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By the end of May, the Port of Sohar had a date with the first Iranian Vessel through the direct shipping line between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran coming from the Port of Bandar Abbas to the Port of Sohar. While we highly commend this important step which would certainly lead to further increase of direct trade exchanges between the two countries, we confirm that this step will be followed by yet some other steps that would also augment the volume of trade exchange between the two countries.

The visit made by OCCI to the Islamic Republic of Iran several months ago marked the starting point for initiation of serious negotiations with regard to the opening of a direct shipping line between the two countries. The initiative was seriously considered by the officials in the two sides, a spirit which highly commend and hope will proceed further in the same rhythm. In this context, we must praise the fraternal efforts made by the Iranian side to have the shipping line implemented on the ground right from the moment it was just an idea.

The activation of seaports of the Sultanate comes in the context of its plans to serve as an important logistic hub that is intended to facilitate the movement of goods and commercial shipping between various countries of the world as part of strategies aimed at diversifying Oman’s economy and increasing the contribution of non-oil sectors. Oman is definitely qualified to play such a pivotal role due to its strategic location overlooking the Indian Ocean.

Stakeholders, including business owners and exporters from both sides, will surely sense the positive outcome of this step in the immediate future. It is hoped that the Port of Sohar will play a significant role in re-exporting Iranian products to the world markets. The same applies to the Omani products which need to have access to new markets through the Islamic Republic of Iran.

We are hopeful that these endeavors will be successful in the best interest of the national economy.

Direct Shipping Line between Oman and Iran
23 March 2015
Return of His Majesty to the homeland of Oman

- His Majesty was absent accompanied by sincere prayers to Almighty Allah to bless him with speedy recovery.

- Manifestations of jubilation and loyalty processions and demonstrations on his return reflected solid cohesion between a leader and his people.

It was a day that was not like every day. Omanis have been awaiting with utmost eagerness the Royal return of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said to the homeland fully recovered after a treatment trip to the Federal Republic of Germany that was successful thanks to Allah.

During the absence of the leader from home, everybody was faithfully praying to the Almighty Allah to bless His Majesty with robust health. The prayers were conducted not only by Omanis but also by each and every one who knew His Majesty and Oman. It is His Majesty who proved to the entire world, through his deeds, what it means when a ruler devotes his whole life to making his people happy and ensuring decent life for them. Under the wise leadership of His Majesty, Oman boasts its versatile achievements to all countries of the world.

The manifestations of jubilation and festivities that overwhelmed every corner of Oman immediately after the official announcement from the media of His Majesty’s home-return have reflected and epitomized one of the most human concepts, i.e. cohesion between a leader and his loyal people across Oman. They also featured feelings of passion, loyalty and gratitude treasured by
Al-Kiyumi:
His Majesty is behind each and every success achieved by the Private Sector in the Sultanate of Oman. Oman has regained its smile with His Majesty’s return.

the people of Oman, children, men and women, to the builder of Oman’s renaissance and leader of its development drive. They also showcased the sincere and deep sentiments towards His Majesty who dedicated all his endeavors to serve and promote this dear nation. The happiness which overwhelmed all Omans everywhere following the Royal return and the impressive demonstrations which took place in various parts of dear Oman were the sincerest expression of the love and gratitude from loyal subjects to their great leader. It is true that all of Oman took to the street on that day which provided a living example of national cohesion between the leader and his people.

On this happy occasion, OCCI organized a special ceremony in commemoration of the return. Addressing the ceremony, His Excellency Said bin Saleh Al-Kiyumi, OCCI Board Chairman, said: “We are very thankful to the Almighty Allah for blessing our great leader with robust health and well-being. It is godsend that deserves to be thanked and an occasion that needs to be rejoiced. The feelings of concern and expectations about the health of our cherished leader over the past months turned into jubilations and reassurance after the auspicious comeback. Yes, thanks to God, Oman has regained its smile. His Majesty the Sultan is behind each and every success achieved by the private sector in the Sultanate of Oman. Through his usual wise policy and full understanding of the requirements of change, His Majesty could pave the way for the private sector and provided it with such a favorable climate that enabled it to further strengthen its role and prove its presence as an effective contributor to the country’s comprehensive development.”

Attending the ceremony were engineer Redha bin Jumaa Al Saleh, OCCI Board Vice-chairman for Administrative and Financial Affairs; Abdul Azim bin Abbas Al Bahrani, OCCI Director General; and the employees of the OCCI head office. The ceremony has reflected the manifestation of love and loyalty to the architect of Oman’s modern renaissance and the leader of its distinctive drive. It also reflected the feelings of gratitude demonstrated to the Almighty Allah for blessing His Majesty with full recovery and the sincere prayers to God to protect His Majesty, keep him healthy; bless him with long life and preserve Oman under His Majesty’s wise leadership to sustain the country’s security and prosperity.
BETWEEN THE HAMMER AND THE ANVIL
OCCI calls Council of Ministers for urgent and immediate intervention for amendments in the Chamber Law.

Sayyid Fahad: The Government tries to make OCCI active.

The government is demanding from Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) to redouble its efforts and roles in a lot of economic and commercial issues and even social development in general as the official patron of the private sector and as well as a strategic partner in the development process that has been being witnessed by the Sultanate under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said - may Allah protect him -. At the same time, the private sector is demanding from the Chamber to play a bigger role in adopting its demands, taking care of its interests and defending issues with the government, which is, as the responsible in the sector observe, of double standards and tendency with every inclination to the other party in a productive relationship.

The Chamber is in an unenviable position and as it is neither to these nor to those. Government has shackled it by using the law, limiting it to a consultative body and so its opinion is not binding, while the private sector, calls it on to take decisions, the authority for which it does not possess. In light of this dispersion and polarization between the Chamber and other parties, the Chamber is often forced to catch the stick in the middle to ensure the balance in the relationship with the government as well as private sector, workforce and civil society institutions at the same time.

Intervention in tasks and responsibilities by many agencies and institutions leads to dispel efforts, waste a lot of initiatives and create a multitude of problems. In this case multiple entities may engage in similar roles, and mostly these roles will be identical or replicated.

Those who concern the economic matters need not spare much effort to find such interventions or similarities.

It would not be divulging the secret if we have said that the government is firmly pressurizing the Chamber to exercise its limited authority which is ineffective to satisfy the private sector, and to adopt policies and programs, which sometimes may not be in line with the needs and requirements of the sector. So the Chamber is still knocking all doors to find a suitable ground for the work of all agencies in a joint framework, in the interest of our nation.

Praise the efforts of the Chamber

During a meeting with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of OCCI, and Chairman and Vice Chairman of the General Federation of Oman Trade Unions, Deputy Prime Minister for Cabinet Affairs, His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud Al Said pointed to the efforts of government to make role of both OCCI and GFOTU active, explaining that achieving balance in the relationship between the three parties of production comes at the forefront of the government’s priorities, which devotes all its attention to ensure that the citizens receive respect everywhere.

His Highness has emphasized the importance of the private sector in encouraging all companies operating in the country, to conduct training of national cadres and rehabilitation by providing them opportunities to take over the leadership positions as well as giving chances to small and medium enterprises in getting projects and works to enable them to achieve their aspirations for self-employment. These are among the
Abdus-Salam Al-Khalili

Sufficient time shall be allocated for businessmen to participate in drafting the new law for the Chamber.

fortune things with continuous follow-ups of devoted Sovereign of this country - May Allah honour him. So, all sectors are required to overcome any obstacles to achieve it. His Highness praised the efforts of OCCI and GFOTU, wishing them all the best in their tasks that they focus.

OCCI's Board of Directors, chaired by HE Said Bin Saleh Al Kiyumi and the members present appreciated the guidance of the Deputy Prime Minister responsible for the Council of Ministers on improving the level of cooperation between different sectors and to enable each party to carry out its responsibilities and to achieve balanced relationship between the three sectors involved in the production, in order to attain justice for all, increase productivity and create a favorable climate for investment. The Board stressed the keenness of OCCI to continue the active coordination with the production sectors and all stakeholders of development in general and economics in particular, both in the public and private sectors to
improve the rate of progress and development and to promote environment and opportunities for employment, investment, training of national cadres and rehabilitation and to enable them to take over leadership positions in institutions and private sector companies as well as to support Small and medium-sized enterprises.

Making amendments in OCCI Law

OCCI Board has called the Council of Ministers for urgent and immediate intervention to make amendments to the draft OCCI Law, so as to enable the Chamber, as it is considered as legitimate representative of the private sector in the Sultanate, to perform its duties and carry out its responsibilities inside and outside the Sultanate and to strengthen its authority to cope with the current phase requirements and the changes occurring in local and global economic arena. The board expressed its thanks and appreciation to His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Cabinet Affairs for exalting the efforts undertaken by the Chamber, its support and interest in keeping its role active in its plans and programs for sustainable and comprehensive development witnessed by the Sultanate under the wise and enlightened leadership of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said - may Allah protect him. This was during his meeting with a number of Their Excellencies in addition to the Chairman and Vice Chairman of Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), and the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the General Federation of Oman Trade Unions.

