State Budget 2015

State expenditure has been estimated at R.O. 14.1 billion while the State revenues have been estimated R.O. 11.6 billion, making a deficit of RO 2.5 billion.
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Given the present situation in the region where oil prices are slumping, and the surrounding speculations about the future of the country’s development projects and the direct and indirect implications that may potentially affect several sectors, an important issue surfaces. Specifically, there is an apparent need for other sustainable income-generating resources to be introduced, the aim being to reinforce the contribution of the actually existing resources by putting in place tangible plans that are implementable in the near future.

Taking into consideration the proverb “every cloud has a silver lining” it is hoped that such a setback in oil prices would lead us into a holistic revision of the policy of dependence on oil which proved to be inappropriate to be relied upon for quite a long time.

In the same context, we should not ignore the increasing importance of the businesses sector and the necessity of ensuring that this sector is accorded the greatest possible attention, including its various commercial, industrial and service fields. We are required to focus on this trend in the light of the current oil prices. This means that more support should be accorded to the private sector organizations providing them with all the necessary tools that enable them to undertake their role as an active contributor to country’s sustainable development with yet more effectiveness in the future.

Referring to the rights of these organizations to obtain government support and subsidy, we need not remind those in charge of these organizations of the duties and responsibilities that they should sense towards their society and nation. We are satisfied that the awareness of this role is on the rise which indicates that the Sultanate of Oman, with the energies of its youths and resolve of its men, women and decision-makers, is capable of addressing and overcoming the implications of retreating oil prices which, if any, should not continue for long.
His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said issued on the first of January 2015 the Royal Decree No. 1/2015 ratifying the 2015 State General Budget.

The Ministry of Finance in a statement said that the approved expenditure for the year 2015 has been estimated at RO 14.1 billion, with a growth rate of about 4.5 per cent from the last year’s spending estimates. Overall public revenues were estimated at around RO11.6 billion, with a one per cent decline compared to last year revenues. The estimated 2015 deficit amounts, therefore, is RO2.5 billion, (21 per cent) of revenues and (eight per cent) of domestic product.

With respect to the components of public spending, current expenditure of nearly RO9.6 billion, represent 68 per cent of the total public spending, while the investment expenses worth RO 3.2 billion accounts for 23 per cent of total public expenditure to cover spending on development projects, capital expenses for the production of oil and gas and the projects being carried out by government companies. Estimated expenses of the subsidy programmes amount to around RO1.1 billion, eight per cent of the overall public expenditure.

With regard to public revenues, total revenues are estimated at RO 11.6 billion including income from oil worth RO9.16 billion, representing 79 per cent of total revenues, while non-oil revenues are estimated at RO2.44 billion, forming a ratio of 21 per cent of total revenues.

The statement issued by the Ministry of Finance pointed out that the most prominent investment projects – across main sectors – that will be implemented directly by the government or through its companies during the year 2015 which bring prospects and opportunities to stimulate the economic activity in the Sultanate and create plenty of jobs opportunities include the following:
• Execution of the railway project (Sohar-Al Buraimi phase).
• Execution of Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the dualization of Adam - Thumrait road.
• Executing Fishery Industries Complex project in Duqm.
• Executing the infrastructural works for the commercial and governmental quays at Duqm Port.
• The project of new residential city for the people of the wilayat of Liwa.
• Completion of the wastewater network in Muscat.
• Establishment of the wastewater plants at various Wilayats.
• Investment projects of the Oman Food Investment Holding in the fields of poultry, Meat and Dairy products, etc.
• The infrastructure development project to increase aquaculture production.
• Projects of Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran) - three hotels (four & five stars) in Muscat, as well as completion of the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre project.
• Projects of Oman Oil Refineries & Petroleum Industries (Orpic): Liwa Plastics Industries Complex and Muscat-Sohar Product Pipeline project.

The statement also pointed out that the budget allocations include financial allocations of RO 9 billion (same as last year's) to meet the social requirements in the fields of education, health, housing, training, support and other social services as follows:

Education sector amounting to RO 3 billion, representing 21.3 per cent of total public spending, comprising opening and operating 41 new schools in several parts of the Sultanate.

Internal and external training programs at RO 95 million.

Health sector with allocations amounting to RO 1.6 billion representing 11.3% of the total spending. It includes opening and operating 11 new hospitals and health centers in different parts of the Sultanate.

Allocations for social insurance welfare amounting to RO 129 million.

Housing Sector at RO 2.3 billion, of which RO 55 million for housing assistance programs supervised by the Ministry of Housing. This includes construction of new houses in different Wilayats plus an amount of RO 15 million to provide easy housing loans. In addition, RO 15.4 million for housing loans program of the Oman Housing Bank.

RO 1.8 billion for subsidies and exemptions including subsidies for interests on housing and development loans beside subsidy for electricity, water, fuel and some basic foodstuffs.

The Ministry of Finance's statement pointed out that as for the privatization programme, a plan to privatize a number of state-owned companies is currently being prepared for implementation over the coming three years (2015-2017). The execution of this plan will start immediately upon approval.

The statement also pointed out that due to the effects of lower oil prices on the State General Budget, it was necessary to take some temporary precautionary measures which the government currently discusses to maintain the integrity and the stability of financial and economic situation and the developmental gains, but these procedures – as has previously been declared to the media – will not affect the aspects related to citizens living, the provision of basic services for them, the
employment both in the public and the private sectors and the State employees’ dues which are considered among the constant fundamentals for the government.

The press statement of the Ministry of Finance about the Draft General Budget of the State for the fiscal year 2015 reads as follows:

In light of the approval of the General Budget of State promulgated by Royal Decree No. (1/2015), the Ministry of Finance is pleased to review the performance indicators of the national economy and the most important features of the general finance and the estimates of the 2015 Budget as follows:

First, the National Economy performance:
Despite the challenges posed by the decline of oil prices to the global economy, particularly to the economies which depend primarily on oil revenues, the solid ingredients and foundations which the national economy possesses as represented in its stability at the macro level, the completion of the infrastructural system and the legislative structures related to the economic and investment work environment, the rates of growth achieved in non-oil sectors, the qualified national human resources, as well as the financial stability represented in healthy general finance, the banking system, monetary policies and a stable local currency, constitute the mainstay of the national economy to ably face and overcome the global financial variables.

In this context, the national economy is expected to continue to grow at acceptable rates, driven by the growth of non-oil activities in addition to a strong effective domestic demand and high oil production rates.

Projections indicate an increase in the rate of real growth of the national economy to 4.4 per cent in 2014 compared to about four per cent in 2013. As for 2015, the planned growth rate is projected at five per cent, while growth rate of the non-oil activities, which form an important tributary for the national economy growth, is expected to reach 5.5 per cent, at constant prices.

The growth of this group of activities will mainly be concentrated on the construction, electricity, water, trade activities and services of public administration, defense and transfer industries.

Regarding the monetary and banking developments in the Sultanate, the conditions of the banking sector remained solid. The sector showed a marked improvement in performance during the period January-November 2014, where the total credit balance of commercial banks rose by 10.5 per cent amounting to around RO 16.8 billion, compared to RO 15.2 billion for the same period in 2013. The balance of total deposits in these commercial banks rose by about 14 per cent which amounted to about RO 17.3 billion by the end of November 2014, compared to RO 15.2 billion by the end of November 2013.

Data show a steady decrease in interest rates on deposits in Omani Rials from 1.32% in August 2012 to 1.27 per cent in December 2013, and to 1.006 per cent in November 2014. In line with global interest rate trends projections in the coming period, interest rates are expected to fall in the Sultanate at a greater level which will contribute to supporting the bank credit growth and stimulate investment activity.

Thanks to increased oil and non-oil exports, the national
economy is also projected to continue to maintain its external balances, but the size of current surpluses is expected to retreat as a result of the noticeable rise in domestic demand and the falling oil prices. As for the current balance, its surplus rate to GDP is projected to drop to 2.9% in 2014 compared to about 8.2 per cent in 2013.

**Muscat Securities Market performance:**
Despite the market’s recent volatility, it is hoped that the market will witness a stable performance during 2015 in anticipation of a balanced growth of the national economy, besides the continuation of public spending at current rates and the good performance of listed companies.

As for the inflation index, consumer prices have registered a significant decrease in 2014 to about 2.2 per cent compared to 3.1 per cent in 2013. The outlook for 2015 indicates a continued decline in the rate of inflation to two per cent due to the decline in global basic commodity prices.

**Second, Public Finance:**

1) General Budget Performance and financial results for 2014: Actual public revenues until the end of fiscal year 2014 are expected to amount to around RO 13.9 billion, compared to total estimated revenues of RO 11.7 billion in 2014 budget, i.e., an increase of 19%. The increase is due to the rise in the actual realized price of oil than the budget’s assumed price and the rise in most actual items of non-oil revenues. As for actual spending, it is expected to reach around RO 14.5 billion, i.e., a 7% increase than the approved budget estimates, as additional allocations have been approved during the year to cover the emerging needs during the implementation of the budget.

2) Economic and Social Objectives of the 2015 Budget:
The financial policy of the Sultanate is based on a set of key objectives, which form a sustainable framework for public finance to coincide with the total goals approved in the eighth five-year plan [2011-15] and its financial framework. The General Budget seeks to achieve a set of important goals that contribute to the continued and balanced economic and social development, namely:

1) To continue the investment spending required to maintain economic growth rates and stimulate domestic demand, where the economy is expected to bump up by five per cent at constant prices geared by non-oil sectors as it is expected to achieve a growth rate of 5.5%.

