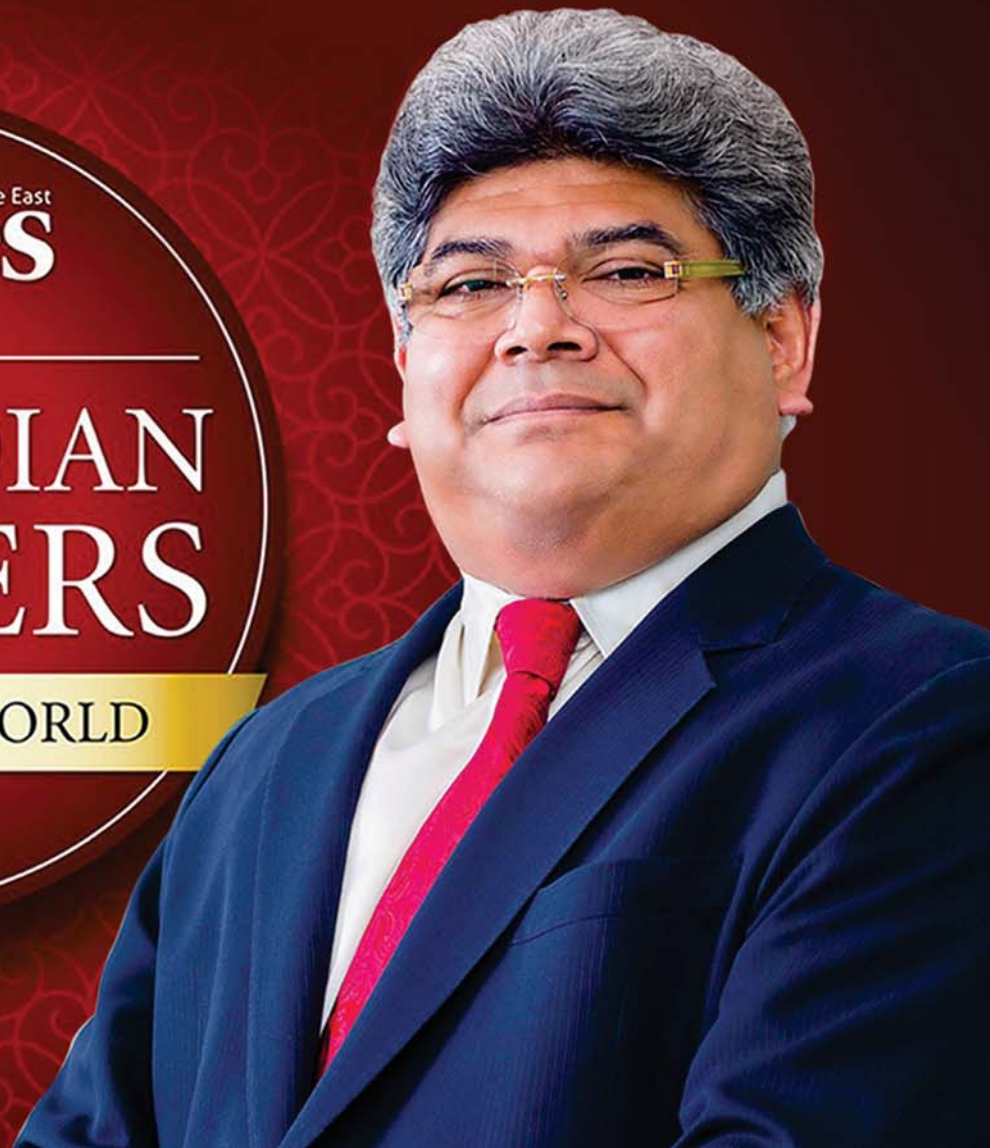


Mr. Dilip Rahulan recognized
and awarded by Forbes ME as
one of the 'Top Indian Business
Leaders in the Arab World 2016'

Forbes Middle East
— The **4th** —
**TOP INDIAN
LEADERS**

IN THE ARAB WORLD

2016



The Wanderer

Watching his grandfather repair ships in his hometown of Kochi, India, Dilip Rahulan knew he wanted to be an engineer. His profession took him to some unlikely places—from Tanzania to Botswana and Kuwait. Now based in Dubai, his company Pacific Controls is behind that city's move to digitize.

BY KELSEY WARNER

Just off the highway, south of Dubai, is an anonymous industrial park populated by some of the construction and information technology giants responsible for the rise of this city. Sprawling low-slung buildings stretch in every direction. One sticks out among them: a round blue glass structure fronted by a white iron gate and shrouded by tall evergreens. A Dubai Civil Defence guard stands at the entrance. It is the headquarters of Pacific Controls, which automates and monitors all sorts of systems—from fire emergencies to air-conditioning and electricity.

