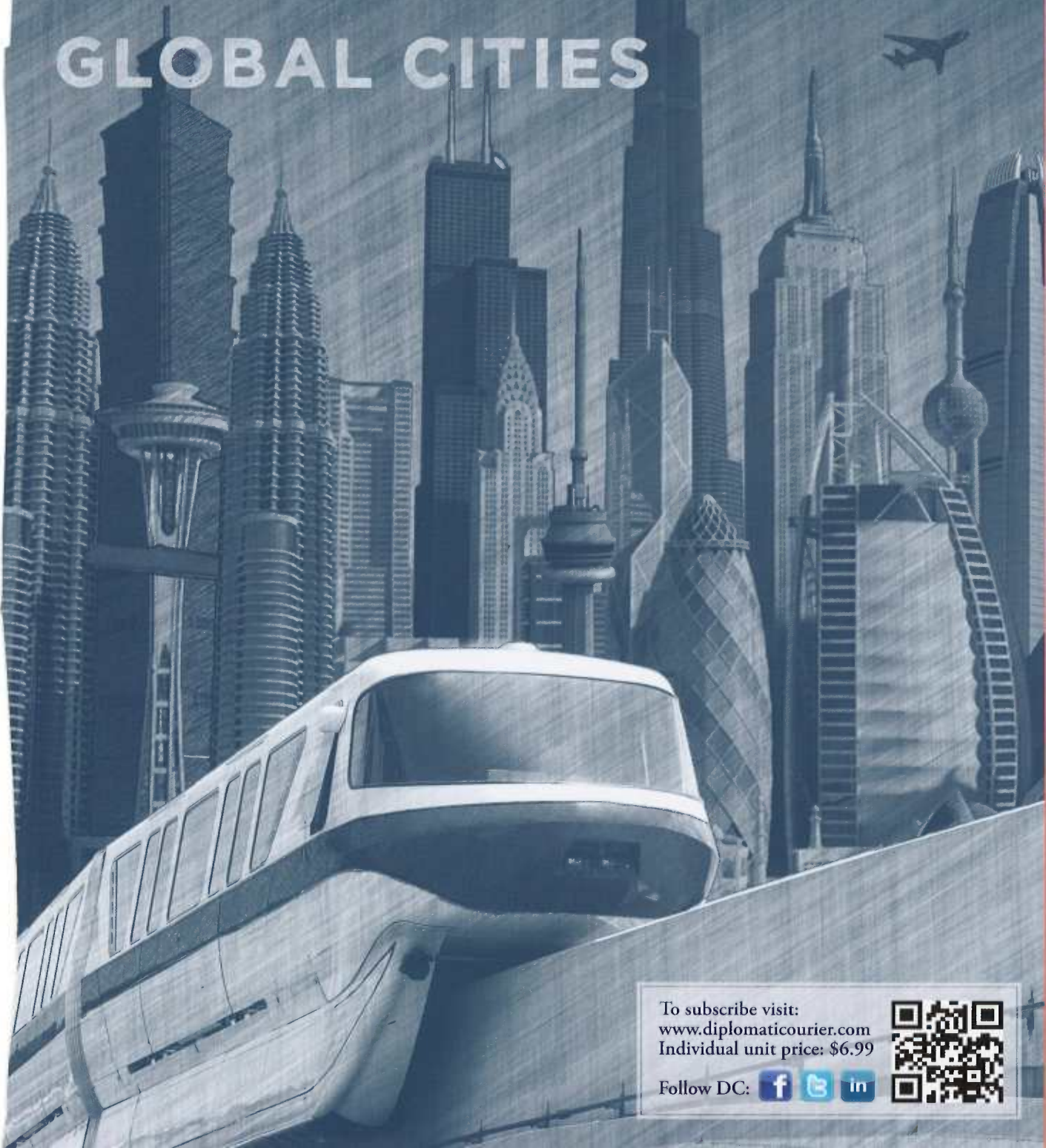


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Masdar

Model Future City

| BY VADA O. MANAGER |

Think for a moment. What if cities, similar to schoolchildren, were each posed that classic question: “What do you want to be when you grow up?” How many would definitively be in a position to answer with confidence and poise?

Any visitor to today’s Abu Dhabi would have no doubt that it would precociously deliver an answer that would involve two dimensions: a fun, sophisticated city with the ambition to become the center for renewable energy in the world.

