SOLAR IMPULSE AIMS TO GIVE HOPE IN TURBULENT TIME

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A solar plane circumnavigating the globe aims to give hope to the young generation across the globe in turbulent times, apart from promoting the potential of clean energy, according to a co-founder and co-pilot of Solar Impulse-2.

The Abu Dhabi-backed solar plane is expected to complete its global flight in the coming days.

“Yes, this is also our goal [giving something new to look forward to … some positive examples] to the young generation,” Andre Borschberg, the co-founder and co-pilot of Solar Impulse 2 (Si-2), told *Gulf News* in a telephone interview from Cairo. He was responding to a question on the relevance of projects like Solar Impulse in the wake of last week’s tragic incidents in different parts of the world.

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“There is a lot of bad news in the media. Bad news [tends to] stay in the media [for a while]. The person who committed the atrocity in Nice [in France] will be there in the news for at least one more week, making him and his atrocities famous,” Borschberg said.

But, often good news appears once and is not mentioned again, he said.

“Our project talked of new opportunities. I have noticed young kids … their eyes shine when they visit our plane. That is incredible,” Borschberg explained.

He said Solar Impulse wanted to give the young generation a message that they could make the impossible possible. It helps people to change their attitude towards what they perceive as “impossible”, Borschberg pointed out.

Borschberg and his colleague, Bertrand Piccard, were told that building an aircraft with the weight of a car was impossible. “But our project proved that it was possible,” he said.

Borschberg created a major human record by flying the solar plane in its 8,924-km flight from Japan to Hawaii in around 118 hours, breaking the previous record for the longest uninterrupted journey in aviation history. For almost five days and five nights, he piloted the plane wearing an oxygen mask as it climbed up 8,000 metres during the day, its solar cells storing enough energy to propel the aircraft through the night.

Borschberg and Piccard has been taking turns to pilot Solar Impulse 2 in its global circumnavigation, that will be completed at Abu Dhabi from where the epic journey started in March 2015.

Although the plane was scheduled to take off from Cairo at Saturday midnight for its final leg to Abu Dhabi, certain unexpected developments caused a delay. The weather was not favourable and Piccard, who had to fly the plane, was feeling sick, an official spokesperson of Solar Impulse 2 told *Gulf News*. The new departure date will be announced as soon as the engineers find a favourable weather window for Solar Impulse 2 to take off, she said.

Piccard explained his condition in a tweet: “I’m sick. Stomach upset. I prefer to postpone the take-off @solarimpulse. I cannot go flying for 48 hours in that shape. Sorry.”

Borschberg told *Gulf News* that the flight to Abu Dhabi might take around 48 hours, which could be extended up to 72 hours, depending on the weather conditions.

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