Businessmen and local investors demanded the government extra time to put their comments on the draft law for OCCI, which has been forwarded by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to the OCCI to submit their remarks on the law to the Ministry within a period of a month. During their meeting at OCCI Headquarters with HE Said Bin Saleh Al Kiyumi, OCCI Chairman, they made it clear that the period specified by the Ministry is not enough, especially since the proposed draft needs a lot of study and review by the businessmen and businesswomen involved in various activities and economic sectors, including commercial. The law, as they see, is necessarily to establish a new phase to the Chamber to enable it to perform its duties and carry out its responsibilities inside and outside the Sultanate and strengthen its authority to cope with the current phase requirements and changes in local and global economic arena.

The new Chamber Law contrary to what we expected

Sheikh Salem bin Ahmed al-Ghazali said: The new draft law submitted by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry is contrary to what we expected as businessmen where it also is clear to us if the role of the Chamber is refrained, because there is no independence, even in decisions to be taken by the Board of Directors and no doubt it will adversely affect
Husain Salman

The Chamber shall have its own identity and independence in its decisions, goals and outlook for development of private sector.

Re-structuring the Chamber

While explaining his opinion, Simon Jamil Karam, emphasized the importance of the fact that the law leads to re-structure OCCI and it will regulate its relations with all agencies and institutions in both public and private sectors in order to achieve integration in the roles and responsibilities. He pointed to the necessity to revisit some articles of the current law that hinder the Chamber from performing its responsibilities and to the necessity to provide ample space for more authority that come under its scope. Karam said, that the status quo of the relationship between the Chamber and the relevant authorities in the public and private sectors and civil society institutions does not help the Chamber and does not help those institutions and in general does not serve the economic and human development. Therefore the government should reassess that relationship according to the principles and practices pertaining to each of these authorities, by considering their roles and responsibilities as defined in decrees of each. For example to mention, but not limited to, presently there is confusion between the roles of Chamber and professional associations of economic nature. The situation requires an unbiased solution through the Law of the Chamber and other related laws so that there will be a positive integration between the Chamber and these associations which serve economic and professional development in the country.

Focus on Human Resources

Ahmed bin Isa Al Zadjali has noted the importance of the law’s address to the expected role of the Chamber on the part of human development, especially in the private sector and importance to enhance the Chamber’s partnership with the government in this aspect by enabling it to put its remarks on laws and regulations with respect to career, training, rehabilitation and other related fields as well as giving them the opportunity to participate in shaping training programs for national cadres as per the requirements of the private sector in addition to the Chamber’s involvement in outlining general standards for professional and technical training institutions. He pointed out that the government is depending a lot on companies and private sector organizations to enhance their contributions towards rehabilitation and operation of the national workforce, and therefore it becomes necessary that the new law for the Chamber is to equally frame the roles of both the Chamber and the private sector in this aspect.

Sheikh Abdul Salam bin Salim al-Khalili said that the current stage requires extra effort from businessmen to contribute to the efforts of the government and the OCCI to improve the performance and contributions of the Chamber in the development process in general and economic and commercial activities in particular. He emphasized that the drafting of the law that keeps pace with developments and updates, meets the developmental and economic needs and takes into account the requirements of both private sector and the Chamber, equally, has been considered as the first important step. Therefore enough time must be allocated for businessmen to participate in reviewing the new law for the Chamber and not to hurry and scurry to enact the law. He also emphasized the need for direct and persistent communication between entrepreneurs and the Chamber, at one hand, and the officials assigned to draft the law and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, on the other hand, to achieve compromising formats for many of the articles contained in the draft in order to serve the national interest as a basic objective.

Take Time to Renew the Chamber’s Law

Hussein Salman Gholam emphasized the importance of Chamber’s own personality and independence in its decisions, goals and outlook for the development of the private sector, for understanding the concerns and challenges to overcome and for finding solutions to them. He added that we all of us do not disagree on the necessity of the Chamber’s independence and its formal representation of
Abdur-Rahman Barham says that the Chamber had lost its independence, as the draft law imposes on the Chamber to forward their decisions to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, who has the right to cancel the same. He added that I think it’s the time to consider the Chamber’s opinions in laws and economic and commercial legislation as mandatory, if they are matters relating to economic affairs or laws relating to trade and economic interests. He also noted during his discussion that clause of General Body and the quorum is the main factor to expedite the issuance of a new law, and from this perspective, we must look at all aspects of the law carefully and without hurry so that we can eliminate any possible mistakes that may require another revision of the law.
Jameel Ali Sultan spent a term of office as vice-chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) which he describes as a very fruitful experience from which he learned a lot and could build extensive relations and during which he engaged in several activities. “It was an unforgettable period. I spent most of my time at the chamber and benefited a lot from the advices given to me by my father who chaired the chamber in its second term. I learned from him to serve with unlimited dedication and devote my efforts and time in service of the nation and distance myself from personal interests. As is the case in every field of work, tangible positive results strengthened my motivation to exert yet further efforts,” said Jameel Ali Sultan.

Reality of the chamber of required powers
Asked about Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry in questions like: how do you view the chamber now? How do you evaluate its performance? He said: “The chamber was better in its performance and contribution. This rating must have its motives because at that time the chamber had more delegated powers to the branches which diminished centralization of performance. It is natural to have independent societies which are better operational under the chamber’s umbrella. On the other hand, the chamber should accommodate these societies and work together with them to integrate each other.”

About the proposed draft law of the chamber and the private sector’s reservation on some of its clauses, he said: “The chamber is an independent entity and any law intended to curtail its powers or attributes it to any government authority will naturally involve objection from the private sector. We are going through an important stage of building the Omani economy where the chamber’s efforts are required without any curtailments.”

Winning Social Responsibility Award
WJ Towel was one the companies which won the Social Responsibility Award accorded by the chamber to the companies which devote greater attention to the social responsibility aspect and translate their responsibility towards the society into practices in service of a large segments of the community. “Winning the Social Responsibility Award of the chamber is a source of pride and further responsibility at the same time. We are proud that through our efforts we could win the award. In fact, the efforts made were not for the purpose of receiving the award, but they
Jameel Ali Sultan: OCCI is an independent entity and any law that constraints its powers or attributes it to a government authority will be objected by the Private Sector.
actually reflected a sincere desire on our part to contribute to the community. This award now places more burden and responsibility upon us as we will continue to contribute further to the community,” he said.

Trade Relations with Iran
You were a member of the trade delegation dispatched by the chamber to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Tell us about that visit and its outcome?

I took part in several delegations during my tour of service with the chamber and the period after. However, this time was quite different and deserves to be commended. I must, therefore, take this opportunity to thank the chamber's board chairman for the good organization. I spoke to the members of that delegation who all expressed their admiration of the high standard of organization of the delegation which reflected positively on the results of this visit.

About the launch of the direct shipping line between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran through the Port of Sohar in Oman and the Port of Bandar Abbas in Iran, he said: This line was a pressing need since exportation/importation between Oman and Iran used to take place through third party which is costly. Of course, the launch of this line would solve the problem and undoubtedly uplift the volume of trade exchange between the two countries. It is a successful step for which we congratulate the Omani private sector. However, we hope that further steps will be taken by the relevant authorities to relax the restrictions which curtail the effectiveness of this line by both the Oman and Iranian sides. If we want to have distinguished trade relations and good economy, we should sit together, study the obstacles and bring about radical solutions to them.

Powers or Autonomy?
Concerning the possibility of granting autonomy to the OCCI branches and whether it is feasible to have an association of chambers in Oman, Jameel Ali Sultan said: “I am not in favor of setting up an association of chambers in Oman. Some branches do not have the resources which enable them to be operate autonomously. The idea is, therefore, not feasible at the present time. However, I support the idea of implementing decentralization and expansion of the powers of branches. I suggest setting up a consultative committee within OCCI in line with the other specialized committees to include in their membership former OCCI chairman and vice-chairmen in order to take advantage of their experience and know-how in service of the chamber and the private sector.”

Omanisation is a national duty... but...
About his opinion on the Labor Law and Omanisation policy, Jameel Ali Sultan said: “Sometimes, the problem does not lie in the law but in the way how it is enforced. Omanisation is the demand of all and first of all is a national duty. The difference, however, concerns the mechanism of Omanisation. For example, Omanisation percentage in banks is excellent because Omanis tend to be interested in such kind of jobs. On the other hand, there are some other jobs which young Omanis do not take interest in. In such a case, there is no point in compelling the companies to Omanise such professions.”