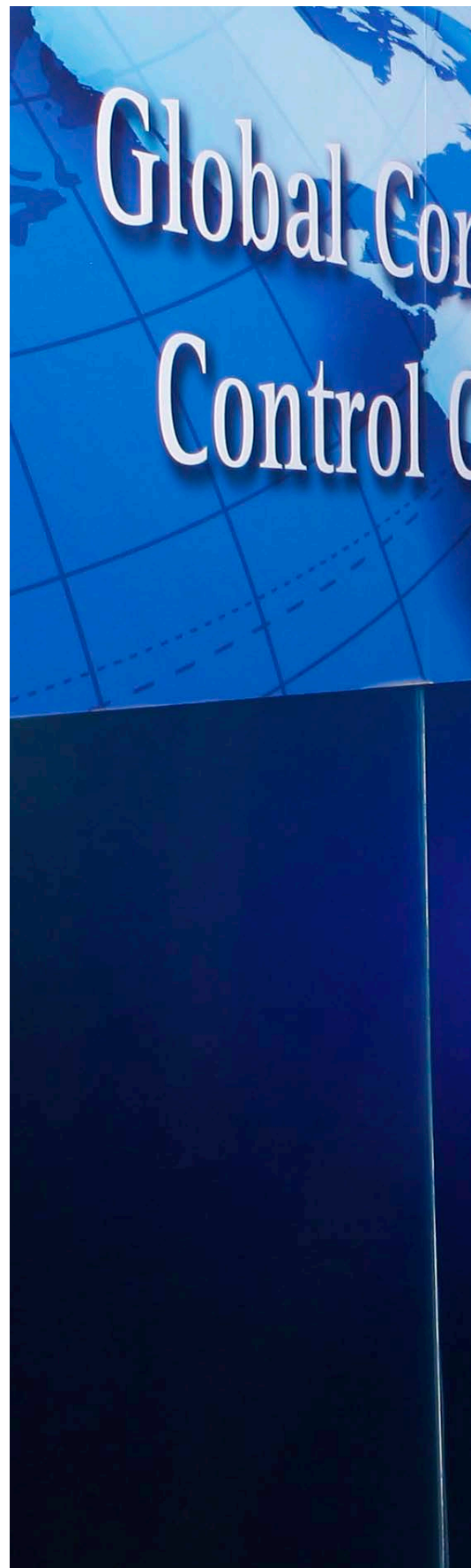
The company's mega projects on behalf of the Dubai government and real estate developers are shaping the way people live in the emirate. Last year, it generated \$330 million in revenue, a 29.4% increase over 2014.

"No one believed devices could communicate with each other," says Dilip Rahulan, the 60-year-old founder and executive chairman of Pacific Controls. He did. A large man in a navy pinstripe suit, his eyes sink behind big cheeks when he smiles.

Rahulan owns a 65% stake in the company; Hassan Saadat Yazdi and his son hold 35%.

