

# High Hopes

Middle East projects vie for tallest tower title.

The title of world's tallest building figures to be a fleeting distinction in the coming years. First there was the Burj Dubai, al-

ready the tallest structure in the world at more than 700 meters (2,297 ft.), and on its way up to at least 818 meters — or more than half a mile — at its projected completion in September 2009. Sometime during the next decade Burj Dubai will relinquish its title to the Nakheel Harbour & Tower development, a US\$38-billion project in Dubai that will include a tower more than a kilometer (0.62 miles) high.

"Dubai — indeed the Gulf region as a whole — is on an incredible journey," says Manal Shaheen, Nakheel's director of sales, marketing and customer service. "At Nakheel, we are creating unique locations that don't exist anywhere else in the world, attracting visitors, businesses and residents to become part of the 'Dubai vision.' We see the tall building trend as being not so much about competition, and more about demand. There is a real appetite for and interest in ultra-tall buildings, and always has been. Already, Burj Dubai has become an iconic tower, a tourist attraction, and it achieves some of the highest real estate prices in Dubai. On these grounds alone, we see no reason for developers in the region to stop launching ambitious — and tall — projects."

But a kilometer won't be the height standard for long. Kingdom Holdings in Saudi Arabia announced on Oct. 11 that it will build a tower "over 1,000 meters high" in Jeddah at a cost of \$26.7 billion. Some speculate that the tower will be the first to reach the mile-high club.

## 'Radical Change'

One knowledgeable observer of the skyscraper race says height is no longer an obstacle.

"What is happening is that, since Burj Dubai, the landscape of tall building design has changed enormously," says David Scott, chairman of the Council for Tall Buildings and Urban Habitats, based at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago. "It has enabled architects, engineers and developers

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to see that taller is actually feasible. Before, there were small, incremental developments in height of the tallest buildings. Burj Dubai

has brought a radical change in height."

Scott, a structural engineer and principal with global consulting and engineering firm Arup in New York City, says funding is the most significant construction challenge.

"These projects require a large investment, and developers typically get their payback from the development of land around the towers," Scott says. "Although Burj Dubai is an expensive building, it was quite economical as it developed iconic stature and increased property prices in the area around it. It's a model developers are now using to make substantial developments much greater than a single building."

Shaheen says tall towers are just one segment of Dubai's construction boom.

"The success of the UAE's and indeed Nakheel's real-estate development has been extraordinary, especially when you consider what has been accomplished in a relatively short space of time," Shaheen says. "Nakheel is playing a key role in the vision of Dubai by building homes for more than 3 million people over the next two decades. One must also remember, however, that in the next 10 years there is exceptional expansion planned across a wide variety of sectors, whether it's the rapid expansion of Dubai International Airport and development of Dubai World Central, the growth of Dubai Financial Centre and Jebel Ali Port and Freezone, or the coming online of tourism destinations such as Palm Jumeirah. The Ministry of Planning has predicted that Dubai's population will have almost doubled to 2.1 million by 2010."

But the Middle Eastern skyscrapers will continue to draw global attention. Will even more incredible towers line Middle Eastern horizons? Quite possibly, says Scott.

"I have heard there is a tall building being considered for Kuwait," he says. "There is certainly something going on there."

SITE

**Burj Dubai, the world's tallest building, is now more than 700 meters (2,297 ft.) tall as it progresses toward a September 2009 completion.**



**The Nakheel Tower in Dubai will be the world's first kilometer-high building and its tallest when complete.**

