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## Digital Dubai: Making Dubai the Digital Capital of the World

When the Dubai Government announced in 2021 that it had processed its last-ever paper transaction, becoming the first government in the world to go paperless, it completed a 20-year journey of digital transformation that changed people's lives across the emirate fundamentally.

Since launching its e-Government initiative in 2001, Dubai had been on a mission to digitalise life in Dubai, making city services as easy, efficient and effective as possible, in alignment with the leadership's vision to make Dubai the best city in the world to live in.

This mission was driven from the top, with His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Ruler of Dubai and Vice President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), putting innovation and digitisation at the centre of Dubai's social and economic strategies. The mission was spearheaded by Digital Dubai (formerly Smart Dubai), the architect of the paperless strategy; Dubai Blockchain Strategy; Happiness Agenda; UAE Pass and the DubaiNow app.

When asked what he believed had been the key theme of Dubai's digital journey over the years, His Excellency Matar Al Hemeiri, Chief Executive of Digital Dubai Government Establishment, said "collaboration", closely followed by "agility and adaptability". Over a 20-year period, Digital Dubai had continuously and quickly adapted as new technologies emerged.

But the process of digital change was not over: there was no finish line on the journey to making Dubai the most digitally-enabled city in the world. H.E. Matar Al Hemeiri wondered what the next priorities should be for Digital Dubai, and how he could make the operation he led as effective as possible.

### Growth of Dubai

The UAE had grown spectacularly since its formation on 2 December 1971, thanks to the discovery of oil and gas in the region and the ambition and vision of its leaders.

Dubai was one of seven emirates and, aware that its limited supply of oil and gas would run out sooner than that of its neighbours, it set out to diversify its economy. Led by the late Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum, and later his son, Sheikh Mohammed, the emirate invested in trade, finance and tourism to position itself as a global business and logistics hub. Landmark projects such as Port Rashid (1972), Jebel Ali Port (1979) Jebel Ali Freezone (1985), Dubai World Trade Centre (1979), and Emirates Airlines (1985) helped to foster this growth, which saw Dubai play a leading role in taking the UAE's GDP from \$14 billion in 1979 to \$104 billion

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