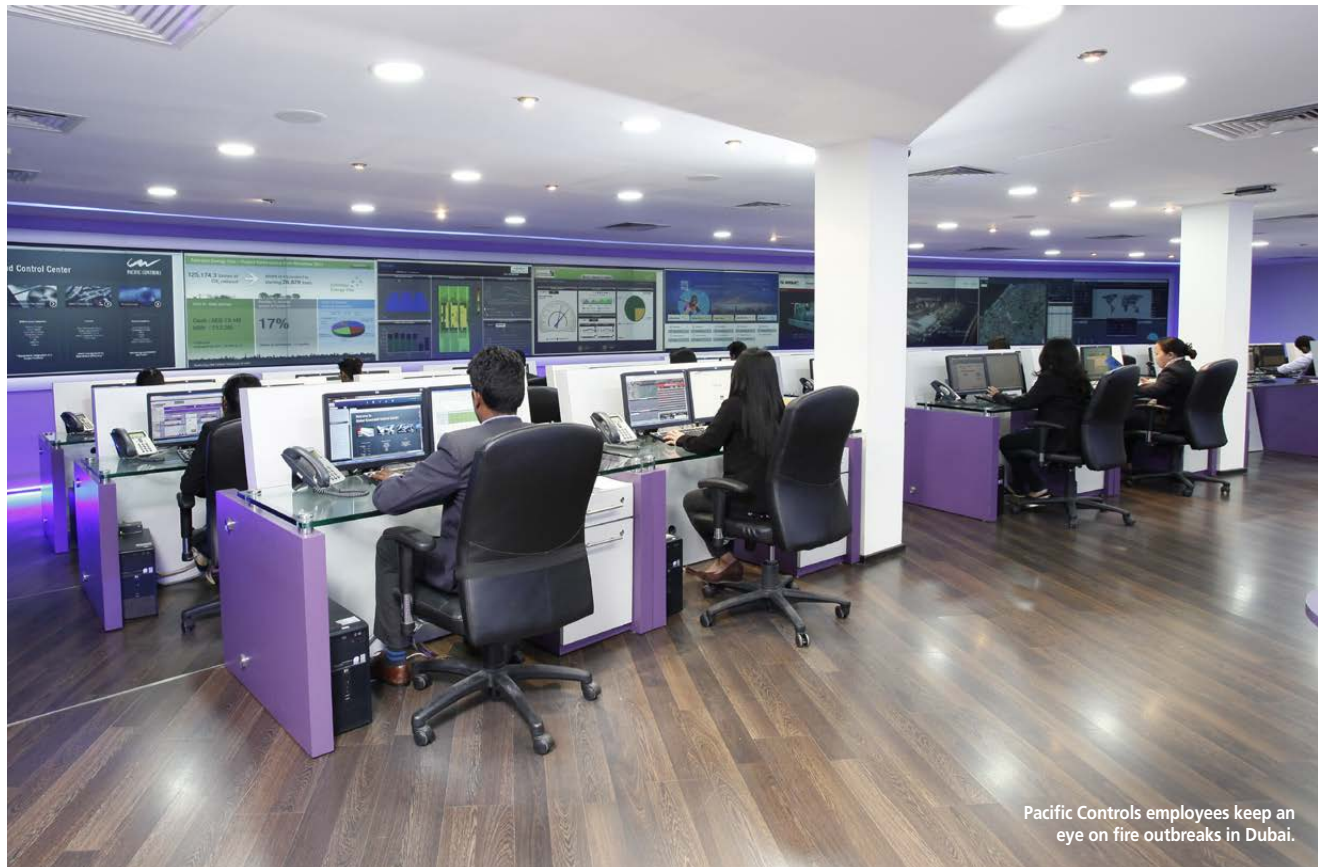
In Rahulan's Dubai, everything is connected. The home, workplace and smartphone respond to life's daily needs. Software and sensors adjust the temperature in a room, signal the amount of food in a refrigerator, detect the purity of drinking water, turn the lights on or off, and warn against high carbon dioxide levels. The list goes on. Rahulan expects a device or a smartphone to control these actions in homes across Dubai by 2020.

Already, in 57,000 buildings in Dubai, if a detector senses smoke in an apartment, it triggers an alert to an emergency response team at Pacific Controls. On the fourth floor, an employee pulls up a blueprint of the building



RAJAJA / FORBES MIDDLE EAST





Pacific Controls employees keep an eye on fire outbreaks in Dubai.

on a computer screen marked with the location of the alarm. The phone number of the resident or the building flashes. The responder calls to determine the level of intervention. If it is not a false alarm, he notifies the closest Dubai Civil Defence fire trucks—located on a GPS-enabled map. From detection to dispatch, response is designed to take under two minutes.

In its first year of use in 2009, Pacific Controls’ fire safety system helped reduce the number of fires by 18%. Crews were able to ignore false alarms, and rush to a scene before a disaster occurred.

Last year, the company got a contract from the government to help build Dubai’s “Smart City.” Homes that are part of the project have a device that monitors smoke, gas leaks and water pump malfunctions. It looks like a plastic thermostat with a digital screen made by Honeywell, and is connected to Pacific Controls.

Rahulan built his career around these public-private partnerships.

An only child, his parents left him with his grandfather in his native city of Kochi, India so he could remain in school,

while his father, a railway engineer, managed a station in the mountains of southern India.

One day, Rahulan didn’t show up at home after school. He had wandered, his neck “stretched up, up,” staring at the clouds. When his uncle found him, Rahulan was too embarrassed to admit that he had followed the clouds, and took a beating instead.

His grandfather was his boyhood hero. A marine engineer, he fixed up boats coming into Kochi’s port from the Gulf, China and the U.K. It took Rahulan three years to convince his grandfather to allow him to board one of those ships. He struck a deal with him to learn English, in exchange for an excursion to a freighter.

His grandfather’s profession inspired him to become a mechanical engineer, and he earned his bachelor’s degree from TKM Engineering College in Kollam in 1981. He then worked for one year at his uncle’s company, which sold air-conditioners. The ships, however, gave Rahulan a glimpse into another world.

A college friend encouraged him to travel to Tanzania. In 1982, with \$500 in his pocket, he left, and found a job with

a World Bank project building University of Dar es Salaam.

On a weekend trip to Zambia, he was struck by its affluence compared to Tanzania. A real estate developer he met through a friend offered him a job as a senior mechanical engineer at his firm. For three years, Dev Sabrawal was his mentor and boss. Rahulan was in charge of building a cluster of homes, ensuring the lights turned on and water ran from the taps.

