

**H**.E. Saif Mohammed Al Midfa, a seasoned finance and marketing professional, is the CEO of Expo Centre Sharjah (ECS), the exhibition wing of the Sharjah Chamber of Commerce and Industry. He is also the Chairman of two of the most prestigious regional chapters of global exhibition associations, International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE) and Global Association of the Exhibition Industry (UFI), Paris. He is also the Chairman of the Council of Arab Economic Unity's Exhibition wing -- the Arab Union for International Exhibitions and Conferences.

Ever since he joined ECS in 2004, H.E. Midfa has been instrumental in expanding the business horizon and profitability of the company. Apart from spearheading the expansion of ECS and the launch of several new trade and consumer exhibitions, Midfa has played a significant role in promoting Expo Centre regionally and internationally. In this process, he also helped in placing the Emirate of Sharjah prominently on the global exhibitions map.

During this period, the number of shows organised and hosted by Expo Centre Sharjah has gone up considerably. Besides, ECS has also become a member of several prestigious international associations.

Under the astute leadership of Midfa, Expo Centre is planning its next stage of growth, especially taking into consideration the upcoming mega events like the World Expo 2020 and the Fifa World Cup 2022.

SteelFab, the Middle East and North Africa region's most comprehensive trade event for the metal working, metal manufacturing and steel fabrication industry has firmly established its place as the most dynamic and dependable platform for the regional steel fabrication, metal working and metal manufacturing industry in a span of ten years. From the launch edition itself, the event was intended to cater to the complete A-Z requirements of the steel fabrication industry where Metal Forming and Welding & Cutting were the major elements.

The event has continuously showcased the largest welding & cutting segment to be found anywhere in the Middle East and North Africa and has been identified by the regional industry as the sourcing point for all welding requirements as well. The welding & cutting segment is diverse, complete and offers a substantial variety of brands that it has in fact cut down the travel requirement to international shows, and the regional buyers are quite content to complete all their sourcing at SteelFab.

**H.E. Saif Mohammed Al Midfa, CEO, Expo Centre Sharjah (ECS)** in an exclusive interview with **Sanjay Singh, Associate Editor of Steelworld** outlined the significance of the event and said that the exhibition has grown in stature from a very modest beginning. Excerpts



# SteelFab Grows in Stature

**- H.E. Saif Mohammed Al Midfa**

## Can you give a brief about SteelFab Exhibition since its inception ?

- SteelFab is the Middle East and North Africa region's most comprehensive trade event for the metal working, metal manufacturing and steel fabrication industry. From very modest beginnings the show has grown in stature to become one of the leading industry events in sector. During this journey, the ups and downs of the economy have left SteelFab untouched and its growth curve has never seen a drop right from its inception over a decade ago through the troubled times of 2008 and the oil slump. From its initial focus of the metal working industry, the show has expanded its focus areas to cater to various segments of the manufacturing sector. The 13th SteelFab 2017 will feature nearly 400 exhibitors who will display nearly 1,000 brands from across the world through special segments such as Stainless Steel, Wear Resistant & Hard Facing Cladding, Welding & Cutting, Machine Tools and Pipe & Tube Machinery, and is expected to attract more than 9,000 trade visitors from more than 80 countries.

## How important is this event to the steel fabrication industry in the UAE and the GCC countries ?

- Well before oil prices crashed, GCC countries had been focusing on non-oil sectors to boost growth. Post-oil slump, this has intensified. For e.g., the UAE has put in place all necessary plans to take the non-oil sector's contribution to as high as 80 percent by 2021 through intensive investment in the industrial sector, along with other industries. Investments are also pouring in to sectors like infrastructure and manufacturing due to

upcoming mega events. And, the immediate beneficiary of these moves is the core sector that propels the steel fabrication and metal working industry.

SteelFab is the most comprehensive event in the region where fabricators can meet global suppliers, explore latest industry products and developments, and find innovative tools and machinery, helping them improve productivity, increase cost-effectiveness and discover new solutions for all of their metal forming, fabricating, welding, and finishing needs.