2) To continue to implement and supplement the development projects being currently implemented in various sectors as per the schedules set for these projects. These include hospitals, schools, airports, roads, fishing ports, expansion of ports, electricity and water, and wastewater projects;

3) To proceed with the implementation of the new priority projects approved for 2015 according to the current five-year plan;

4) To continue to develop and raise the efficiency of public services provided to citizens;

5) To pay due care to social aspects such as health, education, housing, social care and various support programs;
6) To continue to support and stimulate small and medium enterprises and to implement programs relevant to their development and productivity raising and to expand in the provision of services and programs under Al Raffd Fund in the Sultanate’s governorates;

7) To continue to develop and raise the efficiency and productivity rates of the oil and gas sector;

8) To continue to improve the quality of public and university education, raise the efficiency of spending on the sector, to provide funding for the scholarship policy for higher and technical education, both internal and external, so as to avail more opportunities for Omani students in higher education, and finance employment-linked training programs;

9) To finance the budget deficit by issuing long-term Islamic bonds and instruments, so as to activate the domestic capital market and raise the efficiency of exploitation of domestic savings;

10) To maintain the public debt level at safe haven in proportion to GDP so as to support the stability of prices in the local market and protect the rights of future generations.

3) General Budget estimates:

The approved public spending in the 2015 Budget has been estimated at RO 14.1 billion, with a growth rate of about 4.5% from the approved last year’s spending estimates. Overall public revenues were estimated at around RO 11.6 billion, with a one per cent decline compared to last year’s approved figures. The estimated 2015 deficit amounts, therefore, to 2.5 billion, i.e., 21% of revenues and eight per cent of domestic product. With respect to the components of public spending, current expenditure of nearly RO 9.6 billion, represents 68% of the total public spending, while the investment expenses worth RO 3.2 billion account for 23% of total public expenditure to cover spending on development projects, capital expenses for the production of oil and gas and the projects being carried out by governmental companies. Estimated expenses of the subsidy programs amount to around RO 1.1 billion, i.e., nearly eight per cent of the overall public expenditure.

With regard to public revenues, total revenues are estimated at RO 11.6 billion including income from oil worth RO 9.16 billion, representing 79% of total revenues, while non-oil revenues are estimated at RO 2.44 billion, forming a ratio of 21% of total revenues.

**Third: Investment Program:**

Following are some of the most prominent investment projects across main sectors that will be implemented directly by the government or through its companies during the year 2015 which bring prospects and opportunities to stimulate the economic activity in the Sultanate and create plenty of jobs opportunities:

- Execution of the railway project (Sohar-Al Buraimi phase).
- Execution of Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the dualization of Adam- Thumrait road.
• Executing Fishery Industries Complex project in Duqm.
• Executing the infrastructural works for the commercial and governmental quays at Duqm Port.
• The project of new residential city for the people of the wilayat of Liwa.
• Completion of the wastewater network in Muscat.
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• Projects of Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran) - three hotels (four & five stars) in Muscat, as well as completion of the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre project.
• Projects of Oman Oil Refineries & Petroleum Industries (Orpic): Liwa Plastics Industries Complex and Muscat-Sohar Product Pipeline project.

Fourth: Spending allocated to social aspects:
Budget allocations include financial allocations of RO 9 billion (same as last year's) to meet the social requirements in the fields of education, health, housing, training, support and other social services as follows:
1) Education sector amounting to RO 3 billion, representing 21.3% of total public spending, comprising opening and operating (41) new schools in several parts of the Sultanate;
2) Internal and external training programs at RO 95 million;
3) Health sector with allocations amounting to RO 1.6 billion representing 11.3% of the total spending. It includes opening and operating 11 new hospitals and health centers in different parts of the Sultanate;
4) Allocations for social insurance welfare amounting to RO 129 million;
5) Housing Sector at RO 2.3 billion, of which RO 55 million for housing assistance programs supervised by the Ministry of Housing. This includes construction of new houses in different Wilayats plus an amount of RO 15 million to provide easy housing loans. In addition, RO 15.4 million for housing loans program of the Oman Housing Bank;
6) RO 1.8 billion for subsidies and exemptions including subsidies for interests on housing and development loans beside subsidy for electricity, water, fuel and some basic foodstuffs.

Fifth: Privatization Program:
A plan to privatize a number of state-owned companies is currently being prepared for implementation over the coming three years (2015-2017). The execution of this plan will start immediately upon approval.
The OCCI branch in Musandam Governorate has launched the first station of an initiative adopted and launched by chamber’s branch in Musandam entitled “Takamul” in cooperation with the Six Senses Resort in Diba. The ceremony was presided over by H.E. Sayyid Khalifa bin Al Mardas Al Busaidi, Governor of Musandam, in the presence of H.E. Wali of Diba, Hamid bin Mohammed Zaman Al Raeesi, board chairman of OCCI Musandam branch and Their Excellency, Sheikhs, government officials and board members of OCCI Musandam branch.

**MOU signed**

A memorandum of understanding was signed during the inauguration ceremony between the OCCI Musandam Branch and the Six Senses Resort aiming at further strengthening cooperation in various and diverse fields as well as the role of SMEs in Musandam, provision of working contracts to SMEs and contribution to providing employment opportunities for jobseekers through self-employment in private enterprises that are consistent with the services provided by the Resort.

**Inauguration ceremony**

During the inauguration ceremony of Takamul initiative, two shops were opened at the Six Senses Resort souq (market), one for female fashion, cloths and over-garments (abaya) and the other for sale of pottery and handicrafts. The two enterprises were selected to complement the resort and the services provided to its visitors from all over the world. The Six Senses Resort is one of the prestigious luxuries in the world and is conventionally patterned to provide diverse services to its visitors.

**Ensured partnership principle**

His Excellency Sayyid Khalifa bin Al Mardas Al Busaidi, Governor of Musandam and patron of the inauguration ceremony, in a statement expressed his happiness at the implementation of partnership principle by establishments which resulted in opening two local enterprises. He added that Takamul initiative adopted by the OCCI Musandam branch is one of the pioneering ideas of setting up genuine partnerships between small and medium enterprises and other community organizations. He stressed the need to support SMEs and adopt their ideas and coordinate with various establishments and companies in the society to also support them and turn their enterprises into reality. The opening of the two enterprises at the resort is a confirmation of such partnership which enables the establishments to play their roles each in the area of its specialty.

**Strengthening the role of establishments**

Hamid bin Mohammed Zaman Al Raeesi, board chairman of OCCI Musandam branch, said that the initiative was meant to support and strengthen the role of emerging and small and medium enterprises in Musandam Governorate and adopt small and medium enterprises to integrate with the promising sectors in the governorate for further development of the private sector and its capabilities and skills. It is also intended...
to encourage innovation and creativity in the economic sectors in the marketing of local products and crafts. The initiative in its first station is meant to shed light on specific services and designs in support of resorts and tourist hotels and strengthen the spirit of partnership among various economic sectors. The initiative constitutes an integrated trend intended to stimulate and simulate future plans and conform to the directives and ambitions of developing the private sector and highlighting its role in support of SMEs.

Strengthening tourist services

“The memorandum of understanding signed between the OCCI Musandam Branch and the Six Senses Resort is an important step towards supporting SMEs and consolidating the principle of partnership among all private sector organizations in the Governorate of Musandam,” said Hamid Al Raeesi. He further thanked the board of directors of the Six Senses Resort for their significant cooperation and constructive contribution to the implementation of the first station of Takamul initiative and their adoption of diverse shops in line with the services provided to the visitors and tourists.

Genuine support

Noorah bint Mohammed Al Dhahoori, an owner of a shop for sale of ladies over-garments and women’s fashions, expressed her happiness at the opening of her first trade enterprise. She added that the initiative was a genuine support to SME owners, particularly in the Wilayats. “Since my enterprise in the area of fashions, it thus goes in line with the tourist sector in Diba. I thank and appreciate OCCI Musandam branch for its cooperation and adoption of such initiatives which enrich and strengthen SMEs and build an appropriate economic working environment. I also thank the Six Senses Resort for giving me such a remarkable opportunity for display of our products at their resort,” she said.

Commemorative gifts

Maisoon bint Al Mur Al Shuhi, an owner of antiquities, gifts and traditional handicraft shop, said that the tourists normally seek handmade traditional things like fumigators, incense and perfumes to take home as memento and gifts. “It is for this reason that the idea of my enterprise emerged believing that such products provide tourists with clearer picture about the nature of the region and the products are most famous for. That is why I chose the Six Senses Resort as the best place for promotion of these tourism-related products,” she said.
Al Hosni's passion for the Omani Masar was like a compass that oriented his trend towards entrepreneurship. It was the motivating force that enabled him to set up his enterprise in the form of “Woolen Masars Factory”. With this passion as well, he set his objectives working hard and diligently to realize them. “Any enterprise must be coupled with well-defined objectives and clearly drawn-up plans that are capable of ensuring the success and further promotion of the enterprise,” he said commenting on his enterprise.

Ahmed Al Hosni is the owner of Omani Woolen Masars Factory. He set off in a journey of research exploration into the components of the Masar and manufacturing methods of a Masar that is of an original Omani nature. Seven years of investigation and research were just enough to turn Ahmed's dream into reality, i.e. to have a Masar that is typically Omani.

In a Royal gesture by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the factory was renamed the “Oman Wool Masar Al Masar” which gave the factor an impetus to move forward with yet more confidence and progress. Al Ghorfa Magazine had the following interview with him:

Tell us about the beginning of the Omani Masar Factory?
The beginning was my passion for the Omani Masar. It was my compelling emotion towards this great legacy of Oman which prompted me to dig deep into the secrets of its making. The Omani Masar has been my concern for quite a long time and that was why I did everything that I could in order to know every details of the product and make distinction between various types of Masars. At that point, I took a decision to learn the details and components of the Omani Masar and its tailoring and making methods. That was the first practical step with which I began my enterprise which is the first of its kind in the Gulf and Middle East.

