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Afghan political leaders and their Western allies appear to agree that efforts should be made to engage the Taliban, or at least elements among Nato's adversaries, there is no obvious reciprocal desire from the other side.

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## Feng shui to the rescue in hard times

Melanie Swan

Last Updated: August 04, 2009 9:59PM UAE / August 4, 2009 5:59PM GMT

DUBAI // Recession may be bad news for most people, but the feng shui business is booming, with victims of the downturn willing to spend thousands to try to turn their misfortunes around.

One consultant, who charges Dh8,000 a session, has seen an increase in clients from spas to financial corporations and media outlets, all seeking an eastern approach to surviving the present hard times.

"People here are opening up to more holistic approaches in all areas of life," said Shivani Adalja, who has been operating in Abu Dhabi since 2005.

"Not everything can be cured by science and medicine. There is an aspect of life that is mysterious."

Feng shui, a Chinese term meaning "wind water", involves rearranging or adding touches to homes and workplaces to allow for what practitioners call a "positive flow of energy".

Feng shui experts will add details in specific "wealth and prosperity" areas, such as hanging Chinese coins, adding water features or bamboo plants.

Daniella Russell, health and leisure director for the Wafi Group, which manages malls and hotels in Dubai, turned to Ms Adalja when the company underwent recent renovations. Since the upgrades, she said, employees had reported feeling more "calm and comfortable". One arm of the company has seen a 35 per cent increase in business.

"Shivani has made some very astute observations about the business and has really helped to increase activity in several areas," said Ms Russell. "In one area, she told us to add plants to increase the activity, and we really could see results overnight and it's continued to increase from there."

After refurbishing the group's offices, Ms Russell applied the same

principles to her home.

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Deema Sayegh, an interior design consultant who worked on the renovation of Cleopatra's Spa at the Wafi mall, said it was hoped that by incorporating Ms Adalja's feng shui principles, the company could improve its profit margins.

"If clients like the spa, they will come back," she said. "Staff will do a better job, which will in turn increase business."

Priya Khanna, feng shui master at Elements Feng Shui, who has been in Dubai for 20 years, witnessed a similar surge from January to March from people desperate to make positive changes in their lives. Previous recessions had also seen a similar thirst for alternative routes to prosperity, she said.

"They were looking for a quick-fix treatment," she said. "Feng shui at the time was something new in Dubai so they wanted to give it a try."

"As it wasn't connected with any kind of religion or ritual so they thought it was an easy case of changing their environment to change their life."

She has known many clients enduring tough times, especially in the banking and property markets. The past eight months had brought in new people, including Russians, Lebanese, Britons, Emiratis and Indians.

"I've had businesses approach me which I've never dealt with before, everything from fruit and vegetable companies to car garages and fabrication units," she said.

Over the years, Ms Khanna has dealt with many large companies, including Emirates Bank and RAK Ceramics. Although during the recession larger companies have clamped down on spending, small and medium-sized businesses and personal clients continue to come in.

Proshat Sarabloo, an Iranian who runs Zensation in Dubai, works with all kinds of businesses, from spas to telecommunications companies.

"Last year, I was working with developers but this year it's much more individual," she said. "Now, many businesses are applying feng shui to land they are buying, to build on it in accordance with feng shui principles."

Donald Trump, the late Body Shop founder Anita Roddick and Virgin's Sir Richard Branson, as well as corporations including Hilton Hotels and HSBC banking group, are all reported to have consulted feng shui experts to help their businesses.

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