**Can you give some details about the profile of exhibitors taking part in the event?**

- SteelFab showcases machinery and equipment in metal forming, surface preparation & finishing, grinding & cutting, machining & other allied engineering disciplines. For the previous edition, SteelFab featured 376 direct exhibitors from 43 countries displaying close to 900 brands. The show includes special focus areas such as Welding & Cutting, Machine Tools, Tube & Pipe, Wear Resistance, and other attractions like Foreign Pavilions, Live Displays, Seminars & Technical Presentations, apart from a vertical, Fasteners World Middle East.

Rising foreign participation has become a major Unique Selling Proposition (USP) of SteelFab. For its past edition, SteelFab hosted Italian, German and Taiwan pavilions, featuring 31, 23 and 22 exhibitors, respectively. Besides, there was impressive presence from Turkey, India and China. SteelFab also enjoys support from leading industry associations from Italy, Germany, Taiwan and the UK.

**Which are the major countries taking part in the exhibition?**

Exhibitors from the US, Germany, Poland, Italy, the UK, the UAE, Turkey, India, China, Taiwan, France, Holland, Switzerland, Japan, Spain, South Korea, Canada, Austria, the Netherlands, Australia, Egypt, Portugal, Finland, Sweden, Greece, Belgium, Singapore, Czech Republic, Saudi Arabia, Denmark, Ukraine, Lithuania, Slovakia and Bulgaria, among others, are taking part in the show.

Q From the Indian perspective, why is it important for this Asian country to showcase its products in terms of market penetration?

One of the main advantages that awaits exhibitors from India is the strategic location of

Sharjah, which has a catchment market of over one billion people across the Middle East, CIS region, North Africa and the Indian Subcontinent. Within the UAE, Sharjah is connected to each of the other emirates by an impressive network of roads. The emirates of Dubai and Abu Dhabi are situated 15 and 150 kilometres away respectively.

Besides, Sharjah, which is widely acknowledged as the industrial backbone of the UAE, is a manufacturing stronghold and contributes more than 48 percent of the country's gross industrial output. It is also home to one-third of all the manufacturing establishments in the UAE. This means exhibitors will have ready access to the industrial units based in Sharjah.

Since Sharjah is a gateway to the entire MENA region, exhibitors can also explore



*“One of the main advantages that awaits exhibitors from India is the strategic location of Sharjah, which has a catchment market of over one billion people across the Middle East, CIS region, North Africa and the Indian Subcontinent.”*

business opportunities across the region. They can also develop and maintain synergies with the Indian business community in the UAE and the region.

**How big is the steel fabrication industry in the UAE and the neighbouring Gulf countries in terms of turnover?**

- The metal fabrication market is segmented on the basis of end use into construction, manufacturing, energy and power, oil & gas, pipelines, aerospace and others. Most metal fabrication units are focused on providing finished as well as fabricated metal products that can be directly used to assemble various parts.

The global metal fabrication market was valued at US\$16.35 bn in 2015 and is forecast to expand at a CAGR of 3.0% to reach US\$21.38 by 2024, according to Transparency Market Research.

**Sharjah Expo is becoming a major exhibition centre in the Middle East.**

**Your comment on this important development?**

- Expo Centre Sharjah (ECS), which was established nearly three-and-a-half decades ago as the first exhibition facility in the UAE, is today the region's leading trade exhibition venue and a geographic as well as financial landmark for the Emirate of Sharjah and the country. Over the years, apart from hosting and organizing some highly focused B2B and B2C shows, ECS has played a key role in prominently placing Sharjah as one of the top 10 business cities in the Gulf region and the UAE on the global exhibitions map. In 2017, we will be celebrating our 40th anniversary and preparations are on for big celebrations. In recent past, we have added more space, revamped our website and launched our app. By 2020, we will be fully equipped to contribute in all possible ways for the success of World Expo 2020.