A research and investigation journey...
The quest into this manufacture began in 1996 and continued until 2003 during which I made a tour of several countries producing and exporting the Omani Masar that took me to...
India, Indonesia and China. The research and investigation journey took seven years that were quite enough to provide me with the necessary experience and know-how to embark upon the making and tailoring of the genuine Omani Masar exclusively made by qualified and trained Omanis.

The idea then began to materialize into my mind and I began to draw the general features of the factory which was like a long-awaited dream for me. Then I started another journey for the specifics, i.e. the search for companies that supply Masar sewing machines. Through my visits to various countries of the world I did not come across any machinery specialized in the making and tailoring of the Omani Masar. There were no such machines as the Masar used to be handmade.

I visited Japan, Indonesia, India and Korea where I presented the idea to the machine makers until I could eventually enter into contract with a company that understood my idea and agreed with me to manufacture special and unique equipment for the making of the Omani Masar.

Following delivery of the required machinery, the factory was set up in Al Maabella Industrial Area, Muscat Governorate, in 2008 with an initial production rate of 40 Masars per day using only one type of first grade wool locally known as “Nisf Tarmah”.

In your opinion, why is it important for factories producing Omani identity products to be exclusively operated and managed by Omanis?

Any products featuring Omani identity, traditions and heritage must be purely made by Omanis who have better knowledge than others in the making of such products to meet their specific requirements. Omani products such as the Masar for example should be made by Omanis only because they are the ones who are going to use these products. In our factory, we know what this product means to Omanis and to the Omani identity, symbols and traditions that it has been bearing since ancient times. It is important that the factory owner must be Omani and that the workers in the factory must also be Omanis who are responsible for symbolizing and depicting the Omani identity and image on the product and working hard to preserve their heritage by adding an original Omani imprint on the product. The Omani manufacturer also knows the real moral value of the product such that his first concern is not profit making only but to preserve the products and work towards further promoting it. Foreign factories do not take into account these requirements as their sole concern is profit-making without paying any attention to the moral and traditional value and identity of the product.

What characterizes the products of the woolen Masars factory and what are the factory’s quality standards?

The factory produces high quality products of the original Omani Masar. It is easy for anyone to distinguish between our factory's products and those imported from abroad. Our products feature an Omani identity because our designers and color mixing technicians are Omanis who are experienced in Omani taste and the colors that are suitable to Omanis.

How do you market your products? Do you have representatives in the Wilayats?

The Omani product is self-promoting product. We believe in the quality of our products and their ability to have prestigious place among the best Omani products as well as to compete in the market. Our customers’ role is very important in our marketing plan and that is why we cater for providing them with the best products in order to ensure their satisfaction which is an effective and reliable tool for the promotion and marketing of our products.

Our products also have presence in exhibitions staged in the Sultanate and outside it in the GCC markets. Thank God, we have good reputation within the Omani market which gave us more strength and drove us ahead to continue to provide high quality products whatever it takes.

What is the level of competition that the factory confronts vis-à-vis other woolen products imported from abroad?

Competition and product profile in local market

Oman has an open “supply and demand” market where competition tends to be uneasy. There are so many countries which produce and export to the Sultanate the Omani Masar. For examples, the Masars made in China, India and other countries do compete with our products, but we have great confidence in our product which is uniquely made by Omanis having extensive experience in the field. Omanis working in our factory are the makers as well as the users of our Masars. Our products have another strong characteristic that makes it
distinctive on top of competitors, i.e. the Omani identity which always demonstrates its prominent presence on our products.

You must have heard the support programs for small and medium enterprises. Do you feel the impact of this program in reality? Have you received any support from other companies and establishments?

Yes, I can see that the Sultanate began to attach importance to the small and medium enterprises which represent the real Omani economy and operate to increase national income. The backing endeavors were crowned with the Royal orders of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos setting up a special authority concerned with the support to these enterprises under the name “Small and Medium Development Authority” as well as the Rafd Fund. The role of these enterprises has become quite obvious in developing this sector to enable it to become an effective tributary of the national economy. These enterprises have become a place where young ideas can be embraced and epitomized. In this manner, it has become possible to set up companies and establishments in the future that contribute to raising the overall income. These enterprises should also be accorded financial, moral and administrative support to enable them to stand on their own and continue to thrive. The ultimate goal is to curtail the increasing value of imported goods.

There is considerable turnout for our products by the government authorities and other large establishments of the private sector out of their belief in the need to support Omani products and make them top the list of their needs. Our products are of high quality and bear a distinctive feature and identity. That is the reason why we have a lot of customers who deal with us again and again and serve as good promoters for our products. We have signed a number of cooperation agreements with various establishments to provide them with their needs for Omani Masars.

Are there any obstacles to the success of the enterprise?

Challenges and difficulties … no way to give up…

It is natural that any enterprises is faced with difficulties and challenges which should be addressed in a positive perspective by turning them into opportunities for yet better performance and productivity. Like other business owners, I faced many challenges, but the biggest and most difficult challenge that I faced was how to get every available detail of the best type of Masars. Thanks to the Almighty Allah, I managed to overcome this challenge through the research, investigation and learning journey which helped me get the sort of details that I needed about the Masar. The outcome was the existing enterprise which you are now seeing.

Another hardship was the difficulty of maintenance of the Masar manufacturing equipment. At first, maintenance was carried out by assistance of experts and technicians brought specifically from abroad which cost me too much money. However, I also managed to overcome this difficulty as well through patience and by sending one of my sons for an overseas maintenance and repairs course. He is now well qualified and efficient to handle all maintenance works of the manufacturing equipment and is capable of repairing them by himself without the assistance of any technicians from abroad.

What is the factory’s future vision? Have you got any expansion plans?

The future vision is to see our home made products of Omani woolen masars proudly used by every Omani. We also seek to expand and set up another bigger factory with more advanced technology. Thanks to God, I received on 17 December 2014 the building drawings of the new factory which will see light shortly, God willing. We are working hard to further develop our business and minimize the purchasing value of imported products as well as the outflow of monies from the Sultanate.

An advice you would like to give to the young entrepreneurs?

There is no such idea that is free of challenges and difficulties. However, a clearly defined objective makes things easier for the idea or business owner. The entrepreneurs should, therefore, have optimism as their slogan and be ambitious when conceptualizing and developing their ideas. They should always take into consideration at equal bar the project success and failure and be prepared to all results and capable of dealing according to all circumstances.
Economic Caravans

Messages to Al Dhahirah Brethren

Everybody is well aware of the fact that the three Wilayats of Al Dhahirah Governorate, namely Ibri, Yanqul and Dhank, are currently witnessing a wide economic awakening with the foreseen future promising yet further and more expanded activity in the field of investments.

This is true particularly since the Branch of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) at Al Dhahirah Governorate has released a campaign entitled “Invest in Al Dhahirah Governorate” which began to bear fruit in provoking and stimulating the hard-work and encouraging internal and overseas investors to inject further economic investments into more projects in the Wilayats of Ibri, Yanqul and Dhank.

In such positive atmospheres, we are appealing once again to our countrymen in the three wilayats of Ibri, Dhank and Yanqul, in the name of religion and nationalism, to roll up their sleeves, launch their ideas and release their monies for further investments.

While we extend our thanks and appreciation to those who took the initiative of taking part in the investment drive using their monies to implement commercial, industrial and services enterprises, we at the same time urge in the loudest voice hesitant businessmen to join the process and enter into the world of trade, economy and finance in the governorate. We also encourage others investing outside the governorate to divert their external investments to their wilayats by adopting economic projects in the three wilayats. By so doing, they will serve themselves and their community at the same time.

These repeated calls for further investments by our countrymen in the three wilayats of Yanqul, Ibri and Dhank are significant messages of alarm for all that foreign investment is coming to the Al Dhahirah Governorate and that once it starts nothing can stop it.

You are worthier of reaping the advantages of such investment.

Our dear countrymen, you should get involved individually and collectively in carrying out industrial, commercial, agricultural, media, technological, service and tourism enterprises in the middle of Al Dhahirah Governorate, its main streets and international roads such as Ibri-Saudi Arabia road and the roads leading to the Governorates of Al Batinah, Al Wusta and the Interior.

Through your investments and enterprises you will provide thousands of employment opportunities and participate in development of your country.

The society awaits considerable efforts on your part. So, do not miss the opportunity and act quickly before it is too late, since foreign investment is flowing to Al Dhahirah Governorate and the entire Oman.
His Excellency Said bin Saleh Al Kiyumi, OCCI Board Chairman, stated that the visit to Spain by the Omani high-ranking trade delegation comprising a number of representatives of the economic sectors and government companies came in the context of strengthening cooperation between the two countries in the economic areas and ways of boosting them for mutual benefits and familiarizing with the Spanish experience in economic activity and ways to utilize it by the Omani private sector in the upcoming period. His Excellency pointed out that the Omani Spanish relations were distinguished at all political and economic levels thanks to the wisdom of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said in building beneficial relations with all countries of the world. He stressed the importance that the Omani private sector dedicate and capitalize on these relations in quest for further investment opportunities in the Sultanate. He also called for creating effective partnerships with counterparts in various countries of the world indicating that the visit was part of a significant role played by the Omani private sector in support of the efforts being exerted by the government to capture investments for large economic projects scheduled to be carried out in Oman. He added that the visit would also effectively contribute to attracting investments and creating economic opportunities.
partnerships with foreign companies for further investments and transfer of experiences and technology. His Excellency referred to the Spain as “having rich experiences in the field of investment which we want to take advantage of and impart to the Sultanate.”

The OCCI delegation's visit to Spain came in the context of the OCCI’s role to diversify the levels of delegations dispatched to friendly and fraternal countries with the aim of taking advantage of their experiences. He pointed out that OCCI has a wide range of investors and that OCCI works hard to serve all these categories to meet their expectations. He further said that the OCCI board worked on several aspects in service of the private sector out of its belief that the OCCI is the home for merchants of various levels.