Consumer Protection
Asked about whether it is true that business owners are always in confrontation with the consumer protection organization, he answered by saying: “This is not true. I am a trader and consumer at the same time and cannot do without the products of other traders. As a matter of fact, I do comment the efforts being made by the Public Authority for Consumer Protection and its quite obvious role in unveiling cases of commercial cheating. We are proud of this Authority. However, since we are in a free market, it is important at the same time not to distract the attention of the private sector for each and every venial acts. The solution, in my view, is for the private sector and the Consumer Protection Authority hold joint meetings to address any questions. If we want the private sector to succeed, we should create an appropriate production environment as it integrates other sectors and is a good contributor to income generation.

Women’s participation in OCCI Board
There is no representation of women in the OCCI Board of Directors in its current term. How do you explain that? In his answer, he said: I keep on asking the same question to the women themselves. Omani women proved to be competent in all fields and is strongly present in the private sector. They were also represented in the chambers’ board in previous terms. I hope that they will run for election in the upcoming periods.
Yanqul Tourism Festival...
For Family and Economy

- Al-Dahira Governorate Branch of OCCI succeeded in organizing a tourist, economic, social, cultural and entertainment event, in cooperation with the Tourism Management at Al-Dahira Governorate and many agencies, with the active participation by the people of the beloved wilayat Yanqul. This was the first and largest event ever witnessed by wilayat Yanqul, which is rich in many natural, heritage and geological tourism potentials, arts and folk games.

- Yes, Yanqul tourism festival was successful and was appreciated by HE Ahmed Bin Nasser al-Mahrazi - Minister of Tourism, who chaired the festival’s opening ceremony in the presence of a number of officials, organs and agencies at Ad-Dahira Governorate as well as His Excellency Sheikh, Governor of Ad-Dahira.

- OCCI Branch at Ad-Dahira pursued to conduct the Yanqul Tourism Festival during the period from 27 April until the first of May 2015, for five consecutive days, thus achieving a number of tourist messages and it became a family, economic, cultural and heritage festival.

- Ad-Dahira Branch of OCCI had a conviction of the importance of the tourism festivals in pushing business, marketing and economic activities in general. This is what encouraged the chamber to embrace the idea of a Yanqul Tourism Festival which achieved outstanding success. It was supported and encouraged by the people of the wilayat of Yanqul, officials of different institutes and management of the tourism at Ad-Dahira. This will push us to conduct another festival as Dhank Tourism Festival to be followed by a third festival in the wilayat of Ibrī.

- Thanks and appreciation to all of those who presented the idea or executed it in practical or encouraged for the success of the Yanqul Tourism festival with its different wings and sections like heritage village, Bedouin tent, tent for marketing, games, folk art and fun games. Thanks for the participation of foreign communities and volunteer teams from Ad-Dahira governorate.

- The chamber extends its special appreciation and praise towards all the youth and the public of the wilayat of Yanqul, officials and tourism management and other agencies who were the secret of the success of the Yanqul Tourism festival!!!
A charming group have gathered under one roof to discuss on a clear purpose and a common vision -- upgrading of areas of works of Omani women in SMEs (SME) sector; providing support and facilities to them; understanding the challenges they face in trade and investment activities; and discussing on the optimum environment for the growth of ambitious economic projects adopted by Omani women in full right and trust in addition to understanding echo of women in small and medium-sized enterprises and micro businesses, on the context of the seminar on implementation and evaluation of Sih al-Shamikhat resolutions, recently held at Cultural Center at Sultan Qaboos University, and the extent of its contribution to ensure SME growth in the period ahead and to utilize maximum of their outputs.

The above was during a seminar for the women’s economic empowerment held in Muscat Hall in Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, organized by the Arabian Women Media and hosted by OCCI under the patronage of His Excellency Dr. Muna bint Salem Jerdani, Undersecretary for Technical Education and Vocational Training, Ministry of Manpower and in the presence of HE Said Bin Saleh Al Kiyumi, Board Chairman, OCCI. Representatives from government & private agencies and bodies, entrepreneurs, those interested in the sector, representatives from the media and women’s associations and Omani female students of commerce from private colleges in the Sultanate were also present.

**Promote the economic participation of women**

Azizah bint Salim al-Habsiya, CEO of Arabian Women Media explained: To keep up with the great approach and general direction in the interest of SMEs, we are discussing today on setting out a vision for women working in SMEs and the challenges they faced, in order to promote economic participation. She said: We will try hard through our organization, which is small in size and great in ambition, Arabian Women Media, to grope needs of women engaged in SMEs through the participation of female members of chambers of commerce and Omani women associations and female students in business disciplines; to set a vision for joint action; to discuss the challenges faced by women in the way of promoting economic participation; to closely understand these challenges; and to put them on the table of debate and dialogue.

**Omani women ... active and serious energy**

She called upon in her speech the concerned authorities in the Sultanate to monitor women’s economic participation and encourage them through attention to the numbers, statistics and the percentage of women’s investments in business projects, whether small or medium, in order to create a road map to help to assess the quality of women’s participation and the promotion of the participation in the economic aspect, since everyone knows that women in our country is an effective and serious energy and therefore it should be exploited for the advancement of society and development.
Golden Era for SMEs

Ahmed bin Abdul Karim al-Hooti, member of OCCI board, and Chairman of the SME committee of the Chamber talked about the most prominent recommendations of the seminar on Evaluation and Implementation of Sih Shamikhat resolution. He said: We are in the golden age of SMEs to enjoy its abundant support. The businesswomen have nothing but to take advantage of the supports offered to them, and to maximum utilize the initiatives put forward by some government agencies, like the benefits of tenders and business posed by Sultan Qaboos University, which is considered as the first institution that announced the registration of SMEs to take advantage of its jobs. Also they can benefit from the cards that are given to the business people by activating them to serve their institutions. They can also take advantage of the media publications to promote their services.

The need for awareness

Ahmed Al-Hooti: We call businesswomen to initiate to break into the business activities to prevent the similarities in the work and the consequent difficulty in product marketing.

Stories of great success and ambitions beyond the limit

Najah Al Abdul Salam reviewed her pilot project financed by Al Rafd Fund. Her experiment was in founding a private clinic for speech. That was after she graduated from Oklahoma State University, USA. She was the first specialist in speech therapy and language at Royal Hospital in Oman. She thought of establishing her own project. She honed her skills in the treatment of difficult and complex cases in speech, conversation and hearing. Najah explained that she had suffered at the beginning of the project from the lack of financial resources in addition to carrying out alone all the works that required in the clinic like coordination, service, management, financing and treatment. But heard about Al Rafd Fund, she applied for financial loan and she was able to advance with her project in all its aspects and she achieved great successes. Finally she won the award for Entrepreneurship organized by the General Authority for the development of SMES.

An invitation to join the promotional exhibitions

Atifa bint Hussein Al-Lawati, deputy head of the Omani Women’s Association in Muscat governorate, and owner of Atifa Jewelry, pointed out that there are some challenges that may hinder women’s presence in the SME sector. The most important is training and rehabilitation especially in emerging businesses and ways to develop existing projects. She called businesswomen to join the Association, as it conducts several workshops in addition to many promotional exhibitions of their business, whether home business or small company. She narrated her experience, saying: I benefited greatly from exhibitions and customers have increased and they come from all over the Sultanate to buy my products. I work from home and I present high-quality merchandise to my customers with prices affordable for all. I could travel to various countries to attend international exhibitions related to the jewelry business and I myself present the goods.

Ideas and experiences of Thurayya

Futun bint Abdullah al-Ma’mary from the College of the Middle East also spoke on the benefit of the seminar, saying that the seminar produced some brilliant ideas on the establishment of small businesses enabling future development and evolution, especially for us as students, and on marketing in the local channels, benefiting from the skills and programs of effective social networks largely available with us. We met during the seminar Omani young ladies presented recap of their experiences and the business ideas they have to enrich our culture as students.
Al Kawadir ties up with Italian Company
General Manager of Al Kawadir Distinguished Company:

We extend our sincere gratitude towards Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry for their efforts in the development and support of small and medium-sized companies to be able to be stable and participate in the progress and advancement of the national economy.

OCCI sought through its current session to intensify attention to small and medium-sized enterprises as they are the largest space in the market and the primary factor in the development of the national economy, as well as they have a significant impact on the social side. From this point the chamber has an initiative of conducting of delegations from small and medium enterprises to industrially developed countries to learn about their experiences in this area.

There a contract of commercial agency was signed between Al Kawadir Distinguished company, specialized in the recycling and waste management and an Italian company specialized in the same field, which is considered as the fruit of this delegations by the Chamber to the Sardinia in June 2014, which aims to work for the meetings between Italian and Omani companies including above mentioned Omani companies.