When Sabrawal took a leave of absence in 1985, Rahulan was put in charge. He grew the business and got a taste for managing teams and pitching projects. But, when his boss returned, he fired Rahulan. Zambia had defaulted on loans from the World Bank, and its economy was collapsing. “He called me into his office and said we can’t afford you anymore. I got the pink slip in my hand,” recalls Rahulan.

On his way out of Sabrawal’s office, he ran into an architect friend, Pramod Patel. Patel encouraged Rahulan to start his own company, and promised him a contract.

Rahulan cries telling this story. He blows his nose, making a booming sound. “All these things take minutes to happen,” he says.

In 1986, using his savings, he formed North Atlantic Engineering Consultants. Zambians who had worked with Rahulan on housing, hospital and school projects, helped with introductions for new work. His first contract came from Zambia Telecommunications.

That same year, Botswana sold part of its diamond mines to De Beers, so it could build its infrastructure. “There were only 1,500 kilometers of road in Botswana at the time,” says Rahulan. Sensing an opportunity, he expanded his business there in 1989.

“The first decision I made when moving to Botswana was using tech as much as I could,” says Rahulan. He hired computer engineers from the U.K. and Australia, and purchased Hewlett Packard computers in Singapore.

On Thursdays, he invited government officials at his office, serving them tea and coffee, and showing them computer-aided designs of housing and municipal projects. At that time, he also became interested in electronic security. The government gave him a contract to build security systems at its mining headquarters and the central bank.

In 1992, Rahulan met Kuwait’s former Minister of Communications, Abdulrahman Khalid Al-Ghunaim, through a friend. He decided to move to Kuwait, which was in the midst of rebuilding after the Gulf War. Al-Ghunaim sponsored his move, and became his business partner in a company called Security Systems. Institutions and companies still relied mostly on guards for security. “It was a big task to demonstrate the electronic capabilities of security,” says Rahulan.

To educate potential customers, he hosted weekly open houses at his office. People watched in awe a surveillance camera pan, tilt and zoom.

The company secured contracts with the U.N., the U.S. Department of Defense, and the Kuwait government. Using emerging technology from the U.S., Rahulan put card readers and cameras at some 40 checkpoints along the Iraq-Kuwait border. Shopkeepers hired him to install surveillance and alarms.

With Dubai’s real estate booming in the new millennium, Rahulan saw again another opportunity. Iconic projects were underway: Emaar was developing Dubai Marina and Arabian Ranches, and Nakheel was building Palm island. He left Security Systems and his Kuwaiti partner, and went to Dubai in 2006, where he headquartered Pacific Controls.

That same year, he attended a BuilConn conference in Amsterdam, where presenters talked about automating buildings. Presentations “flew over everybody’s head,” recalls Rahulan, but he understood the potential.

The keynote speech inspired him to pitch a project to automate air conditioning, lighting and elevators, as well as moving sidewalks and baggage claim at Dubai Airport’s Terminal 3.

“We went and pitched convergence,” says Rahulan. But, the American firm in charge of Terminal 3 picked someone else. When the relationship with the subcontractor didn’t work out


after six months, it called Rahulan and gave him the job.

Incoming flights ping the control tower from 60 kilometers away, triggering a cascading chain of events—up to 300. Surveillance systems are on when passengers get off a plane; trains pull up to transport them; luggage conveyer belts begin their loop.

“This is about achieving a vision of making Dubai a happy, sustainable city”

Terminal 3 put Pacific Controls on the map. “It was an iconic project that brought us limelight,” says Rahulan.

Integrating systems that speak to one another has generated “a gold mine of data,” he says. The company maintains a cloud data center, the size of four football pitches, which it co-owns with telecom operator Etisalat. It has information on the number of fire trucks on the road at any given moment, or the average indoor temperature of a house in Arabian Ranches during the summer months. The data can be used to increase the number of fire trucks, for example, or to detect patterns in fire outbreaks.

“This is about achieving a vision of making Dubai a happy, sustainable city,” says Rahulan. He smiles and his eyes disappear behind his cheeks. 

أقوى قادة الأعمال الهنود في العالم العربي لعام 2016

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الشرق الأوسط

Forbes

TOP INDIAN
BUSINESS
LEADERS
IN THE ARAB WORLD

ديليب راهولان

رئيس مجلس الإدارة التنفيذي
لشركة (Pacific Controls)
يرى أن المستقبل لإدارة
المباني إلكترونياً

رفاهية العالم الرقمي

تسهم (Pacific Controls) في توفير أسلوب حياة أفضل
لسكان دبي بتنفيذها مشروعات كبرى عبر أحدث
تقنيات تكنولوجيا الاتصالات



الدول الأخرى... 8 دولارات
قطر 30 ريالاً
عمان 3 ريالاً
البحرين 3 دنانير
السعودية 30 ريالاً
الإمارات 30 درهماً