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Dubai emerging leaner, stronger

Knowing the Dubai business world as I do — from major internationals to corner-shops, and from CEOs to taxi-drivers — I did not believe that these resilient people would lose heart to that kind of degree.

By Carole Spiers, Special to Gulf News

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Five months is a long time to be away from my home in Dubai — my second home, that is — and as we touched down at Dubai International, courtesy of Emirates airlines, (probably the best airline anywhere), I wondered if things had really got as bad as the scare-stories would have us believe.

For the world's media have certainly seized upon Dubai as the fallen idol of the Middle East — once, they wrote, 'the byword for 21st century, futuristic architecture and unrivalled prosperity, the epitome of luxury and excellence' — and now depicted as a ghost town of empty shops and restaurants, and huge deserted building-sites topped by motionless cranes, silent in the midday sun.

Knowing the Dubai business world as I do — from major internationals to corner-shops, and from CEOs to taxi-drivers — I did not believe that these resilient people would lose heart to that kind of degree.

Even the reported mass-flight of the expats sounded highly exaggerated. When our plane landed, I'd already made a note to look at the airport car-park. Was it really littered with abandoned Mercedes and Lamborghinis left over from the boom, as their owners fled home? Well, not that I could see!

Next stop was my usual check-in at the Royal Home Hotel Apartments in Bur Dubai. The view from my window showed the building site opposite, as unchanged, confirming the real-estate slump.

Then for lunch at Kamat Indian restaurant nearby where the manager said business was maybe down a little but was now steadily increasing again.

And then to work — my first assignment was a presentation to Dubai Internet City Toastmaster's Group. No sign of pessimism here, instead a group of local business people full of enthusiasm for the growth of the local economy. Next stop will be to present at the Women in Leadership Forum at the Atlantis ...

Travelling back to the hotel along the Shaikh Zayed Road (noting in passing that the superlative, new Metro does not yet seem to have had much effect on the traffic congestion), my vision is inevitably dominated by the awesome Burj Dubai, due for completion in December.

The Burj is a symbol of everything Dubai stands for, and it truly represents the hope of the future. When I consider the sheer extent of the teamwork and technical expertise that must have gone into this great engineering miracle, I am reassured that Dubai has what it

takes to survive the recession and emerge triumphantly.

For it is not just Emiratis whose vision is dominated by the Burj, but the whole astonished world. Don't believe what you may read abroad about Dubai failing to cope with its first recession. Dubai is emerging leaner and stronger — a miracle of faith, planning and the genius of the vision of His Highness Shaikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai.

- The writer is a BBC broadcaster and motivational speaker, with 20 years experience as CEO of Carole Spiers Group, an international stress consultancy based in London.

Reality: Key points

- When you're away from Dubai, you can get a depressing view from the media
- My first day back in Dubai confirmed my belief in a resilient local culture
- The Burj Dubai represents the triumph of technology and close teamwork