Explaining the role of the chamber in this contract, Engineer Ibrahim bin Abdullah Al Hosni, General Manager of Al Kawadir Distinguished Co. says: We extend our sincere thanks towards OCCI for their efforts in the development and support of small and medium-sized companies to be able to be stable and participate in the progress and advancement of the national economy. He added that the chamber has given the company the opportunity to participate in the trade delegation to Italy to meet with entrepreneurs and companies there, and its results were this agreement.

Integrated specialized team of trained Omani manpower

Hosni said: We are happy to have this global agency for the waste management and recycling so as to meet all the needs of industrial sector and other relevant vital sectors through establishment of advanced and modern infrastructure. The company has a specialized integrated team of trained national labor force.

He pointed out that this step is in order to avoid or minimize environmental pollutions and wastes. This is to prevent and reduce the use of substances with environmental impact. Also this has an economic impact on energy consumption, which is something very important if we want to really control the future effects of global warming. He stressed that we, small and medium enterprises, are able to extend the domestic market with such modern technologies at competitive and reasonable prices if we had the opportunity.

Al Kawadir Distinguished company engages in recycling and waste management, which is of great importance in avoiding or minimizing - at the maximum possible amount of - environmental pollution by following the sequence and the application of waste management strategies (including raising the efficiency and productivity of materials and energy). This is based on the principles of the use of fair production technologies - closed circuit formation (recycling) - and environment friendly disposal of waste.

Strengthening the leading position

It is worth mentioning that Al Kawadir Distinguished company has made great strides towards strengthening its leading position as a 100% Omani and one of the small and medium-sized companies that gained access to the global agency with a major company in the world in the waste management and recycling, the Italian Company, OMPECO srl, which serves the high engineering consultancy, manufactures machines, installs high-tech factories and plants for recycling and waste management.

The company produces converter, with an idea to convert waste to grinded homogeneous, dryer and sterile products, which can be stored for a long time, or can be used as combustible for the production of energy. The feature of the converter, unlike all other similar equipment, is not using external heat source, but heat is generated directly within the waste by converting mechanical energy into heat energy in waste grinding phase. So we do not need to use extra pressure or steam from an external source.

Some of the main features and characteristics of products are their conformity to the specifications EC, protection against vibration, shock and fire, and the higher level of sterilization by Autoclave sterilization system which works under the pressure of steam (Moist heat) up to 120 °C.
A number of businessmen and investors demanded the Ministry of Transport & Communications and Royal Oman Police to cease the implementation of mobile truck weighing system on the main and secondary roads in order to control the excess weight of truck. This is as per article No. 37 of the Executive regulation of the Traffic Law, according to which the axial weight, not their gross weight, will be considered for violation of trucks. They argued that large damages and negative effects will be resulted by implementing this law, not only for the companies and establishments in private sector but also for the citizens, in general, and for the customers, in particular. Also they emphasized, during the meeting held at the OCCI head office, presided by HE Said bin Saleh al-Kiyumi, Chairman, OCCI, in the presence of Omani Land Transport Society, that authorities relevant to this decision, specially Ministry of Transport and Communications, have not taken into account the remarks and viewpoints of the private sector.

HE Said bin Saleh al-Kiyumi, OCCI Chairman, said: Ministry of Transport and Communications and other authorities did not review with the Chamber, the only representative
of the sector, on this decision, to avoid any possible disadvantages, whereas we had officially addressed the Ministry, on the importance of collaboration with the Chamber in everything related to Laws and regulations related to Transport Sector, in particular, and the then reply from the Ministry was very positive. HE the Chairman of Chamber pointed out that the collaboration between the government authorities and private sector for the entire matters that come in purview and functions of the Chamber shall be done through the Board of Directors. Any permission or stand issued by any of the committees of the Chamber or its administrations or its branches is not valid unless it is approved by the board of directors. HE made it clear that he understands the concern of government to regulate the economic sectors, but it is important to involve the private sector in formulating regulatory decisions, and there is no doubt that it directly affects the economic activity as well as the companies and establishments.

The businessmen and investors who attended the meeting and are representing different sectors in the private sector, expressed their resentment and dissatisfaction with the intransigence they experience from the Ministry of Transport and Communications, as well as the lack of responsiveness with appeals of transport companies, crushers and quarries, and all other companies, affected by the implementation of the system, in spite of their meetings held with relevant officials in the ministry and demanded to reconsider the system, to give a sufficient period of time for establishments and companies to adjust their positions and get adapted to the new reality, especially, since the implementation of the system has significant negative effects on those companies, on the national economy and on the Omani human resources and workers employed in those companies and private establishments.

Khaled al-Salem Al Darie, head of the Omani Society for Land Transport said that the government chants the matter of collaboration with the private sector, but regrettably no trace of this partnership on the ground, adding that if there were not real and effective partnership, there will not be solutions to a lot of important economic issues and matters. He pointed out that the collaboration the government is talking about is not the one that the private sector is looking for. It is looking for a partnership with the government in all matters relating to the decisions and regulations pertaining to trade and economic activity. So it is important for the sake of development and the public, to coordinate efforts between the public and private sectors and activate the effective frameworks of partnership between the two sectors in every issuance of decisions and regulations in order to ensure the implementation on one hand and to avoid any harm to any party, establishments or individual in the society on the other. Al Darie explained that the road transport association is not with the implementation of trucks weighing system, at least at the current stage, demanding the Ministry of Transport and Communications and the Royal Oman Police to allow the companies a transition period so as to be able to adjust their positions.
Mohammed Al-Shabibi
We have submitted a report of ten pages, with disadvantages and solutions, to the Under Secretary for Transport, but no reply.

Ministry of Transport
The decision is not new, and its application is necessary to maintain the road network which belongs to everyone.

For his part, Abdullah bin Khalifa Al Balushi pointed out that the concerned authorities did not inform the companies and establishments in the private sector, anything regarding its implementation of the system. Also it was not announced in the media well in advance. This caused a confusion for those companies in particular, since they have already engaged with some commitments and contracts with entities inside and outside the Sultanate. He also pointed out that companies, particularly crushers that depend largely on the transport sector are facing big dilemma day and night as a challenge with its customers inside and outside. So it was important to study the system well before it is implemented by the concerned authorities. Mr. Balushi, owner of Aswarul Khadra Est., emphasized the importance of role of the Chamber in such issues and challenges faced by the sector, demanding it to keep pace with such changes in the economic arena and stand in favour of the sector and the adoption of its views in such matters.

Rashid bin Saif Al-Rajhi (Cement Products Company) says that the words of the concerned authorities such as the Ministry of Transport and Communications and the Royal Oman Police are contradictory. Now 100% of trucks will be considered as violating the law, because the law is not clear and specific regarding the weights. “So”, Rajhi said: “we demand to stop the implementation of mobile truck weighing system until it is re-studied, especially since this system was passed years ago and implemented under different conditions.

Rashid Bin Hamdan Al-Saadi (Aswarul Khadra Est.) referred to the intransigence of officials in the Ministry of Transport and Communications and their reluctance to accept the point of view of the owners of companies affected by the implementation of the system and he asked them to re-examine the system and to give companies enough period to arrange their positions, as it is the normal practice during implementation of a lot of regulations and laws in the Sultanate.

Saleh bin Abdullah Al-Farsi (Aswarul Khadra Co.) enquired on the extent of the awareness of concerned authorities over the damages to the companies arising from the implementation of the system. He is stressing that the crushers sector is an important economic sector but the officials are considering this sector in the tail of the national economy. Although they are companies founded after the economic feasibility studies and are therefore subject to the standards of profit and loss. The officials should realize the same and consider those companies if the government is seriously looking for the stability of investments and its attraction.

Mohammed bin Yahya Al-Shabibi (Gulf Mining Group) explained that his group is affected by the implementation of the system without giving companies a grace period, referring to a report of more than 10 pages submitted by the group to the Ministry of Transport and Communications, regarding the system. Its content includes the damages that would affect the companies and the private sector, along with solutions to achieve goals of all the parties in government and the private sector.
Mr. Shabibi pointed out that the group has reduced its operations as a result of this system and it has dispensed off, as a first stage, about 150 trucks that were rented from Omani citizens. Also its total exports have reduced from 150 tons per year to 24 tons a year. Mohammed al-Shabibi demanded the government to postpone implementation of the system and allow the companies a respite from complying with the system. Also he demanded to find other alternatives for companies such as the railway line.