**Omani businessmen meet with Spanish counterparts**

The visit program included a meeting between the Omani private sector representatives and their Spanish counterpart to negotiate Omani Spanish partnership and familiarize with the investment prospects and opportunities in both countries and set up effective economic partnerships aimed at setting up economic enterprises. The Spanish businessmen also familiarized with the economic projects that would be carried out in the Sultanate of Oman, ways of investment into them, the facilities provided by the Sultanate to foreign investors, the frameworks and legislations regulating economic activity and the guarantees available for investors to exercise their businesses.

**Investment climate and opportunities in Spain and Oman**

A session was held between the two sides entitled “Investment climate and opportunities in Spain and Oman” in which a number of Omani and Spanish businessmen spoke about the investment opportunities available in the two countries and the possibility for businessmen to take advantage of them. The Omani delegation also visited a number of Spanish companies where they familiarized with their experiences and developments. The delegation visited the Metro Control Center in the Spanish Capital of Madrid.

**MoU signed**

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between OCCI and the Spanish Chamber relating to aspects of cooperation between the two sectors in the two countries and ways to develop such cooperation. The Spanish State Secretary for Commercial Affairs discussed with the Omani trade delegation the areas of cooperation between Oman and Spain and ways of activating them in achievement of further gains and facilitation of trade and economic exchanges with a view to utilizing the potentials of the two countries.

**Familiarization with Metro, aviation and air traffic control**

The delegation paid a visit to Indra Company of Spain where they familiarized with the company's operations and fields of activity in a number of sectors. The 20-member delegation heard an elaboration on the various activities related to passport technology provided by the company to many countries of the world and the importance of information protections provided by the company's systems.

The delegation was also briefed by the company's officials on air traffic control and precision of air traffic monitoring using precise instruments assisting airports in their air traffic control operations and organization of traffic. The delegation also familiarized with the company's systems in manufacturing helicopters used in civil and military fields and their efficiency and the countries using them. Another briefing by the company dealt with manufacturing of tanks and their combat and defensive capabilities and characteristics. The delegation also familiarized with the company's health system through which it provides the highest levels of health care to its employees. The members of the delegation were briefed on the e-government systems and their importance in the management of information systems and protection through highly precise systems.

Indra Company of Spain plans to open office in Oman

The company's officials commended the level of cooperation with the Sultanate in many fields and said that the company would work with many sectors assisting government authorities to take advantage of its services. They noted that the concerned authorities in Oman were working towards developing many areas of infrastructure and that the company was prepared to provide its expertise in this field of development.

Indra Company is in the process of opening an office for management of its operations in the Sultanate in the context of its trend focusing mainly on many economic development areas in the upcoming period. The Omani delegation also familiarized with the Madrid metro.
operation which secures transport for the population. They heard an elaboration on the control systems via an information network and passenger control system. The metro station is being controlled by 5,000 cameras in trains and 3,000 cameras in the stations with connections to the police and employees around the clock. The Madrid metro station manager explained how trains are controlled saying that there are 13 metro lines controlled by 10 staff. The OOCI chairman then exchanged commemorative gifts with station’s officials. The delegation visited CC Company for public service in Spain and familiarized with the services that the company provides to the population.

In their meetings with their Spanish counterparts, Omani businessmen stressed the necessity of working towards utilizing the investment opportunities and potentials available in the Sultanate, particularly with the government’s trend to carry out many vital and strategic projects in various sectors such as tourism, industry, agriculture, fisheries, mining and other sectors representing promising investment opportunities in which the private sector can be an effective partner and major contributor.

The Omani businessmen hailed the role played by the SMEs in the national economy drive and the importance of supporting these enterprises and promoting them through the provision of appropriate subsidy by the government and bigger private sector organizations in order to enable these enterprises to carry out the economic role entrusted to them effectively in the upcoming period.

Spanish companies’ desire to have presence in Omani market
Sheikh Salim bin Abdallah Al Rawas, managing director and CEO of Al Rawas Holding Group, said that by sending such delegations overseas OCCI would strengthen economic and trade relations and open up wider prospects for the private sector. Al Rawas was of the opinion that the OCCI should adopt the idea of setting up partnership and cooperation between the Omani companies and their Spanish counterparts.

Al Rawas indicated that the delegation’s visit to Spain was successful as it provided an opportunity for the delegation to get acquainted with new companies and further strengthen already existing relations with other companies. “There is a desire on the part of the Spanish companies to have presence in the Omani market and vice versa involving various large or small projects. The seminar which was conducted on the sidelines of the visit witnessed distinguished attendance and significant response from the Spanish businessmen which reflects their interest in the Omani market,” said Al Rawas in concluding his statement.

Converging trade views
Jameel Ali Sultan, board member of Towel Group of Companies blessed the efforts made by OCCI to organize such visits. “The delegation of businessmen to Spain is a good trend on the part of the OCCI. The meeting which gathered Omani businessmen with their Spanish counterparts has contributed to converging trade views on a number of issues which we hope will be successful over the upcoming period, particularly in the light of the interest shown by the governments of the two countries and their keenness on promoting this cooperation into wider scopes,” Sultan said.

Promoting investment potentials in the Sultanate
Hani Al Zubair, board member of Al Zubair Group said: “The economic mobility witnessed by the Sultanate today requires to be accompanied by a process of marketing and promotion of all investment potentials and opportunities. This is only achievable through effective partnership between OCCI and the private sector. The organization by OCCI of the visit to Spain in the context of OCCI’s care for the sector’s firms would promote the private sector’s large and small companies.” Al Zubair stressed the importance of such visits and meetings gathering businessmen with their counterparts in various countries of the world due to their positive results, most importantly introducing the Sultanate and depicting a good picture about many of its attractive elements such as its unique and strategic location and profile. This is a very important aspect that should be focused on in all visits made by trade delegations whether organized by OCCI or any other authorities. He added that the visit to Spain provided a good opportunity to discuss and strengthen fields of cooperation with the Spanish companies which were proved to have keen interest in activating various areas of cooperation with the Sultanate at all levels.
Sheikh Saud bin Mohammed Bahwan, Manager at Saud Bahwan Group, commended the efforts made by OCCI to organize visits for businessmen from various large and small enterprises. He stressed that such visits would certainly open up promising investment opportunities and economic partnerships and would bear fruit in the medium and long terms allowing the Sultanate to achieve its objectives and expectations with regard to highlighting Oman's name and prestige and economic dimensions.

“The growth being witnessed by the country's economic sector and the government’s trend to carry out vitally strategic projects, namely in the sectors of tourism, transportation, industry, agriculture and fisheries open the door for competition among the local and international companies. Thus, the private sector is promised with numerous opportunities that it should optimally exploit and invest in,” said Bahwan.

**Placing the Sultanate’s name on the global investment map**

Sheikh Saud Bahwan called for giving SME owners such opportunities for them to invest in the manner that strengthen their presence in the economic arena. He stressed the importance of joint efforts of the state institutions to support SMEs and provide them with the appropriate environment for their success.

Sheikh Saud thanked OCCI for organizing the visit to the Kingdom of Spain which he said was very successful in the presence of a host of Omani businessmen who are always keen on being present at such economic activities. He added that such participation was aimed at depicting positive picture of the Sultanate reflecting its economic growth and developmental mobility.

**Constructive partnerships and cooperation**

Sultan Al Bartamani, Director of Transport and Energy at Oman Oil Company, commended the efforts made by OCCI to organize such visits which resulted in positive outcomes. He said that the visit to Spain with the presence of such a high-ranking delegation of businessmen gave this trip an impetus resulting in the setting up of constructive partnerships and cooperation between Omani and Spanish companies.

Al Bartamani added that the Sultanate possesses solid relations and economic treaties and agreements at various levels with the countries of the world. “From here stems the importance of making such visits aimed at activating these agreements which the state establishments should capitalize on and invest in in service and promotion of the national economy. This move would further promote national economy on one hand and introduces the many investment potentials and opportunities available in Oman on the other hand.”

**Passion of Spanish companies towards consolidating relationship with Omani companies**

Faisal bin Mohammed Al Yousef, board chairman of Muscat Finance Company, is of the opinion that the visit by the trade delegation to Spain provided the Omani businessmen with the opportunity of meeting with their Spanish counterparts to discuss greater aspects of trade cooperation, particularly since the Spanish companies were so passionate and keen to consolidate relations with the Omani companies and set up diverse partnerships. He said that the good organization of the visit was a major factor in converging views on a number of issues on various fields such tourism, food stuff, industry, transport which are major sectors that we do need in Oman.

“We have familiarized during the visit with experiences of some companies including Indra Company which has trade cooperation relations with some firms in Oman. We also visited Metro Company where we were familiarized with its experience in the management and operation of trains as the company is one of the world's leading companies specializing in this area,” Al Yousef said.

**Positive outcome from operations of Indra in Oman**

The Vice-President of Indra Company said that they appreciate the visit by the Omani economic delegation to the company premises as part of their visit to Madrid where they were familiarized with the company's activities and large capabilities and potentials which could be utilized in the Sultanate in many sectors.

He added that the visit would have a positive outcome and impact on the company which has an operational presence in Oman and would also strengthen the trust that the company has acquired through its business in the Sultanate over the years. He pointed out that the company provides its services in many fields to civil and military establishments including aspects of air traffic control and security matters. He said that the company enjoyed high reputation in many countries of the world due to its high-quality products.

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“The Omani Spanish relations were getting stronger day after day thanks to the previous visit of King Juan Carlos of Spain to the Sultanate. We have to extend a hand of cooperation and take advantage of these relations in the upcoming period better than before. Indra Company will open an office to manage its operations with its customers in Muscat. This step will add greater value to many concerned authorities and the company itself with regard to increasing communication and exchange of benefits. It is hoped that our projects in Oman will be successful and meet the expectations of Oman in its economic drive,” he said.

