



In Conversation With
Dr Rashid Al Leem
Director General – HFZ Authority

Hamriyah Free Zone Authority Offering a gateway to global business



Dr Rashid Al Leem, Director General of Hamriyah Free Zone Authority gives us an update on the “next generation free zone” and why the early investors are already enjoying their presence there.

In a relatively short span of 15 years, the Hamriyah Free Zone Authority (HFZA) has charted a course that has netted, to date, over 4,000 investors in the business it knows best – fostering entrepreneurship and economic development. In deploying business solutions for international and domestic investors to access the lucrative MENA market of 1.5 billion consumers and trans-shipment points beyond, HFZA offer a host of incentives that include (i) tax-free environment; (ii) repatriation of capital and profits; (iii) total ownership of business; (iv) “one-stop” concept for application and issuance of licences, visas, work permits, etc, and (v) Ideal geographical location.

Far from resting on its laurels, HFZA has been prolific in continually promoting its services worldwide through active participation in regional and international conferences, expositions and direct interaction with industry players. A regular presence at INTRADE Malaysia, the HFZA team stopped over at Kuala Lumpur en route to the 8th ASEAN Ports and Shipping Conference at Ho Chi Minh City. B&I took the opportunity to catch up with Dr Rashid Al Leem, HFZA's director general, on the latest developments at HFZ.

B&I: Firstly, our congratulations to HFZA for securing membership in the World Council for Renewable Energy (WCRE). What were the specific initiatives in renewable energy that HFZA had to take to gain admission into WCRE?

HFZ: Admission into the World Council for Renewable Energy is not based solely on green initiatives like renewable energy and harnessing of solar power but other considerations as well, such as socio-economic factors and sustainability. We are people-oriented and in order to build and maintain entrepreneurship and economic development at HFZ, we need to provide not just social services for our investors' 10,000-strong workforce but also adequate housing and other amenities. There is a need to also provide an administrative machinery that facilitates investment and is conducive to creating a work environment that is productive and hassle-free. All these aspects of our operations are also taken into consideration for WCRE membership. Green initiatives, as we understand them, is already a practice in HFZ and these are incorporated with the other aspects.



B&I: As a socially responsible corporate organisation, what other initiatives, aside from renewable energy, have HFZA taken or will be taking in your vision towards a “sustainable – NEXT GENERATION FREE ZONE”?

HFZ: Green initiatives are something that everybody else is into these days, but at HFZ we emphasize on “Sustainability – Next Generation Free Zone.” It is a vision that we work towards and it involves more than just greening our surroundings or using solar energy. Among others, we aim to generate stability in our operations so as to provide continuity and a strong foundation for our successors, for the future generation to inherit and build on. We, therefore, have to preserve our resources, to care for the environment and plan our business for long-term sustainability. Ultimately, what will determine our success is not just the bottom line but sustainability and growth rate.



“ We are people-oriented and in order to build and maintain entrepreneurship and economic development at HFZ, we need to provide not just social services for our investors’ 10,000-strong workforce but also adequate housing and other amenities.”

B&I: The Hamriyah She-Q Club, which you launched recently, is “an Investors Friendly Platform encompassing Safety Health and Environmental Quality concepts”. Would you elaborate on how the Platform is structured and how it works?

HFZ: It is a voluntary association, which provides a friendly platform for all investors to raise concepts and suggestions which are e-mailed to all, including us, for information or discussion or consideration. It is an effective communication tool that we provide and we meet every two months to consider these concepts and suggestions especially those pertaining to safety, health and the environment. For example, on World Earth Day, we were able to get all our investors to turn off power and black out for one hour! Also, for the recent oil spill crisis in Gulf of Mexico, our investor BP was able to give us, through the e-mail network, a running account of the situation, of progress in containment and so on. Personally, I am very pleased with the success of the She-Q Club which is, again, another aspect of sustainability.

“ There were 78 companies in HFZ when I first came onboard in 2000 and today we have 4,700 investors; we hope to build on this and increase the number... ”

B&I: Since our last meeting at INTRADE Malaysia in November 2009, has there been any new infrastructural and/or service development at HFZA for the added benefit of your investors?

HFZ: A 14-month project, which has been initiated and will start this month, is the greening of the entire Hamriyah Free Zone. Principally, this will involve the planting of the very resilient (dama) trees and turfing with grass which will be irrigated by sewage treated water. As you know, our country is dry and hot and the project to green HFZ will help to bring temperatures down and reduce the need for cooling. It is a Government project and since HFZ is Government, there are no tax breaks to speak of and also no fees imposed on our investors. In fact, the Government is considering to make it law for roofs of buildings to be greened by planting vegetation, over and above the usual potted plants indoors. On the matter of rail services at HFZ that you raised with my colleague Mr Saud Al Mazrouee in November, it is still in the feasibility-study stage; however, the Government continues to improve the transport and traffic dispersal system with highways and roads. These are crucial to HFZ as we serve a large hinterland of seven emirates and our deep water port facilities is one of the major channels for trade.

B&I: HFZ has been, to say the least, very active in its promotional campaign that is both global and intensive. How would you rate your success thus far? The road shows in India, how did that go?

HFZ: Actually, it is not a one-man show; we have well-informed teams travelling to international events, conferences and expositions worldwide (Mr Saud is, at this moment, in Libya whereas I am moving on from here to Ho Chi Minh City). There



Dr Rashid (centre) with the B&I team.

BIODATA: DR RASHID AL LEEM

A Masters in Business Administration and a doctorate in the same discipline from Florida-based American Global University, Dr Rashid Al Leem is the sum of many parts – chief executive, expert in project/programme management and marketing strategies, motivational speaker, lecturer, author and humanitarian. His outstanding contribution in all these sectors has earned him accolades and awards from various quarters worldwide, eg Gold Medal 9th International Water Symposium for research and strategies in Saving Water, Microsoft International Company certification for Intellectual Properties Protection and Developing Computer Software and honorary PhD (Somali University) for humanitarian service.

Concurrent with his tenure as Director General of Hamriyah Free Zone Authority, he also serves as Director General of Sharjah Sea Ports and Sharjah Customs and as Board and/or Committee member on a number of public and private institutions, eg World Association for Small and Medium Enterprises (WASME), India and Business Development Committee of American Business Council of Dubai and the Northern Emirates.

Dr Rashid actively participates in international courses and conferences on industry, administration and economics in the UK, Singapore, Netherlands, Vietnam, Japan and South Korea. For the latter two countries, he represents the Sharjah Government for sales of oil, gas and LPG. In his own right, he is Chairman and Founder of Alleem Corporation Sharjah, an organisation “dedicated to helping people maximise their communication skills and leadership potential”.

were 78 companies in HFZ when I first came onboard in 2000 and today we have 4,700 investors; we hope to build on this and increase the number before I take my leave in the near future.

The road shows in India covered the cities of New Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai which proved to be particularly difficult as they speak and write different languages in the north and south! It was a new experience altogether for us.

B&I: From our viewpoint, what is the latest count in the number of Malaysian investors in HFZA and how are they distributed in respect of type of industry?

HFZ: So far, there are less than 10 Malaysian investors/companies at HFZ and most are engaged in trading rather than manufacturing. This could be due to the fact that they already have their factories or manufacturing plants based locally here in Malaysia and HFZ becomes their transshipment point for accessing into the regional market. Sime Darby and Eversendai are still the largest Malaysian investors and we will continue to promote and encourage more Malaysian investors to come to Hamriyah, hopefully at INTRADE 2010. ■