Being follow-up of the matter, the Chamber held a panel discussion attended by all parties involved in this system from the public and private sectors, like the Ministry of Transport and Communications, the Royal Oman Police, Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Ministry of Manpower and the Public Authority for Consumer Protection as well as the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Oman, companies and institutions affected by the implementation of the system. The purpose of the meeting was to start a comprehensive and transparent dialogue on the issue and come up with common visions. Indeed audience listened to the views of personalities relevant to the private sector and the meeting was alive with discussions from the two sides. A working paper was also presented by the Ministry of Transport and Communications. HE Engineer/ Salim bin Mohammed Al Nuaimi, Undersecretary for Transport said that the decision “to determine the weight of trucks on the roads” is not a new one but it is issued in 1993, according to the executive regulations of traffic law, but that the implementation was late. Al-Nuaimi said that the implementation and enforcing phase of the resolution was preceded by a transition phase, during which the ministry monitored, for a period of six months, over the weights of trucks and assessed the impact of irregular weights on the roads, in addition to the direct impact on the transportation process and the smooth flow of traffic, which revealed the need to start the implementation of the decision.

Ministry of Transport and Communications, in collaboration with the Royal Oman Police have begun the actual implementation of the weight of trucks in 2014 by using mobile weighing stations and filing as violation of trucks if their total weight was more than 25% of its total axial weights. This concession to exceed the maximum axial weights of trucks was considered as period for implementation, which will extend until the end of 2015. The ministry has already started the process of tender for establishing the fixed truck weighing stations on the main roads where all the trucks will be weighed round the clock instead of random weighing some as in the case of mobile weighing stations.
IN SEARCH OF GUIDANCE

On the Table of Tourism Committee at the Chamber

• Violations and obstacles in tourist guidance.
• Restriction on random tenting has become a necessity.
• Proposal for the use of tourist tax to finance the training of tour guides.

Follow-up: Zamzam al-Hinai

Ali al-Hajri:
Tour guide is a mobile camera of Oman for visitors.
In a meeting of the Tourism Committee, at Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which was characterized by transparency, openness and initiative, Ali bin Salem al-Hajri, Chairman of the Committee called an extensive conference at the head office of the Chamber with the members of the committee and heads of tourism committees at the branches of the Chamber in the governorates. During the meeting, they discussed the issues and concerns of the tourism sector in the Sultanate and the obstacles that it faces as hindrance against the growth of tourism. It may be impossible to consider tourism as a source of income to the country. Meeting targeted to coordinate efforts and to determine the track of the Committee’s activities in the next phase.

Ahmed bin Salem al-Junaibi, Vice Chairman of the Tourism Committee at al-Wusta Governorate Branch explained: Despite the difficulties experienced by the tourism sector in the Sultanate and specifically in al-Wusta governorate, we must work as one team and intensify efforts for serving this vital sector. The sector is important in our country, and it is necessary to coordinate with National Ferry Company in order to conduct a trip from Muscat to Duqm and vice versa for the purpose of raising the poor occupancy rates of hotels in the economic zone of Duqm.

Saud Bin Salem al-Yahmadi, Chairman of the Tourism Committee of Chamber’s Branch of North Sharqiya Governorate talked on the issue of tourist guidance and violations that occur in this area as tourist guidance is practised by non-professionals, which affect the tourism dramatically because of lack of familiarity with the history and geography of the place and the poor knowledge about the customs and traditions which drive the wheel of tourism backward. On the other hand, the ugly exploitation of tourist guides by some tour operating companies with respect to unsatisfactory and low wages, also compels them to resign from their job.

Ali bin Salem al-Hajri, Chairman of the Committee added that the tour guide is a mobile camera of Oman for its visitors and an important role lies on his shoulder in enriching tourism, explaining that although the expatriate tour guides possess the knowledge on the history, they cannot, definitely, reflect the customs and traditions of Oman as an Omani can do. Abdulaziz bin Rashid al-Hassani, Vice Chairman of the Committee stressed the need to locate where the problem lies in tourist guides and address the relevant authorities through the Chamber as it is the official representative of the private sector.

Lack of tour guides in castles and forts

And on the same subject, Saeid bin Saif al-Mujaini, Chairman of the Tourism Committee at branch of the Chamber at South Batina Governorate said: It is truly regrettable the lack of enough tour guides in castles and forts which reflects the lack of a clear plan by the Ministry of Tourism regarding regulations of tour guides sector and keeping it efficient. If the Forts and castles and the great historical legacy of the Sultanate reflected by them are facing inadequate number of tour guides, whereas these forts are the most important and unique feature in the tourism sector, then what would be the case in other tourist destinations. Regarding the tour guide card, Al-Mujaini, suggests the need of a training program for applicants.

On the other hand, Badr bin Nasser Al-Hajri, member of the Tourism Committee of the Chamber, mentioned
that tourism companies experience delay in the completion of transactions and tedious bureaucracy from the part of the Ministry of Tourism and other relevant authorities. Regarding the issue of tourist guidance, he said that, the tourist companies may sometimes have to bring expatriate guides despite they believe that the Omani guides are absolutely apt for this position than any others.

Yunus bin Sakhy Al Balushi, Director General of the Directorate General of the Municipality of Amrat and member of the committee emphasized that it is not worthwhile for affected tourism companies to remain idle, waiting for solutions from the Ministry of Tourism. They should take the initiative by suggesting appropriate solutions, especially since the companies are the most affected ones by the obstacles faced by the tourism sector.

**Tourist Guidance is seasonal job**

Dr. Abdul Karim bin Sultan Mughairy, Principal of the Oman Tourism College and member of the Committee emphasized that there are many efforts being made in this regard, but we must not forget that the tourist guidance in the Sultanate is mostly a seasonal job and there is a sect of tour guides working as employees throughout the year and they will be available for guidance in tourism seasons. He added that the training programs for tour guides are available, but the problem comes after the training as the tourist guide jobs are seasonal and are active during certain periods of the year. On the other hand Mughairy explained that funding for the training of tour guides shall be benefitted by the job seekers and not the employees. Here the need to find ways to finance the part-time tour guides also becomes clear.

**Training of people of the areas**

Dr. Jalal Hamza Alifi, head of the Tourism Department at Sultan Qaboos University and Committee member also agrees on the need to provide training courses for tourist guides where several countries impose training requirement before getting this card. With respect to seasonality of tourism Alifi says that the solution lies in conducting courses for the people of the areas so that they will take over guidance responsibility at their regions and most important is the willingness of the society to accept the work of tour guide.

**The members of the Committee pondered whether it was possible to use tourism tax, for example, to finance the training of tour guides!**

Ali bin Ahmed Al-Rawas, Chairman of Tourism Committee at branch of the Chamber in Dhofar governorate, explained that it is important to give the tour guide what he deserves from the official wage and treated as an employee and not employed during the tourism season only.

We discussed this during the meeting mechanism of the participation of the committee in Salalah Tourism Festival along the lines of its participation in Muscat Festival, and it met with success in its last edition. The Committee also talked upon the issue of random tenting and its negative impact on the environment due to the consequent lack of responsibility of some tents towards the cleanliness of the place. The committee suggested to set up mechanism for tenting to resolve this problem by determining particular place for tenting, which will be fenced around and by preventing the tourists from tenting outside this specified place, with the provision of basic services such as water and toilets against small payments from those wish tenting.

Saif bin Said Al Badi, chairman of the tourism committee at the branch of the Chamber in Addhahira Governorate, pointed out that the slow procedures with relevant authorities in the tourism sector as well as the poor tourism culture may be the two main reasons for the weakness of tourism investment in the Sultanate, emphasizing the need to find quick solutions to these issues.

As he asked the members of the Committee why the petroleum companies operating in the Sultanate do not initiate to build integrated fueling stations on the roads, or why the concerned authorities do not put that condition in this regard before sanctioning the establishment of fueling station in certain locations? This should be in line with successful experiences of integrated fueling stations in the neighboring countries where experience has shown the positive impact of the integrated fuel stations on the roads, on the development of domestic tourism.
Dr. Ibrahim bin Baqir al-Ajmi, chairman of the chamber’s real estate development committee, emphasized the need to intensify efforts by the committee in the coming period for the development and advancement of the real estate sector and to work seriously to find solutions to the obstacles faced by those who work in the sector as it is one of the important sectors contributing to the national economy and functioning side by side with some other sectors. He pointed out that the chamber is one of the pillars of this sector as it is the house of traders and their representative to the decision-makers. It acts as the engine of economic activities. He stressed that the convergence and integration of roles between the Chamber and other agencies relevant to real-estate sector is important.

Al-Ajmi spoke to Al Ghorfa about the outcome of the efforts on the issuance of “broker card” of realtors, which will be effective soon, for the purpose of regulating brokerage market as charting its regulations is in progress. Training courses will be provided for new applicants for these cards. The training period is to be agreed with the concerned authorities. The aim of these actions is to regulate the real estate market in order to qualify it with transparency, candor and credibility, to gain the confidence of investors and to avoid indiscrimination in business. The system will be applied in Muscat governorate as a first stage and consequently will be spread to other governorates at a later stage.