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PAT FOR PATRONS

Ministry of Manpower honors pioneering facilities in employing citizens and good performers of the private sector.

Photographed by: Al Omaniyyah

The Ministry of Manpower every year honors top performing private sector establishments leading in Omanisation program having high percentage of Omani workforce as well as good performing Omani employees of the private sector. The gesture comes in recognition of the private sector’s significant role in achieving genuine partnerships with the government for further activation of national manpower employment programs in various fields of work. It is also intended to encourage the private sector establishments to provide incentives to their national workforce to ensure their stability and retention.

The awarding ceremony was held under the auspices of His Highness Kamil bin Fahad bin Mahmood Al Said, Assistant Secretary General at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Council of Ministers Affairs. It was also attended by a number of ministers, undersecretaries, representatives of the government and private organizations and male and female business owners.

Honoring top performing companies

Honored during the ceremony were the top performing companies operating in various economic areas, including agriculture, fisheries, industry and mining, manufacturing, construction sector, sale and distribution, tourism, transportation, communications, financial brokerage, health, electricity and water, education, vehicles, catering and provisioning in accordance with specific criteria, namely commitment to the set Omanisation percentage, employability of national workforce in each sector separately, compliance with the provisions of the labor law and the decisions and regulations issued in its implementation, Omanisation rate as based on five professional standards, national manpower retention, qualification and development of national human resources, employment of the largest number of graduates of vocational training centers, on-the-job training provided to college students and support of SMEs.
Honoring outstandingly performing Omani employees in private sector

Outstandingly performing Omanis in the private sector were honored according to specific professional standards, namely technicians, professionals, skilled labor, and semi-skilled labor. The evaluation was based on various benchmarking standards including work performance, discipline, productivity at work, safe custody of production tools, compliance with occupational safety and health at workplace and innovation. The employment period of candidates nominated for recognition in the same establishment should not be less than five years holding the same job, during which period the employee must not have received any warning from his/her establishment during the same period. Priority is normally given to candidates who are having more experience.

His Excellency Hamad bin Khamis Al Amri, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Manpower for Labor Affairs, delivered a speech on behalf of the Ministry of Manpower in which he said: “I am so pleased to warmly welcome you all and thank you for sharing with us this ceremony in honor of a host of leading establishments who have performed outstandingly in so far as the Omanisation program is concerned as well as an elite well performing Omani employees of the private sector in recognition of their distinguished performance and retention of their jobs and works. The development drive in Oman has achieved qualitative leap over the decades of the blessed renaissance in various fields of development, including the economic, social and humanitarian aspects. In this way, we could build a modern state capable of interacting with the present time requirements and developments. The developmental achievements made by the Sultanate were a natural result of the wise leadership and insight of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, who has graciously given rightful orders to cater for human resources, knowledge and labor which are three synchronous components, through which nations build their glories. The private sector is one of the basic pillars of development providing renewed employment opportunities for the young generation. Work in any useful field is a sacred duty which the youth must undertake after completing their education and training in order to achieve their ambitions.”

Organization of labor market in cooperation with three production parties

“Guided by the Royal orders of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the government has always been keen on providing basic potentials for developing the private sector to enable it to create further employment opportunities for Omani nationals whose numbers are on the rise in these establishments nowadays.” His Excellency added that organizing and developing labor market to further strengthen its employability capacity of national workforce, amendments were made to the current labor law in cooperation with the three parties to production (i.e. the government represented by Ministry of Manpower, OCCI and the Sultanate of Oman's General Trade Union). The aim of this endeavor is to create attractive working environment and employment conditions for nationals to join the private sector.

In the context of genuine partnership among the three parties to production, community-based organisations and professional societies during this year, a joint work was carried out for implementing the wise government’s decisions to conduct a comprehensive revision of the applicable labor law. A draft of the amended law was formulated to the latest applicable international standards with the necessary legal and executive procedures now being finalized for the law to be issued.

Social dialogue committee

“In the field of developing prospects of cooperation between the social partners in the labor market, a social dialogue committee was set up comprising the three production parties. The committee is aimed at constructively and jointly dealing with issues related to the labor market and its new developments. In quest for developing the skills of national workforce and preparing the youth professionally to joint labor market, a system for technical and vocational education was developed in cooperation with the private sector, the aim being to expand and modernize these educational and training institutions by promoting the technological colleges and training centers and modernize their infrastructure and programs of study and training with particular emphasis on quality control and diversity of levels of skills and specializations to reach the threshold of 80 scientific, technological and vocational specializations. As
a result, the number of students in technology colleges, government training centers and employment-oriented training programs funded by the government in the current academic year jumped to nearly 50,000 male and female students. The purpose of this is to provide the private sector with its requirement for professional workforce," His Excellency said.

**Labor market developments are many and so are the accompanying challenges**

“The new developments in the labor market are too many and so are the accompanying challenges whether with regard to the manpower structure in terms of educational and vocational levels or structure of facilities in terms of their classes and records. There are also some other challenges associated with the conditions of work or the individuals who prefer to work in government rather than in the private sector as well as the values and behaviors of some employees and some employers. Other challenges relate to the expatriate manpower and hidden trade in various economic activities which require practical actions to address and resolve in order to instill the values of work into the youth so that they can be a role model in discipline, commitment and mastery and increased productivity to their own benefit and to the benefit of their families and for the progress and prosperity of their facilities and society,” His Excellency said in concluding his statement.

**The human cadre is the real investment**

Engineer Redha bin Jumaa Al Saleh, OCCI Vice-Chairman for Administrative and Financial Affairs, delivered a speech on behalf of the private sector in which he stressed the importance of this ceremony to honor top facilities and outstandingly performing Omanis in the private sector for the year 2014. The honoring ceremony is a good gesture to motivate this vital sector which needs to be developed in a rapid pace. He pointed out that the human cadres and development of their capacities and skills in any establishment is the real investment which should capture the focal attention of our establishments. Also, recognizing and appreciating their efforts instills in them the spirit of corporate affiliation particularly needed by the private sector establishments as this trend leads to stabilization of competencies and hence working stability leading to better productivity and higher level of quality.

**Many thanks to pioneering establishments and Omani competencies**

Engineer Redha Al Saleh expressed his thanks to the top establishments in the area of employing Omanis and said: “We say thank you to the top establishments of this sector which have put upon themselves the responsibility for granting national cadres the priority in employments in activation of the aspect of social responsibility which should be strengthened in all establishments. We are now in greater need for this type of responsibility towards the nation and its people. It is unreasonable that the government continues to shoulder alone the burden of hosting higher education deliverables and job-seekers. We all know that the numbers of deliverables are on the increase and exceed the employment capacity of government establishments. On this basis, we greet you and support you in your further endeavors to employ yet more national cadres to enable them to serve their nation with the knowledge and skill that they have attained. I should not miss this opportunity to bless the Omanis whom we are deservedly honored today affirming our full support to you. All what you need to always be up to the level of responsibility pinned on you. The concerted efforts of the state establishments and the private sector establishments are the most important feature of the next stage of the development drive which was implanted by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said.

**In the principle of social partnership we believe**

Nabhan bin Ahmed Al Batashi delivered the address of the Sultanate of Oman General Trade Union. He said that this important annual ceremony is held out of the belief in the principle of social partnership between production parties. The existence of top establishments in the field of employment of national cadres means that there are good performing Omanis and entrepreneurs in the private sector upon which these establishments depend on for the development of their activities and businesses in such a manner as to achieve the national policies and legislations aimed at employing Omani laborers to the maximum extent in complete conformity and harmony with high quality products and services provided by such establishments.

“Employers have always sought to train their workers and develop, motivate and hone their skills and as a result they got in return dedication, loyalty and commitment to the establishment. Hence, it is a social responsibility that requires the employer to provide favorable working conditions and attractive wage for the workers. The worker on the other hand is required to do his level best and due diligence to perform his/her duties with precision and mastery in the best interest of the two parties. Once this is done, we should recognize and honor the top establishments and outstandingly performing Omanis in the private sector who are selected by a committee assigned for this purpose under the supervision of the Sultanate of Oman General Trade Union which is a member in that committee.”
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Gathering of Chamber 2014
Omani and Spanish tourism companies Meet

The OCCI Tourism Committee organised a meeting with the Executive Director of Spain Tour Company under the chairmanship of Ali bin Salim Al Hajri, OCCI board member, Chairman of OCCI North Al Sharqiyyah Branch and Committee Chairman, in the presence of committee members.

The meeting discussed ways of developing tourism sector by opening channels of communication between tourism companies in the Sultanate and Spain and developing such channels in cooperation with leading companies in this field such as Spain Tour. The meeting called for further cooperation with this company in order to put in place joint working plans in serving tourism sector. "The Committee is doing its level best to develop this important sector which provides another source of national income, our aim being to attract tourists from various countries of the world for entertainment and recreation in the unique climates of the Sultanate," said Al Hajri in a statement.

Services Committee meets at North Al Batinah Governorate

The Services Committee of the OCCI's North Al Batinah Branch has recently held a meeting under the chairmanship of Khalid bin Abdullah Al Hosni, board member of OCCI's North Al Batinah Branch and committee chairman. The committee chairman opened the meeting explaining the role of this vital sector and recalling OCCI's initiatives and services to the private sector and possibility of further developing them over the upcoming period.

The meeting further dealt with its agenda which included developing and promoting services sector in the Governorate and streamlining procedures relating to some service organizations included in the committee's working plan for next year. The meeting submitted two proposals, namely conducting a seminar related to the services provided to the Industrial Port of Sohar and the challenges to this sector and another seminar on insurance of properties and fixed assets of the private sector in the second half of 2015. Mr. Saif bin Khalid Al Raeesi, was selected as committee vice-chairman.

