

Event milestones, expert insight, world events and the projects that shaped each year as Breakbulk Middle East grew from a start-up to a powerhouse for networking.

Breakbulk Middle East launched in Abu Dhabi and attracted 2,000 attendees. Sessions focused on cost pressure, risk mitigation and coordination across EPCs, transport, ports and heavy-lift, proving a collaborative forum was just what the region needed as oil reached new lows. There was plenty to discuss, with two conference stages running simultaneously.



“In Saudi Arabia you are not given the opportunity to make mistakes more than once. They will hold up cargo for six months if need be. You will learn the rules very quickly.”

— Corey Henry, Group Logistics Manager, Fluor Corporation.



GCC PROJECTS:

Sub-US\$50-per-barrel oil prices prompted what Höegh Autoliner analyst Teresa Lehovd described as a “paradigm shift” in the Middle East. “The current prices expose the risks of overdependence on one single commodity and emphasize the need to diversify,” she said. Infrastructure projects were expected to thrive, while refining and petrochemicals faced pressure.



WORLD EVENTS SHAPING THE MARKET:

The global oil price collapse put some projects on hold and shifted resources toward diversification. Saudi Arabia's leadership change and the launch of Vision 2030 signaled a longer-term rethinking of project priorities.



2016 | PROJECT PROFESSIONALS EXERCISE PATIENCE



The event returned to Abu Dhabi and recorded a 20% jump in attendance as word spread about the new industry gathering. Ongoing carrier bankruptcies brought a sobering tone and renewed focus on risk mitigation. Project timelines stretched, front-end engineering slowed final investment decisions and patience became a recurring theme across sessions.



“We've seen Hanjin file for bankruptcy over the last couple of months. We've seen Flinter declare bankruptcy. What kind of risks are we facing as cargo owners?” — Cyril Varghese, Global Logistics Director-Commercial & Strategy, Fluor Corporation.

GCC PROJECTS:

Upper Zakum, the world's second-largest offshore field, located on artificial islands off Abu Dhabi. Petrofac's Matteo Pollara presented the logistics case study, which included transporting 194 modules manufactured in South Korea, Singapore, China and Italy for ADNOC.



Credit: ADNOC



WORLD EVENTS SHAPING THE MARKET:

Oil prices began to improve, but the downturn proved “much longer than we thought it could be, particularly given the long lead times between engineering, contract awards and construction,” Cyril Varghese said.

2018

REGROUP, GEAR UP, GET MOVING

No event in 2017 as the event timeframe shifted from October to February



With oil prices more stable, previously delayed projects began moving again. Programming shifted from surviving the downturn to preparing for projects returning to market. UAE government patronage was secured, bringing wider attention to the event and reinforcing its role as an industry meeting point. Conference sessions asked, "Is it time to invest in the GCC?" and addressed the special requirements for logistics personnel working in post-conflict environments such as Iraq, where timelines, security and access could not be taken for granted.



“When you look at a project in Iraq, pre-planning is most of the work, not the execution.”
— Tina Benjamin-Lea,
Logistics Manager, SNC Lavalin



GCC PROJECTS:

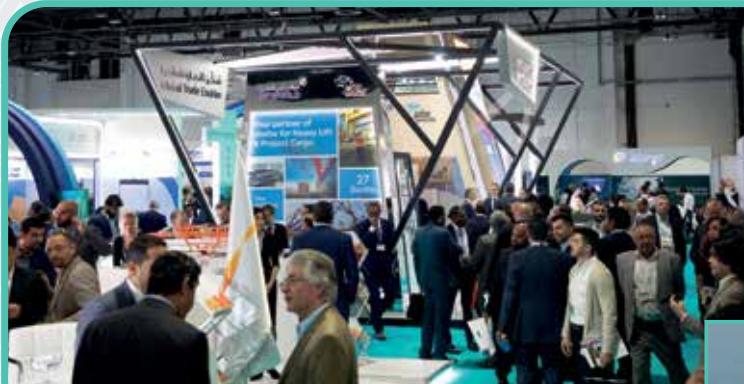
Upstream projects underway: Barzan Gas Development in Qatar and Bul Hanine field redevelopment in Qatar, both representing US\$10 billion in investment. These projects and more were discussed in "Capital Project Outlook for the GCC" by Terry Willis, regional director for the Energy Industries Council.



WORLD EVENTS SHAPING THE MARKET:

Oil prices began a gradual upward trend, projected to reach between \$50 and \$60 per barrel by 2020, easing approvals for new projects.