The Ministry of Housing, represented by the Directorate General of Real Estate Development, has issued the following requirements to obtain a license to practice the profession of real estate brokerage:

First: Individuals:
1. Shall be Omani national or citizens of AGCC with ordinary residence in Oman.
2. Shall not be less than 21 years old.
3. Shall be having commercial registration and membership in OCCI.
4. Shall not have been sentenced in a crime of moral turpitude or dishonesty or declared bankrupt unless he has been rehabilitated.
5. Shall have an appropriate center of operations or a private office in his name.

Secondly: Companies:
1. Shall be an Omani institution or company, licensed to practise the real estate brokerage business and the percentage of Omani brokering employees is not less than 80% with at least one person holding General Diploma or equivalent.
2. Shall be having commercial registration and OCCI membership.
3. Shall have an appropriate center of operations or a private office in its name.

On the resolution of the Ministry of Housing regarding system of the property ownership of Gulf citizens and its repercussions, al-Ajmi explained that the decision is not new but it is based on the previous resolutions of the GCC summit, but that flexibility in the implementation of the resolution was because of the previous situations. Now it’s time to implement it for the benefit of the land price stability. In response to some reactions from those concerned with the resolution, who justified the lack in land investment for long periods as a result of the lack of allied services, Al-Ajmi explained that the investor is supposed to be aware, at the beginning itself or at the time of purchase, that there are no services, and he purchased the land on that base. He added: the Ministry of Housing has recovered the situation and appreciatively put an end to it. So the purpose of this type of resolutions is to find true investors having serious desire to invest and not for freezing the land and prices gambling later, because its predicaments are to be borne by the people of the country without any doubt. He followed saying: We welcome serious investors from our brothers in GCC. Oman embraces investment but in accordance with the laws applicable here because the Sultanate is a nation that respects the laws and therefore those who wish to invest here must adhere to the laws.

Chairman of the Committee, Dr. Ibrahim Al-Ajmi assured that the real estate market in Oman is on track and there is no fear of it. On the contrary there are process of correction in the current price and that is not drop in the price as propagated through social media.
FOR BETTER HR MANAGEMENT

Specialists stressed that human resource management is the backbone of companies and it has strategic position in the system of providing the perfect environment to stimulate workers for the achievements, which will reflect positively on products of the companies and their future plans. Officials also noted that human resources departments in many companies in Oman suffer from marginalization, limits of powers and lack of interest by the boards of directors. In some companies they are sham and not to exercise tasks of human resources officials, but only to register with relevant government agencies that this person is Human Resources representative or official for the company in the private sector. Those who control all functions of human resources manager are only expatriate with full powers.

Importance of Convincing employer of the importance of the role of human resources

On the role of human resource managers in the private sector, Khalid bin Ali al-Husseini, Human Resources Manager, Arab Logistics Company, says: As managers of human resources, upon our shoulders are many duties that reflect the importance of the role played by this administration. I remember them here, for example, but not limited to, to attract the employees, the selection and recruitment; job categorization; wages and salaries; performance assessment; training and others.

He added: What leaves no room for doubt, and those who hold such responsibilities may agree with me, is that the biggest challenge for human resource managers is to harmonize the multiplicity of cultures and religions and the multiplicity of languages. This is a major challenge to the Manager of Human Resources to find ways to deal with and ensure creating an atmosphere of fraternity and affection in the organization, for the fact that the organization, in general, is a place to work and live together.

He added: In order to increase the activation of our role as managers of human resources in the private sector institutions, we wish more attention by business owners to human resources management and empower human resources manager in terms of authorities, decision-making, training and support to achieve the goals set by the management, provided that these goals should be clear and well-settled. Also the employer should possess the
correct conviction, culture and information on the importance of the role of human resource management in the success of the company’s strategy. He pointed out that there are a lot of solutions, which in turn increase the activation of the role of human resources manager in the private sector institutions that have no space to be mentioned here.

And about the role of the chamber to maximize the role of human resources says Husseini: Attempts of the chamber like arranging ongoing meetings with representatives of human resources management and observing their concerns and aspirations are the instrumental to help the growth and increase of the knowledge of the person concerned. We ask favour of those in charge of the chamber to continue to organize such meetings with the officials in the chamber and in the public sector on a regular basis.

Some staff do not have commitments to their duties

According to Humaid bin Mohammed al-Uwaimiri, HR Officer, Advanced Technology Company (name to be confirmed) : We, as responsible for human resources in the private sector face many challenges which require our greater effort to dealing with, like Omani employees’ indifference to work, frequent absenteeism with and without reason, frequent sick leaves and late attendance to work. We request from official authorities to put a tough law on this matter, and we wish to include training plan for human resources in the Omani law so as to be mandatory for everyone.

He added: We would request the Chamber to develop a plan for regular meetings and conferences between HR managers, Chairman of the Chamber, Chairman of the General Federation of Oman trade unions and the Ministry of Manpower, which in turn regulate our job and work on the relationship between human resources and employees.

Awareness of the authorities and duties

On the importance of the role of departments and officials of the human resources of the institutions in the private sector, HE Said Bin Saleh Al Kiyumi, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry pointed out that human resources are the backbone and the safety valve. So the international companies pay great importance to the position of Human Resource Manager, as they are keen that one who does that job should enjoy the competence, experience and knowledge. They give him all the powers required for his position, enabling him to perform his duty to the fullest.

He said: It is noted that many private sector companies in Oman do not pay due attention to this administration both in the efficiency of one who manage it or in the powers granted to them, which will reflect negatively on the work and the relationship between employees and management of the company. Some of the main causes of work stoppage that took place in some companies is lack of the language of dialogue as well as the lack of strong management of human resources that exercise its functions in accordance with international standards. He also emphasized on the necessity of activating the departments and division of human resources in companies and institutions in the private sector to be able to keep up with the needs of companies on the one hand and human resources on the other hand. Also these Departments are expected to play role of organizing the relationship between companies, institutions, trade unions and human resources.

He urged everyone to work on self-development, to be desirous for the awareness on the powers and duties and to act boldly to achieve the objectives. He proposed to organize a monthly meeting of human resources managers hosted by one of the companies in order to coordinate efforts and study requirements of the sector in addition to a broad meeting in every three months in the chamber. He ensured that HR Managers from companies in the private sector will be included in the delegations representing Oman to the Arab Labor Organization meeting and to the International Labour Organization meeting to be conducted in Geneva for gaining experience, contacts and communications.

This came in a meeting organized by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry with the Chief Executives, managers and officials of human resources in a number of companies and institutions in the private sector, in the presence of the Chairman of the General Federation of Oman Trade Unions, during which attendees discussed the reality of human resources departments in private sector institutions in the Sultanate and the challenges faced by them, focusing on the need to draw an action plan for the next stage of the development of these departments in line with its position and responsibilities until private companies play their role to the fullest in attracting national workforce and contribute to the development of the national economy.

He explained that the meeting was organized as the chamber believes in the importance of dialogue with the respective segments of the sector, whether they are employees, employers or leaders in the institutions and it believes that the strength of any nation lies in human resources management, indicating that this meeting to chart a course of action in line with government programs, it plans with private sector and its main objectives.

Marginalization and Limited powers

Nabhan bin Ahmed al-Battashi, Chairman of the General Federation for Oman Trade Unions, also stressed on the importance of building cordial relationship between the parties of the production and building a community dialogue between them, pointing out that the human resources departments at companies are suffering from power limits, marginalization and lack of interest from company management. He emphasized that the most random stoppages of work occur because of the gap between senior management and decision-makers and employees. He notified the need to strengthen human resources departments and empowering them.
At the end of the seminar on the development of investment in private education, speakers requested the officials involved in the sector to simplify the procedures for obtaining licenses for private schools by creating a one-stop office with appropriate powers to consider the requests for licenses, with the help of personnel having competence in the field of education. Also they requested to find a sustainable partnership between the business and finance sector and the private sector to support education initiatives in the creation and development of private education facilities; and to develop a future vision concerned with the allocation of land and appropriate locations nearby housing areas for private school buildings. Besides, they emphasized the importance of forming a regulation for assessment, approved by the Ministry of Education to classify quality levels in private schools and align it with the tuition fees, in addition to encouraging the private sector to set up schools as non-profit ventures being a part of social responsibility programs; and the development of private education system, characterized by creativity, innovation and flexibility undergoing to quality control by an independent body. Again they emphasized the importance of holding regular meetings with the proprietors of private schools by the Education Committee of the Chamber to discuss the challenges they face.