Pakistani Delegation visits OCCI

A delegation of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Pakistan has visited the OCCI. The delegation was received by engineer Redha bin Jumaa Al Saleh, OCCI Vice-Chairman for Financial and Administrative Affairs in the presence of Ahmed bin Abdul Kareem Al Hooti, OCCI board member and a number of business people from both sides.

The two sides discussed a number of issues aiming at strengthening cooperation between the two countries, particularly in the field of trade and uplift the volume of trade exchange to the level in commensuration with the volume of the two countries' resources. Engineer Al Saleh told the visiting delegation about the role entrusted to the chamber as an umbrella of the Omani private sector and its representative in all economic areas inside and outside the Sultanate. He stressed the importance of turning the fraternal relations existing between the two sides into more productive relations in the fields of trade and industry. He said he considered this visit as a new stage for relations between OOCI and Associations of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Pakistan.

The two sides also stressed the necessity of activating the joint business council as soon as its membership has been finalized to include members from both sides and the need to put in place a roadmap for the upcoming period focusing on expanding the fields of investment and strengthening trade partnerships between the business community in both countries.

The volume of trade exchange between the Sultanate of Oman and Pakistan has achieved a progressive growth over the past years with Omani exports to Pakistan accounting to RO 259 million in 2013 and imports from Pakistan to the Sultanate amounting to nearly RO 72 million for the same period.
The joint economic committee of OCCI Branch in Musandam Governorate and Ras Al Khaimah Chamber of Commerce and Industry held its first meeting at the main conference hall, OCCI Musandam Branch, Khasab. The most important aim of the joint economic committee is to strengthen cooperation and economic activities in various fields, create a favorable investment environment for the two sides, explore the obstacles and difficulties facing the private sector and business owners from both sides and impart and exchange experiences.

Hamid bin Mohammed Zaman Al Raeesi, Chairman of OCCI Musandam Branch, welcomed the delegation of Ras Al Khaimah Chamber of Commerce and Industry. He stressed the importance of the meeting in enriching and strengthening bilateral trade relations and bonds of cooperation between the two fraternal countries, besides opening up new prospects of joint economic cooperation. “For this to be achieved, there is a requirement for creating an appropriate environment for cooperation, exchange of experiences, facilitation of obstacles to business people, increase of trade exchange and contribution to joint investment opportunities,” he noted. He further commended the economic significance and considerable role played by the joint economic committee in consolidating joint economic and investment cooperation and further enhancing the environment of economic relations and trade exchange between the two sides.

The meeting was chaired on the Omani side by Mohammed bin Rashid bin Mohammed Al Shuhi, Acting Director of OCCI Musandam Branch, in the presence of a number of government officials in Musandam; and on the UAE side by H.E. Mohammed Hassan Al Sabab, Director General of Ras Al Khaimah Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in the presence of a number of government officials in Emirate of Ras Al Khaimah.

The agenda included a set of main topics which would further support partnership between the two parties and achieve the desirable goals in the best interest of all, namely: streamlining procedures for business owners, tourists and private sector employees at the border check points and customs making it easy for goods and equipment to move smoothly and solving the difficulties and challenges.

The agricultural and veterinary sector was included on the agenda with the two sides discussing the importance of issuing health, agricultural and livestock certificates for the imported goods in order to ensure their quality before reaching the markets and creating a cooperation mechanism and strengthening communication between the two quarries at Ad Dara border centers between Oman and UAE.

The tourist sector was also widely covered by discussion on the agenda. The two sides discussed tourist investment opportunities reviewed between Musandam Governorate and Emirate of Ras Al Khaimah and ways to strengthen communication between tourist companies on both sides and facilitate access of tourists through the border points. The two sides stressed the importance of opening up new prospects of tourist communication and cooperation. The meeting also discussed the subject of trade licenses aimed at streamlining licensing procedures for business owners in both sides and strengthening ways for wider cooperation through the facilities granted to business owners in the two countries.

As for further strengthening partnership with the OCCI Musandam Branch, a number of essential issues were discussed, including giving the opportunity to business owners on both sides to attend workshops, activities and economic events and exchange visits and maintain communication among the various administrative organs in the two chambers. The meeting also discussed operational mechanisms which would enrich and strengthen service delivery, provide investment opportunities to SMEs in the Governorate allowing them to participate in exhibitions held in the Emirate of Ras Al Khaimah and mutually offer investment opportunities available in Musandam and Ras Al Khaimah.

The meeting is considered to be one of the highly constructive encounters that contribute towards further convergence of views and settling of all difficulties and obstacles which would prevent the optimum utilization of the economic and human resources available in the two sides. The two parties agreed on the importance of discussing and negotiating all these issues with a view to arriving at recommendations in furtherance of progress of partnership between the two sides.
The delegation of the OCCI Al Dhahirah Branch returned to the Sultanate after a successful visit to Indonesia that lasted seven days. The visit was made under the financial sponsorship of Daleel Petroleum and other companies operating in Al Dhahirah Governorate as part of the Initiative “Join us to Develop” which is supported and encouraged by His Excellency Said bin Saleh Al Kiyumi, OCCI Board Chairman and other board members.

The 24-member delegation comprising businesspeople of Al Dhahirah Governorate was led by Ali bin Saleh Al Kilbani, chairman of the OCCI Al Dhahirah branch who said: “The delegation's visit to Indonesia has positive impact in terms of economic enlightenment and trade awareness allowing the delegation the opportunity to familiarize with the Indonesian experience in various trade, industrial, agricultural, service and marketing fields particularly since Indonesia is regarded as an economic and purchasing power having diverse economies and terrain and a population of more than 250 million.”

Al Kilbani added that the delegation visited several specialized factories such as the factories of furnishing, tyres, electronics, jewelry and textiles. The delegation’s program also included a visit to the Sultanate of Oman's Embassy in Indonesia where the delegation benefited from the views of His Highness on economic investment in Indonesia. The delegation had also an active presence in the inaugural ceremony marking the launch of the direct flight line of the Sultanate's national carrier, Oman Air, in its new station at the Indonesian capital of Jakarta.

Al Kilbani pointed out that the Public Authority for Promotion of Exports and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in Indonesia organized a ceremony in the presence of the Indonesian Ambassador to Oman. He said the ceremony provided a good opportunity for the businessmen from both Oman and Indonesia to meet face to face and exchange experiences. “This visit was successful in all aspects and contributed to activating economic communication between Oman and Indonesia. An invitation was extended to Indonesian businessmen to visit the Sultanate in order to take advantage of the investment opportunities and economic projects that the Sultanate intend to carry out. A number of Omani businessmen decided to sponsor some Indonesian agencies in the Sultanate.”

The Investment Promotion Committee of the OCCI North Al Sharqiyah Branch held a meeting under the chairmanship of Khalfan bin Amer Al Mafarji, OCCI Branch board member and committee chairman. The meeting was to familiarize with the major works of the committee, select a vice-chairman and put in place a working plan for the committee for the upcoming period.

The committee chairman opened the meeting thanking the committee members for their presence and stressing the significant role entrusted to the committee to promote investments in the governorate. He called upon all members to intensify their efforts to bring about a clear and well-defined plan. The committee members then selected Mohammed bin Said Al Rashdi as committee vice-chairman.

Four events were proposed for next year to contribute to promoting and attracting investments, namely Omani Products Exhibition (encompassing all Omani companies and establishments manufacturing Omani products), Integrative Trade Forum (including diverse promotional activities by activating and coordinating the role of working teams with promotional exhibition including training, encounters, workshops for participating business owners assisting them in developing their firms and products each in the area of production), productive families exhibition which comes in line with the interest in productive families in order to encourage them to showcase their products at the exhibition and other associated activities) and talent and trade innovation exhibitions (which is concerned with production of talents and gifted ones in various fields such as photography, drawing, fine arts, innovations of various types and scientific creations with the exhibition serving as a venue for them to promote and market their innovations.
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The Parliamentary Friendship Committee of the Senate of Poland headed by Michal Sewerynski, visited Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) accompanied by the accredited and non-resident Polish ambassador to the Sultanate. The delegation was received by engineer Redha bin Jumaa Al Saleh, OCCI Board Vice-Chairman for Administrative and Financial Affairs, in the presence of H.E. the Polish ambassador and members of the Polish Friendship Committee at the State Council and a number of business owners from both sides.

The meeting discussed aspects of joint cooperation between the two countries in the commercial and industrial areas, and ways of enhancing and increasing the size of trade exchange between the two sides to meet the requirements of the next stage.

Eng. Redha bin Juma al-Saleh explained that there are many areas of cooperation between entrepreneurs from the two sides, referring to the importance of activating the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two sides through the participation of entrepreneurs in international specialized exhibitions in the Sultanate and the Republic of Poland, and through the exchange of trade delegations and encourage mutual investment.

The Head of the Polish delegation explained that this visit is the second in two years, reflecting a firm desire to find a commercial collaboration with the Sultanate. He added that the previous visit yielded positive results and expressed the hope to see them realized in the near future. He said that the delegation has a perspective based on a previously conducted study about cooperation and partnerships that may be set up with the Omani side. He extended an invitation to the businessmen and businesswomen in the Sultanate to visit Poland and view closely the investment opportunities there. He praised the leading experience of one Omani entrepreneur investing in the Republic of Poland.

The two sides agreed on the importance of intensifying mutual trade missions during the upcoming period. A trade delegation from the Polish Chamber of Commerce is planning to visit the Sultanate soon for the purpose of meeting with representatives of the Omani private sector and the business community to improve these relations.

A meeting was held at the OCCI head office involving a World Bank expert and members of OCCI Tourism Committee. The meeting discussed the roles played by both the Omani public sector and private sector in conceptualizing strategies for development of tourism sector in the Sultanate.

The visiting expert familiarized himself with the role of the tourism committee and the efforts it makes in this field as well as the roles of the sectors and organizations, each separately, in support of the tourism sector. He also familiarized with the role of Omran as being the biggest tourism development company in the Sultanate of Oman and its role in developing tourism sector in Oman.