2019 | THE BIG MOVE



Breakbulk Middle East moved to Dubai and attendance increased 83% to 3,408. While the sector mix stayed consistent, the event expanded and added new community programming, including the launch of Women in Breakbulk. The conference also featured its first dedicated spotlight on Saudi Arabia.



“Breakbulk Middle East represents a platform that brings significant value to the industry and can therefore be very effective in reinforcing collaboration between the UAE and Saudi Arabia upon shared goals for maritime advancement.” – Rayan Qutub, CEO, King Abdullah Port.



WORLD EVENTS SHAPING THE MARKET:

Vision 2030 continued shaping Saudi project pipelines, with emphasis on giga-projects, public-private partnerships and non-oil sectors.



GCC PROJECTS:

Mohammad Jaber, then with Agility, highlighted the “huge expansion of the refining sector,” including Saudi Arabia’s Jazan Refinery and Terminal Project. Jaber is now CEO of Combi Lift Projects MEA and a founding member of Breakbulk’s Future Thinkers group.



Credit: Saudi Aramco

2020 | JUST IN TIME



Breakbulk Middle East took place just before COVID-19 became a global pandemic. Sessions focused on sequencing, modularization and fixed delivery schedules, with logistics planning framed around immovable timelines. The official Breakbulk MEET app was introduced, and Education Day welcomed 122 students, including a surprise visit by H.E. Eng. Ahmed Al Khouri.

For the first time, the event actively encouraged participation from Africa, reflecting growing project and logistics ties between the regions. A practical session, "Preparing for Big Project Work in Africa," delivered much-needed advice.



"There are several key misconceptions about working on projects in Africa, and perhaps the most common one is the assumption of what basic infrastructure is present." – Lars Greiner, Consultant, HPC Hamburg Port Consulting GmbH.



Credit: Lars Greiner

GCC PROJECTS:

The Africa panel with representatives from JGC and ExxonMobil, discussed the proposed Rovuma LNG project in Mozambique, slated to become the world's largest project of its kind. The project was subsequently delayed until recently due to an insurgency. ExxonMobil now targets FID in 2026, with first LNG production around 2030.

2022

TOGETHER AGAIN

No event in 2021 due to the pandemic



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“The market is growing, Saudi Arabia is the land of opportunity, there is so much construction, there is so much investment – and it is fast-tracked.”
 – Sue Donoghue, Arab Cluster CEO, (Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia), DHL Global Forwarding; Vice Chair European Chamber of Commerce Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.



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GCC PROJECTS:

Unit 4 at the Barakah Nuclear Power Plant in the UAE was under construction, due to start commercial operations in 2023. This marked the first nuclear power plant in the Arab world and an important piece energy diversification, discussed in the “Regional Outlook, Project Financing, and Investment” session.



Credit: ENEC



WORLD EVENTS SHAPING THE MARKET:

Russia's invasion of Ukraine boosted demand for Gulf oil and LNG as Europe reduced Russian imports, improving availability of funds for new energy and infrastructure projects.

2023 | NEW NETWORKING DAY & NIGHT



With the pandemic firmly in the rearview mirror and an active project landscape, interest surged. Attendance jumped 93% year over year to 6,496, while country representation rose from 55 to 98.

The first Breakbulk Golf Day and Welcome Reception at the Monkey Bar were held, both quickly becoming permanent fixtures on the Breakbulk Middle East agenda.



“Breakbulk Middle East has been one of the best events we have attended.” — Anfal Zahir Al Affani of Oman’s Ministry of Transportation, Communication and IT.



WORLD EVENTS SHAPING THE MARKET:

Elevated energy prices continued to support project development across the GCC.

GCC PROJECTS:

Ruwaish Derivatives Park in Abu Dhabi and the Ras Al Khair crude oil-to-chemicals project in eastern Saudi Arabia, each calling for investments of around US\$20 billion. EIC’s Ryan McPherson discussed these and more in the standing-room-only session “MENA Project Review” and in Breakbulk Studios.



2024 | TORRENTIAL RAIN CAN'T STOP BREAKBULK

Attendance reached 7,197, while a 101% rebook rate signaled further growth ahead. Heavy rain delayed the opening and flooded parts of the exhibition hall, but staff cleared the water and dried the carpeting. Within hours, the doors opened and the networking began.

Participation by Chinese companies increased. Greatkun, a freight forwarder, delighted attendees with a traditional dragon dance that made its way throughout the exhibition hall, a first at Breakbulk Middle East.

Programming focused on what shippers need from suppliers and the path to decarbonization in the maritime sector, while Women in Breakbulk tackled how to become a more influential leader. Panelist Alia Janahi, vice president of HSE at DP World in the GCC and the first female Emirati to join the company's HSE department, shared how early in her career she designed a new uniform after realizing her abaya was not suitable for climbing aboard vessels. Others followed her lead, a great example of influential leadership.