With its urban architecture complemented by lush green gardens, fountains and investments in state-of-the-art shopping and convention facilities, it already makes a compelling cultural cosmopolitan argument. However, already with approximately ten percent of the world’s petroleum reserves and plentiful natural gas reserves, how realistic is its aspiration to lead the world in renewable energy?

First, context is important. Abu Dhabi is the capital city of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), as well as the largest of the seven emirates federation. Abu Dhabi city is indisputably a seat of power—it is where you will find the president of the state and the government, and the headquarters of foreign embassies, oil and numerous commercial companies. With beautifully sculpted family friendly beaches, it is an island joined to the mainland by two efficient bridges. The city is also nurturing active suburbs on the mainland.

The enormous convention center, luxurious hotels, spas, designer golf courses, theatres and the pending debut of some of the world’s

most famous museums like the Guggenheim, often takes visitors by surprise. Breathtaking shopping malls and indigenous souks in Abu Dhabi make for a great shopping expedition. Cool cafes, clubs and restaurants abound around the Corniche and Yas Island, a burgeoning mixed residential hotel and entertainment area.

While Abu Dhabi is emerging as one of the most important cultural cities in the Middle East, it is also gaining global recognition for its long-term vision and foresight. The city is reinvesting its substantial oil revenues into renewable energy and clean technologies. This bold strategy, born from its Abu Dhabi 2030 plan to transform its non-oil share of the economy from approximately 40 percent to 60 percent, is attracting a diverse set of business executives, heads of state, potential investors and even curious ecotourists. With the active support of the UAE leadership His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the UAE President and HH General Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and chairman of the Abu Dhabi Executive Council, this goal is also tangibly personified by a signature initiative named Masdar.

Located minutes from the Abu Dhabi Airport, Masdar is a new kind of global energy company that takes a holistic approach to the changing realities of power generation, transmission and consumption around the world.

Operating across the full spectrum of renewable energy and sustainable technologies, Masdar is building a livable city on a six km² plot of land and is actually helping develop the “greenprint” for how we may live and work in the future.

It is a sight to behold with its acres of solar panels, specially designed buildings comprising sustainable materials and an actual modernized Arab wind tower that monitors the energy consumption of students living in the dormitories of the Masdar Institute—the academic partnership it has developed with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). At present, some of the largest global companies such as GE, Mitsubishi, and Siemens are establishing headquarters and offices at Masdar within Abu Dhabi in order to take advantage of the fertile knowledge and ability to test certain clean technology innovations prior to taking them to market.

Deepening its commitment to advancing renewable energy at home and throughout



All patrons either walk or take a brief ride on the pictured above computerized, emission free PRTs (personal rapid transit) vehicles to access the action.



Masdar, a planned city currently being built outside of Abu Dhabi, has been termed the 'city of the future'. A number of international firms, including Schlumberger, General Electric, Shell and German technology giant Siemens are also part of the project. Photo courtesy of www.masdar.ae.

the world, Abu Dhabi and Masdar also house the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) made up of approximately 149 countries, achieving one of the fastest ratification processes of any such international body ever established. IRENA's presence, Masdar's expertise coupled with the strict green building standards imposed by the government to conform energy usage in construction developments may soon be emulated elsewhere in the world.

It isn't all work and no play at Masdar. Employees, students, and the public alike are free to enjoy the on-site coffee house, sushi restaurants, and organic grocery fare. Leave your vehicle at the gate—Masdar City has limited vehicular traffic. Instead, all patrons either walk or take a brief ride on the computerized, emission free PRTs (personal rapid transit) vehicles. While regularly open to the public, on designated weekends Masdar hosts special open houses that allow local vendors to sell their organic food and other wares while the children enjoy face painting and other fun activities.

To qualify as a great global city a venue needs to not only provide opportunities for luxurious indulgences but also be a beacon of social innovation. Abu Dhabi delivers on both fronts and more. If New York is respected as a conceiver of world peace because of the UN's presence, certainly Abu Dhabi is playing a similar role in renewable energy and climate change.

It is simply a city that knows what it wants to be when it grows up—and like a municipal version of Microsoft's Bill Gates or Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg in their formative years, it is already building the foundation for an incredible future that can be experienced right now. [DC]



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