The expert pointed out that although the tourism sector in the Middle East was witnessing significant growth and development, it should be supported with short-term plans to cope with the changes in the sector and its requirements taking into consideration the element of competition among the neighboring states and regions. “The Sultanate of Oman has excellent potentials that may not be available in many countries and therefore there is a need to focus on developing these potentials to attract tourists from various countries of the world. It is also important to take care of infrastructure and dedicate it to serving this vital and important sector,” he said.

The meeting also discussed ways of financing small and medium tourist enterprises as well as the major projects in the same sector.
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OCCI receives South African IT delegation

His Excellency Said bin Saleh Al Kiyumi, OCCI Board Chairman, received a trade delegation of South Africa specializing in IT and electronic security for discussion of economic relations between the two countries.

His Excellency welcomed the delegation pointing out that South Africa is well known for its many advanced industries that owners of small and medium enterprises in the Sultanate can take advantage of. He also discussed with the visiting delegation the possibility of taking advantage of the services provided by the companies represented in the visiting delegation and specializing in the field of IT and information security.

The delegation members provided profile of their companies and their services and value added to these services. Bilateral meets were then held between the South African businessmen and their Omani counterparts with particular emphasis on IT for the purpose of acquaintance and familiarization with the advantages and investment opportunities available in the Sultanate and the existing projects in this field. The two sides also discussed possibility of creating future partnerships between businessmen from both countries.

OCCI participates in Islamic Chamber Board Meeting

OCCI represented by Ayman bin Abdallah Al Hassani, OCCI Vice-Chairman for Economic and Branch Affairs, took part in the 20th meeting of Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) Board and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation as well as the roundtable meeting held during the period from 25 – 27 November 2014 in Istanbul, Republic of Turkey.

The meeting reviewed several issues including action to create a better trade and investment atmosphere in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation states. A working paper entitled “Towards an Economic Partnership among the countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation” was presented during the meeting.

Ayman Al Hassani pointed out that the meetings of the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry aimed to coordinate the efforts of the member states for a better investment growth and increased trade exchange among the Islamic countries which would in turn assist in creating employment and economic opportunities and joint ventures in the Islamic World.

OCCI is keen on taking part in such meetings out of its belief in collective work and its feasibleness which would in turn assist in economic development of the member countries and in bringing about appropriate solutions to many of the obstacles facing these countries.

SME Committee proposes awareness campaign for SME owners

The Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) Committee of OCCI has recently held a meeting at BankMuscat head office chaired by Ahmed bin Abdul Kareem Al Hooti, OCCI board member and committee chairman, in the presence of other committee members.

The meeting discussed a number of issues concerning the SME sector, namely the committee’s contribution to conceptualizing new ideas involving the OCCI’s initiatives during 2015 in order to better and tangibly serve SME owners. The meeting also reviewed the decisions passed at the Salih Al Shamikhat Seminar and the actual benefits obtained by the SMEs from those decisions since the beginning of implementation of these decisions. A working team was set up to formulate committee’s proposed observations and amendments with respect to the seminar-related decisions.

The meeting also dealt with a proposal to increase the awareness doses given to SME owners to familiarize them with the ongoing giant economic developments in the Sultanate and appropriate ways to take advantage of them. It was agreed to organize a visit for SME owners to these projects in cooperation with the organizations supporting this segment.
Working paper on entrepreneurship presented to Rustaq College students

OCCI has received a delegation of students from the Applied Sciences College, Rustaq, majoring in business administration who familiarized themselves with the services it provides to its affiliates and the private sectors. Badr Al Awfi, OCCI Deputy Director General for Administrative and Financial Affairs, welcomed the visiting students and presented a profile on the history, inception and evolution of OCCI and the significant role it plays in serving the economy in general and in promoting SME sector in particular.

In his address, Al Awfi stated that the OCCI is concerned with representing the Omani private sector in local, regional and international arenas shouldering the responsibility of delivering a message to the young generation to the effect that trade business is an open door for subsistence and that it was necessary to change the general attitude of higher education students from mere jobseekers to business entrepreneurs.

Mohammed bin Humood Al Abri, Director of SME Department, delivered a visual presentation that included a profile of the OCCI, reality of SMEs in Oman and OCCI’s initiatives in service of this sector and its role in promoting products and crafts. Another working paper was also presented that dealt with how to initiate one’s business enterprise.

The program of the visiting students also included an introduction tour of the departments and sections of OCCI to see for themselves how they operate and to have a clear idea of the corporate working environment which they will join upon graduation from their colleges.

Tourism Committee Meeting discusses enriching the sector

The OCCI Tourism Committee held its third meeting for this year at the Faculty of Arts and Social Studies, Sultan Qaboos University, under the chairmanship of Ali bin Salim Al Hajri, OCCI board member and committee chairman, in the presence of Dr. Talal Al Awadhi, Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Studies, and tourism committee members.

Dr. Talal Al Awadhi welcomed committee chairman and members and thanked them for their visit and wished them success in promoting tourism sector in Oman. Ali bin Salim Al Hajri, committee chairman, reviewed the committee’s terms of reference as approved by the OCCI board. He stated that the terms of reference will be circulated to all OCCI branches in various governorates of the Sultanate for implementation.

Abdul Aziz bin Rashid Al Hassani, committee vice-chairman, reviewed the activity of the executive team assigned to follow up urgent works of the committee and submit reports on them. On the heritage homes being catered for by the ministry of heritage and culture, he said that the committee followed up this matter in cooperation with the Director General of Heritage at the Ministry of Heritage and Culture who thankfully gave a clearer image to the committee on the heritage homes which are in need for further assistance and support.

Engineer Mohammed Al Zidjali, Director General of Services of Employees of Ministry of Tourism, stated that the licensing/cancellation regulations and bank guarantees may be reviewed with the tourism committee presenting views and proposals in this respect which will be forwarded to the ministry after study by the committee. He added that the ministry was in the process of providing a new service entitled “Bed and Breakfast” which would be launched shortly to serve small and medium enterprises concerned with tourism sector.

A report was then presented showcasing the visits made by the committee during 2014 to the OCCI branches in Dhofar, Al Wusta and the Interior where the recommendations were discussed and submitted to the concerned authorities. The committee continues to visit the remaining branches in various governorates of the Sultanate.

The meeting reviewed participation of the OCCI represented by the Tourism Committee in Muscat Festival 2015. The committee visited Al Amerat Park to locate the appropriate venue which Muscat Municipality helped in its design.
Mining and Crushers Committee focuses on port issues

The OCCI's Mining and Crushers Committee held its meeting under the chairmanship of Sheikh Bati bin Mohammed Al Niyadi, OOC board member and chairman of OCCI Buraimi Branch in the presence of H.E. Said bin Saleh Al Kiyumi, OCCI Board Chairman; and committee members to discuss axes already discussed at the meeting of committee chairman and a number of committee members with His Excellency the Minister of Transport and Communications in the presence of the Ministry Undersecretary.

The meeting tackled several important issues such as mobilizing the ports of Sohar and Shinas to accommodate freight and export of products of crushers and mining facilities and the ensuring preparedness of Shinas port to accommodate transportation of crushing and mining materials in terms of the port's infrastructure and access roads leading to the port as well as the efforts of the ministry of transport directed at promoting and attracting external investments in crushers sector in Oman.

The meeting also discussed the need to set up another port in Minji area, Central Governorate, due to its unique characteristics and availability of many types of rocks and important metals such as limestone, gypsum and other multi-use mining materials. The proposed port will contribute to minimizing the impact of land transport since the area lies on the coast about 300 km from Salalah which is the main beneficiary of these metals.

The meeting reviewed some other topics with H.E. the minister of transport and communications such as the latest developments of the railway project and any new modifications to the previously announced specified alignment and the possibility of internationalizing Sohar Airport in the future as Sohar is located near to the Governorates of Buraimi and Musandam and comprises large numbers of Asian communities working in these governorates which would in turn assist in promoting the Sultanate's overall economy.

"With Sohar Port becoming a basic hub for import and export trade, we are hopeful that special roads will be constructed for passage of heavy trucks packed with crushers' products from various governorates of the Sultanate to the Port since the existing roads are so congested with traffic and are exposed to wear and tear due to heavy loads," said Sheikh Bati.

OCCI Board review Business Plan 2015

The board of directors of OCCI held meeting at the head office in Muscat, at the beginning of which H.E. Said bin Saleh Al Kiyumi, OCCI Board Chairman, welcomed the board members and thanked them for their endeavors in Muscat in general and in governorates in particular during the year 2014 and appealed to them to exert yet additional efforts and demonstrate yet further cohesion.

He stressed the importance of integration of work among the board members and the executive body in order to be able to face up to all challenges and promote the standard of business within OCCI.

His Excellency the board chairman also thanked the executive staff for the efforts they have made for the success of the business opportunities forum. The board discussed several important issues, including the OCCI’s 2015.

The board held a discussion on the OCCI Law and Executive Regulations which will be forwarded to the concerned authorities after initial scrutiny. His Excellency also dealt with the current status of the OCCI Law noting that to date no observations have been received on the Law from the board members of OCCI’s branches and from businessmen.

He emphasized that the OCCI doors were open up to the end of the current year for any remarks about the subject matter. The board also tackled the issue of Omanisation and training in private sector companies. It recommended conducting a comprehensive study on this matter and initiating discussions on it with the concerned authorities. The board discussed a proposal for appointment of OCCI commercial representatives in a number of fraternal and friendly countries to facilitate communication with businessmen with coordination being made with the Sultanate’s embassies abroad.
The Sur Gate project covers an area of 217,000 square meters. The project will feature a multitude of world class amenities including Commercial Zones, Luxury Hotels, International School, Leisure Centre, a Hypermarket and a Mall. Sur Gate project is a prestigious development in the Southeast region of Oman that is launched in Sur, by Al Sharqiya Real Estate & Investment Company. The project is located in the vicinity of the Public Establishment of Industrial Estates in Sur (PEIE).