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"In my experience, having ladies in the department makes a difference. And you should be really proud!" — Alia Janahi, vice president of HSE, DP World
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GCC PROJECTS:

Ruwais LNG project in Abu Dhabi, the first facility in the MENA region to run on clean power. US\$5.5 billion EPC contract awarded to a joint venture between Technip Energies, JGC and NMDC Energy, included in this year's MENA project opportunities session.



WORLD EVENTS SHAPING THE MARKET:

Red Sea attacks forced vessels to reroute around southern Africa, increasing transit times and insurance costs. "Rerouting is adding an extra 20 days to the Middle East to Mediterranean routes. On supply chains that has a big impact and is effectively reducing the fleet," AAL Shipping's Christophe Grammare said during the session "The Balancing Act: Demand, Supply and Economy."

2025 | A NEW MILESTONE

Attendance surpassed 10,500 from more than 120 countries. Five countries – the UAE, India, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and China – accounted for around 80% of attendees. The event hosted 193 exhibitors, four times as many as in 2015, along with a record number of shippers. Programming included core topics: MENA projects, risk management, Africa opportunities and Saudi giga-projects, and introduced AI strategies and a new perspective on energy transition projects.



GCC PROJECTS:

Panelists pointed to a potential US\$50 billion spend on energy transition projects by the end of the decade, including carbon capture, battery storage and energy systems. "These new technologies are actually changing the way projects used to happen and the way logistics service providers used to traditionally work," said Fluor's Vineet Bakshi.



“I believe that in the next 10 to 20 years, Saudi Arabia will become a leading exporter of cutting-edge decarbonization technologies to the world.” – Kohki Uemura, president and CEO, DENZAI



WORLD EVENTS SHAPING THE MARKET:

Red Sea security incidents persisted, keeping insurance premiums high, while other global disruptions had limited impact on the region.





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JEBEL ALI PORT SETS BREAKBULK RECORD, HANDLING 630,000 TONNES IN OCTOBER 2025



HIGHEST MONTHLY VOLUME DRIVEN BY INDUSTRIAL AND CONSTRUCTION DEMAND ACROSS THE UAE AND WIDER GULF REGION.

DP World's flagship Jebel Ali Port handled a record 630,000 tonnes of breakbulk cargo in October 2025, the highest monthly total in nearly two decades.

While the past decade saw strong growth in containerised, bulk and RoRo cargo, this new record reflects the renewed scale of industrial and construction activity across the region. Recent increases in imports of iron and steel for major UAE projects, such as the Dubai Metro Blue Line and the

DWC airport expansion, along with rising sugar exports, have been key drivers.

Building on a strong 2024 performance, when breakbulk volumes rose 23% year-on-year to 5.36 million metric tonnes, this new record reflects continued momentum across the UAE's industrial base and its growing role in global trade.

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This milestone reflects the confidence businesses place in Jebel Ali as the region's most reliable gateway for cargo. The steady rise in volumes demonstrates how we are helping customers meet growing infrastructure demand while keeping supply chains efficient and resilient. As the UAE continues to invest in infrastructure, manufacturing and logistics, we remain committed to expanding our capacity, technology and sustainability initiatives to support long-term growth.

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Shahab Al Jassmi | Chief Commercial Officer, Ports & Terminals at DP World GCC

Breakbulk cargo, including heavy materials and oversized items used for large-scale construction and industrial projects, remains a vital part of Jebel Ali's operations. Supported by Jafza's integrated ecosystem and its global end-to-end logistics capabilities, DP World ensures the seamless movement of complex cargo across regional and global supply chains.

The new milestone comes as Jebel Ali continues its transformation into one of the world's most advanced multipurpose ports. Over the past decade, Jebel Ali has consistently achieved record performance across multiple cargo categories, including containers, RoRo and bulk cargo. The latest breakbulk record reflects a broader trend of multi-cargo growth, demonstrating the port's agility in responding to shifting global supply chains.

RECORD VOLUMES AT JEBEL ALI PORT



Breakbulk
630,000 tonnes

October 2025
Highest in
nearly two decades

Bulk
583,368 tonnes

August 2025
Highest in
nearly a decade

RoRo
103,226 units

April 2025
Highest in
DP World history

Containers
1.41 million TEUs

December 2024
Highest in
DP World history

Jebel Ali Port continues to play a central role in the UAE's economic transformation, supporting the expansion of construction, manufacturing and infrastructure sectors, which are key pillars of Dubai's Economic Agenda D33 and the national Operation 300Bn strategy.