This was during the seminar at Crowne Plaza Hotel, Sohar, organized by OCCI, North Batinah Governorate Branch, represented by the branch Committee for Education, under the patronage of His Excellency Dr. Said bin Hamad Al-Rubaie, the Secretary General of the Board of Education, and the presence of HE Said Bin Saleh Al Kiyumi, Chairman of OCCI and a number of officials and relevant personalities in the education sector from government departments, companies and educational institutions.

His Excellency Dr. Said bin Hamad Al-Rubaie, the Secretary General of the Board of Education stressed that investment in education means investment in the society, in the quality and in future generations. Therefore, investors should be away from the business perspective and should consider that this type of investment is the contribution of the private sector for the advancement of future generations of Oman, upon whom we rely for building the nation and who will contribute to strengthening the Omani economy and its development.

Rubai said: There are many opportunities available to the private sector, especially in school and pre-school education in the North Batinah and other governorates, but we must ensure improving the quality of education and this is sought by the government. The improvement, is the basic pillar and one of the important aspects in educational process associated with the preparation, development and rehabilitation of human beings.

Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, stressed on the importance of the seminar that it comes to shed light on one of the most important sectors, not only in the trade and investment side but also on the side of development, upbring and rehabilitation of the Omani human resource to participate and contribute to the nation-building and self-worth, explaining that education is one of the basic needs that the Sultanate’s government ensures as one of the main objectives of the successive development plans.

He pointed out that the chamber is aware of the importance of providing serious and advanced education to meet the market’s needs for fully prepared Omani cadres. So it has formed, in recent years, the Committee for Education, one of the specialized committees of the chamber and it concerns with follow-up of investment efforts in the private education sector. It looks for the issues and challenges related to this sector and proposes their solutions and ideas that serve the development of private education in cooperation with the official bodies responsible for the sector.

The seminar began with a welcome speech by Dr. Ali Bin Hassan, head of the seminar organization Committee and Chairman of Chamber’s North Batinah Branch committee for the Education. The chairman pointed out that the Sultanate has paid in this prosperous reign of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said - May Allah protect him - great care to education. However, the increasing growth in the number of young people who attend annually with public education, and in view of what can be provided by the private education of outstanding contribution in the field of supplying qualitatively educated and equipped cadres to the nation as per its needs of conscious, responsible and productive citizens for the society and the nation. Also considering the humanitarian and global dimension, it was necessary to move towards private education that appeared in the first decades of the Renaissance.

Hence the Education Committee in OCCI Branch in North Batinah Governorate engaged in conducting this seminar on investment in private education in the governorate. He added that this trend is not new in our society. Education was in the past, social and civil responsibility, alike in katatib or small centres for Quranic studies or in rather big schools (madaris) by the endowments of philanthropists. There were private schools during the beginning of the last century to teach calligraphy, Arabic, basics of mathematics and English in addition to the few
public schools that have been established during the reign of Sultan Said bin Taimur, - May Allah’s mercy upon him.

He pointed out that the reason to work hard and relentlessly in this context is that Al Batinah North Governorate is one of the most densely populated areas in the Sultanate in addition to that the governorate possesses presence of considerable proportion of citizens, residents and those who contribute to the development movement. This makes an urgent need to invest in private education, especially with the growing demand for high-quality private education and lack in number of private schools, especially bilingual schools or that offer international programs.

Education has become one of the areas of the lucrative trade in many parts of the world, especially since we moved to the knowledge-based economy in the 21st century, which changed the manifestations of globalization, technology and information explosion that wiped out the world and the way we work, whether at the individual or social level. This requires us to change the way of teaching and learning so that we can support the education for the future, and not for the past.

Private schools between reality and expectations

Ms. Zuwaina bint Abdullah Al Salam, head of private schools department at the Directorate General of Education in North Batinah Governorate explained during her presentation of a working paper entitled «Private Schools between reality and expectations», that the government has provided the opportunity for individuals, institutions or companies of the private sector, to invest in the field of education since 1970, by permissions for establishment of private schools. She added that available statistics show that during 1972-73 academic year there were two private schools in the Sultanate imparting education to a total of 115 male and female students through a team of 12 teachers. Today North Batinah Governorate alone has about 74 private schools which can be classified according to their syllabus to international schools, global schools, bilingual schools, single language schools, Quran schools, and kindergarten, with a total enrollment of 11,944 male and female students and with 967 teachers and 189 administrative staff.

Al Salam also spoke about the reasons for the increase in demand for private education, which outlined several elements including: high population density; high personal income level; the establishment of industrial zones; the high proportion of investments in the governorate; the high rate of awareness of the importance of education; the search for better alternatives to public education; and diversity characterized by private schools and their uniqueness in syllabi which are not offered in public schools as well as the keenness of these schools to compete to provide global educational syllabus of high quality and specifications. Private schools are distinguished by providing kindergarten and allowing to enroll students in lower age to the first grade, unlike in the public schools. She also explained the procedures and requirements necessary for the license for the establishment of private schools.

Partnership in Education

Ahmed bin Suleiman Ismaili, Deputy Executive Director of the United Private Schools, pointed out that there are real challenges faced by the private schools, some of which are linked to the Ministry of Education. Most notables are that the culture of education is a missing partnership among the private schools. Also the real support almost lost as there is no flexibility in choosing the curriculum as well as the advantage of the experience of private schools are not taken.

He pointed out that there are challenges linked to the Ministry of Manpower and some of the laws relating to the regulation of work and workers that do not contribute in facilitating mission of private schools. Among them is the Omani Labour Law No. (35/2003), which is a general law as well as the law of resignation, which must be re-considered in addition to laws and regulations relating to limit of working hours, periods, and maternity leaves in addition to the delay in the procedure for appointing the teaching staff in private schools.
HE Hamdi Al-Taba, Chairman of the Jordanian Businessmen Association and the former Minister of Commerce and Industry, called upon Omani businessmen to take advantage of Jordan’s geographical location privileged to access the North African markets, stressing that the economic developments in the Kingdom during the past few years of comprehensive reforms, providing environment for competitive investment at the level of the region, and security, safety and stability that the regions is blessed with, become an inducement to increase the volume of the economic cooperation between the Kingdom and the Sultanate, to raise the rate of intra-regional trade and to encourage the establishment of investment projects.

He also pointed out that the attractive investment climate in Jordan and excellent economic relations through free trade agreements linking the area with major international markets such as the United States, Europe, Canada and Turkey as well as Arab countries; make Jordan a popular destination for investors to take advantage of the incentives and benefits of the establishment of projects in Jordan to meet the need of the domestic market and third party markets as well as export across Jordan.

This was during a visit of delegation of the Jordanian Businessmen Association to the Sultanate of Oman. They had a meeting with their counterparts from the Omani businessmen at Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry. He has pointed there that this visit extends through pacts of economic relations between the business communities in both countries and in order to consolidate economic relations, that help achieve the common interests.

He stressed to the necessity of enhancing the communication between enterprises, companies and businesspeople in economic activities, particularly joint ventures and exchange of information to find out the potential of cooperation available in the various fields to live up economic relations to the ambitions, especially in the field of exchange-trade, which does not reflect the available potentials.

He explained that the city of Aqaba is Jordan’s Gate to the world in the west of the Red Sea, which is a special economic zone and free zone to form the starting point for the creation of a sophisticated regional center in a strategic location in the Middle East.

All trade and investment projects in Aqaba region are entitled with a lot of benefits and inducements, including the nonexistence of restrictions on the share proportion of foreign investment in all tourism, industrial and commercial areas. Moreover it is a regional center with multimodal transport facilities, like a port with integrated services and an international airport. A 5% tax is imposed on net income of any project with the exception of insurance, banking services and road transport.

He also pointed to the exemptions of all imports to the region from customs duties, exemption from taxes except 7% sales tax on final consumption of ten materials and services of hotels, restaurants and taxis and a special tax on tobacco products and alcoholic beverages, exemption of registered enterprises from taxes of buildings and land on properties owned in the region, the lack of restrictions on dealing in foreign currencies, the transfer of profits and capital abroad, and simplified procedures for employment and immigration.
Engineer Redha bin Juma Al Saleh, deputy chairman of OCCI for Administrative and Financial Affairs, stressed that the decline in world oil prices is one of the violent effects on the global economy, but its impact on the Sultanate and its course of development in the private sector would not limit its economic growth… pointing out that at the same time that the private sector should be immune to this and the negative repercussions of the fall in oil prices at the global level and must adopt a unified strategy and vision to diversify the economic base to address the price volatility of global crude markets, to disengage gradually from total reliance on oil revenues as a sole source of income; and to support other vital sectors.