City Walk (Al Mamsha)
Work has commenced on the first phase, which includes a host of entertainment facilities and it is named ‘City Walk’ (Al Mamsha). City Walk will be constructed on a plot admeasuring 23000 sq. m. City Walk is a world class commercial project that contains Restaurants, Cafes, Fast Food Outlets, Entertainment Hub comprising of a Bowling Alley, Children’s recreational area and much more. It is designed to awaken the senses of the residents of Sur and the surrounding areas, offer the tourists passing through Sur from the neighboring states, a unique location to unwind. The design standards of City Walk will match, or even surpass the other players in the same field, in this industry. The interior as well as the exterior of City Walk has been designed to match international standards.

City Walk has a lot to offer to everyone residing in the area, for the tourists and those travelling or passing through Sur. City Walk will cater to the needs and requirements of families, the young generation, kids, and even those who want to conduct business.

The project has begun to take shape, and the first Phase of the Construction activity has commenced. This phase of the project is scheduled to be completed by November 2015. The entire project of Sur Gate covers an area of 217,000 square meters and it is strategically located at the entrance to Sur, adjacent to the main Sur-Muscat highway. The project will feature a multitude of world class amenities including Commercial Zones, Luxury Hotels, International School, Leisure Centre, Hypermarket and a Mall.

GATEWAY TO SUR

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New Runway opened at Muscat International Airport

An Oman Air Airbus A330 was the first aircraft to land at Muscat International Airport’s brand-new North Runway. The aircraft touched down at around 12:40 on Sunday 14th December. It then taxied to the airport’s North Apron, where it was greeted by the Guest of Honour for the occasion, Minister of Royal Office HE General Sultan Bin Mohammed Al Numani, VIPs and the media. An Oman Air delegation led by the Chief Executive Officer Paul Gregorowitsch and Chief Officer Service Delivery Andrew Walsh introduced the pilot to His Excellency and other guests. The new runway was unveiled as a key element within the development of the new airport. The airport is in the final stages of its construction and will replace the existing facilities. Once opened, it will handle up to 12 million visitors a year in its first phase – up to five million more than the current airport’s capacity. As the Sultanate of Oman’s national airline, Oman Air is based at Muscat and was the airline of first choice to inaugurate the new runway.

The expansion of capacity offered by the new Muscat International Airport mirrors that of Oman Air. By end of 2018, the airline will have received 24 new aircraft, expanding its fleet from 30 to around 50 planes. These include three further Airbus A330s, 15 Boeing B737s and six Boeing B787 Dreamliners.

Sadia Opens Largest Food Processing Factory in Abu Dhabi

BRF, the seventh biggest food company in the world and responsible for the Sadia brand of frozen foods in the Middle East, officially opens a new AED 588M (US $160M) factory at Kizad, Abu Dhabi. “The new plant, represents one of the key foundations of BRF’s strategy of commitment and investment to the Middle East region, a fast growing market that is most strategically placed for the internationalization process of BRF products,” says the BRF Chairman, Abilio Diniz.

The investment provides BRF with a land plot of 162,157 square meters in Kizad and will employ 1,400 workers. The strategic location of Kizad will facilitate faster and more efficient access of the Sadia brand to global markets; enhancing the brand’s superior quality and innovation and assuring Sadia’s commitment to delivering quality products tailored for consumers’ needs in the region. The plant will have a production capacity of approximately 70,000 tons of food products a year including breaded items, pizzas, burgers and others.

The new production line will amplify BRF’s effort in the continuous improvement of high quality and safe food products in the Gulf region, and support food producers in the region.

CSR Recognition for Bank Sohar

In recognition of its numerous philanthropic initiatives and its role as one of the leading financial institutions in the field of corporate social responsibility (CSR), Bank Sohar has received the distinguished Tatweej Academy’s ‘Golden Order of Merit in the field of CSR’ at the recently held Tatweej – Arab Leaders and Leading Organizations Grand Finale Ceremony 2014.

This award marks the third that the Bank has received this year alone for its CSR efforts, having previously won the ‘Green Campaign of the Year’ award for its previous year-long environment awareness campaign ‘Saving Water, Electricity… And Our Planet’ at the ‘Oman Green Award 2014’ as well as being named the ‘Most Socially Responsible Bank Oman 2014’ by UK based International Finance Magazine (IFM).

The prestigious award was handed over to the Bank at a glittering event held at the Jumeirah Beach Hotel, Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Ms. Munira Abdulnabi Macki, DGM of HR and Corporate Support, and Mr. Abdulali Al Lawati, Senior AGM of Corporate Support received the award for the Bank.
Bridgestone Launches Road Safety Campaign

Bridgestone Middle East and Africa FZE, with the support of Robert Bosch Middle East FZE, launched its latest public awareness initiative in Oman. Designed to enhance road and vehicle safety, the Bridgestone Safety Station campaign encourages and educates drivers, reminding them to check their vehicles before hitting the road and make sure that their cars and tyres are properly maintained and ready for the journey.

Launched in June 2014 and now touring the GCC and North Africa, the campaign made its first stop in Oman in December at Muscat City Centre, Muscat. The Bridgestone Safety Station campaign was officially inaugurated in the presence of Omar Faisal Al Jahadmi, Deputy for Consumer Services & Market Control, Public Authority for Consumer Protection; along with senior representatives from Bridgestone Middle East and Africa FZE and Towell Auto Centre LLC, Bridgestone's local distributor partner.

Bridgestone has been educating drivers across the region about proper tyre care and maintenance since 2011 when its first Tyre Safety and Eco Station (TSES) roadshow was launched. The campaign was ideated specifically for the Middle East to build consumer knowledge about the strong correlation between well maintained tyres and road safety.

The Harbor at The Cave Unveils Lavish Weekday Buffets

The Cave, world’s largest manmade cave and an architectural marvel with eight specialty restaurants that are quite the pride of Omani hospitality has recently started offering Buffet Lunch spreads on weekdays at its anchor restaurant, The Harbor.

The Harbor is the best destination for the seafood lover who likes to experiment with different seafood dishes from different cuisines. Ever since its inauguration six months ago, The 360-seater Harbor has been the talk of the town for its global menu with Omani, Mediterranean, Italian, Lebanon, Spanish and Indian seafood dishes. Its ‘seafood market’, ‘catch of the day’, ‘create your own seafood platter’ offerings and caviar specialties have been wowing discerning foodies for quite some time now.

Now The Harbor has added another feather in its illustrious cap (or shall we say, another wonderful chapter to its menu) by offering very lavish buffet lunches on weekdays between 12:00p.m. and 4:00p.m.

Priced at just RO 12 per plate, the lunch menu offers a wide range of breads, salad bar with over one dozen salads, cold starters, soups, hotline entrees, desserts and drinks – all amidst amazing ambience and truly pampering service.

New Project Completed at Sohar Aluminium

Sohar Aluminium has announced the successful completion and testing of its Automation Infrastructure Virtualization Project, an initiative that promises to deliver dramatic gains in system scalability, operational efficiency, and security cost savings over the coming years.

With this achievement Sohar Aluminium became the first smelter in the GCC region to completely virtualize its automation infrastructure, thus becoming a regional benchmark in operational efficiency and disaster recovery.

Virtualization is being increasingly embraced by, among others, manufacturing plants as a powerful tool for improving the overall reliability of its IT hardware and software systems, whilst reducing costs in the operation of these assets. Virtualization allows for multiple operating systems to be hosted on a single server, effectively paring the amount of hardware that is required to run all the software needed by the business.

At Sohar Aluminium, all of the physical servers installed at its various operational units have now been transformed into virtual servers hosted centrally in two data centres. Conceptualization and planning for the project began in 2011 and was completed during the first quarter of 2014. The final project stage, Disaster Recovery, was successfully tested last week, bringing to fruition an initiative that is widely regarded as ground-breaking for complex manufacturing industries like Sohar Aluminium.
Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) had the last year 2014 fully loaded with activities and programs that it launched from the very beginning of the year dedicating every possible endeavors for their successful implementation. At the initiative of its board of directors, OCCI not only announced its nine initiatives at the beginning of the year but also revealed its plans and mechanisms for their rapid implementation, with each and every concerned stakeholder working without weariness to turn these initiatives into reality so that all the sectors' members can take advantage of.

With the advent of a new year, OCCI’s higher leadership has put together the features of its strategy which is aimed at implementing yet further new initiatives in continuation of its successful previous initiatives. The ultimate goal is to sustain the spirit of contribution, hard-work, self-motivation, teamwork and adaptation to working conditions and pressures in order to achieve the set objectives. The initiatives are also meant to better serve the various segments of the business community in the Sultanate and integrate with the community-based, government and private organizations in a full-fledged partnership that drives the youth towards serving their nation and developing fields of businesses in the light of this prosperous era of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said.

The launch by the OCCI of the 2015 Initiatives Competition stands out in testament of the fact that the drive continues with yet more strength and resolve and that the opportunity is opened up for all to take part in the ever-continuing building process of our nation. It is the responsibility of all of us to provide constructive visions and ideas that epitomize real partnership among various State sectors, the aim being to achieve ambitious objectives in support of economic development and investment growth in the Sultanate.

We also take the opportunity to recall that OCCI has launched an important initiative involving social responsibility and e-transition. Through this initiative, OCCI accession certificate will develop into an e-card which would further bolster the concept of e-government allowing for yet smoother and more flexible transaction processing. The initiative demonstrates the OCCI’s keen interest in increasing community interaction with its activities and events through Twitter, Facebook and OCCI’s website for ensured continuity of contribution and continued cooperation among various spectra of the society.

LEGACY IS ON...
Saleh bin Juma Al Bulushi