IMF members raised a lot of questions and inquiries about it. Most notable were on the state budget and its revenue in 2015, ways to provide solutions and revenue alternatives to oil, generating employment opportunities for Omani youth and the essence of economic measures that can be taken, especially in the event of an economic and social impacts of lower oil prices on the Sultanate. Engineer Redha Al Saleh answered all those questions, saying that the Sultanate has always sought to preserve the economic status and is characterized by its budget by stability in every year and has previous experiences and experiments when it was confronted by tribulations and consequences of the crisis on the economic and social life of the citizens.

He said: “I am optimistic that the global oil prices will soon recover and no need to dramatize. The propagandas in the domestic circles regarding policies and measures the government has taken as a result of lower oil prices, such as raising customs duties and taxes on individuals and public and private institutions are untrue.” He noted that the government has yet to announce package of measures to be taken. In case the country is taking any economic measures, it will be, no doubt, well-established and based on scientific methodology with clear principles, considering the economic and social aspects.

Vice Chairman of the Chamber for Administrative and Financial Affairs, said: “What we must focus on in the current period is the suffering of the national economy from the outside remittances. It really weakens the economy and it reached to billions in addition to increasing of the covert trade practices by expatriates who come on work contracts in the private sector, but they engage in covert trade in various ways. Therefore it is necessary to strictly control them where it turns out that the amounts transferred outweigh the salary paid to them. So the covert trade is to be eliminated and bulk infiltrating labor forces are to be fought with. These clearly and evidently affect the national economy.

Also there was dialogue between the parties about the contribution of other sectors of trade, industry, tourism and services, which according to the members of the delegation are relatively limited as a source of revenue. Engineer Redha explained that the coming period will witness a growth in all these sectors since new laws will be issued, which are considered as fiscal stimulus policies like a law of competition protection and prevention of monopoly. The basic aim of this law is to provide economic freedom, open the way for competition, promote the Omani market situation, make it one of the leading markets in the region and enhance the competitiveness and ability to attract investment…The next phase will see more work and productivity, especially with the introduction of the new labor law, which we expect to see the light in the near future. It will work on the regularization of the labor market, serving their aspirations and encouraging youth involvement in the private sector.

The meeting ended with talk about the reasons for the decline of Sultanate’s rate in the Global Competitiveness Report, and their scrutinizing to underestimate the Sultanate, the declines, as stated by the report, in the health and education sectors, the efficiency of the labor market, training and rehabilitation, and development of the labour market in the private sector. Engineer Redha commented by saying that the private sector will seek to maintain the pros shown by the report, resolve the drawbacks and provide solutions to them in cooperation with the relevant authorities.
FORUM FOR BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES AND EMPLOYMENT AT MUSANDAM

Contracts worth RO 17 million have been provided by the Forum;

Follow-up: Ibrahim aljolandani

AL-RAEESI:
Small and medium enterprises sector is the backbone of the economy of any country.

Supporting the private sector in the Musandam Governorate; work on small and medium enterprise development; and providing job opportunities for job seekers from the governorate in companies and enterprises that are implementing projects; as well as contributing to the diversification of the source of income for families and institutions through business contracts with enterprises or with members of the society as a social responsibility; the provision of employment contracts for small and medium enterprises through the projects offered by the companies; highlighting the large development projects and companies & institutions supporting the society; contributing to the self-employment; introducing the business ethics; encouraging freelance businesses; building spirit of competition among small and medium enterprises; and encouraging large companies to adopt social initiatives that enrich and serve different segments of the society, were the objectives of the forum for business opportunities and employment in the Musandam Governorate, organized by the Chamber’s branch in Musandam Governorate during 25-26 March 2015.

Regarding the forum, Hamid Zaman al-Raeesi, Chairman of the Chamber branch in Musandam Governorate, says: This initiative of Musandam branch of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry was to supplement and support the small and medium enterprise sector; to create a bridge of communication and partnership between the public and private sectors; to highlight the role of businessmen, businesswomen, entrepreneurs and innovators; to shed light on initiatives in the business and finance sector in various activities and the diversity of its services; and to identify the potential, the achievements and experiences of small and medium enterprises. The role of Musandam branch is mainly in establishing the spirit of partnership and integration with all the institutions in both public and private sectors for building an economic society capable of competition and productivity.

Also he added that: the small and medium enterprise sector is the backbone of the economy of any country. It is the largest segment of the private sector. So it is necessary for us to create an initiative that works to connect and support this modest sector in
Musandam Governorate through the provision of contracts for small and medium enterprises with companies that are executing government projects in the governorate. Praise to Allah, contracts amounting RO17 million have been finalized.

Also the OCCI Branch at Musandam has taken into consideration the aspect of social responsibility and social service in order to raise the income level of the individual and the family. So it worked very hard to support employment and job seekers and it could provide 130 jobs for job seekers in various categories of top jobs and others through corporate and government projects in Musandam Governorate.

Large private sector enterprises contribute effectively to the development of SMEs

Said Bin Mohammed Al Shahi at customer services department, Omantel says: Always we pursue to participate in such meetings and events especially in those that concern the business sector and the small and medium-sized enterprises. We also strive to clarify and showcase the services provided by Omantel for SMEs, trying to make their business activities simple and easy and to support them for their growth & development, enabling them for competition and progress.

He added that Omantel has recently launched the service of “Amali”, especially for private SMEs, which aims the growth and development of SMEs in a tangible way; offers a unique and integrated solutions for business; and provide integrated communications for business purposes, including unlimited Internet, fixed-line and mobile phone and even free calls within the company. “Amali service” offers all these to the enterprises only for RO 29 per month.

Interest-free loans for full-time employees and job seekers

Saił Al-Zaidi, Regional Director of Oman Development Bank says: Our participation at the forum of business and employment opportunities was to showcase a set of career opportunities for job seekers in various fields, as well as to introduce the products and programs offered by Oman Development Bank to support projects and institutions of the small and medium category.

He pointed out that the bank offers a range of financial products for small and medium-sized enterprises in the areas of agriculture, fisheries, industries and tourism, etc., as the bank helps in preparation of economic feasibility reports through consultancy for the projects worth more than RO 100,000. The financial support shall be at a non-compound interest rate up to 3%, in addition to other interest-free loans up to RO 5,000 for full-time employees and job seekers.

He added that the loans provided to the owners of SMEs in the Sultanate are much better than that in many other countries. There are many finance agencies that support and help the enterprises for their advancement and development. But the owner of the project should have the know-hows and exploit them at optimum.

SMEs involve to promote and publicize their products

Ali bin Hassan al-Shahi, owner of Al-Haramain dates, explains about his participation in the exhibition: Goal of our participation is promotion and marketing of our products and exploitation of this opportunity to meet with representatives of large companies and representatives of government institutions to introduce our products to them.

He added: Praise be to Allah that He gave us a chance to deal with a group of companies like Lulu Hypermarket and National Ferries Company and we will be coordinating with them later to complete the deals officially.

On his beginning in entrepreneurship, Al-Ali Al-Shahi says: My beginning was with an encouragement of programs offered by government agencies and of programs and seminars hosted by OCCI branch at Musandam, which began instill love of self-employment administration without waiting for the job. Also the chamber and government agencies provided us a lot of encouragement like our participation in exhibitions and other activities.

Appeal to the relevant authorities

Mohammed bin Ahmed Al Shaahi, owner of Middle Travel and Tourism Est., says: organization’s name (middle) is borrowed from an area in Khasab in order to introduce it and publicize. He added that he came to participate in the forum of business and employment opportunities by the invitation of the chamber to the owners of SMEs, as well as to take advantage of the available opportunities and to introduce services and programs of our enterprise in the field of travel and tourism.

He also pointed out: I started in this area because the market of Musandam Governorate and especially Khasab is active in tourism area. Regarding the rest of the areas, they are less active because this is a tourist attractive area for visitors. Also I have the desire and skill in this field and experience as well as in the organization of tourist trips.

He added: We request the relevant authorities and especially the Ministry of Tourism to assess the performance of the companies engaged in the cruise tourism and give them instructions and guidance regarding the places that they can visit as some of the places have special features and privacy so as the tourism should not turn adversely to the area.
SHARING THE TURKISH EXPERIENCE

The Chamber is in continuous efforts, since the beginning of the current session, to overcome obstacles to the private sector in their way to keep pace with development and be its key partner, through the initiatives by the Chamber for the promotion of the private sector and increasing its contribution to local income. From this base comes the initiative of “please participate with us for your progress” which included sending specialized business delegations to visit the advanced countries, each according to their respective fields, which in turn opens up more channels of business communication between companies and institutions of Oman and their counterparts from different countries to achieve outstanding cooperation in trade and economic relations between the countries.

In this report we talk about the trade delegation that the Chamber sent to the Republic of Turkey during the period from March 3 to 6, 2015 with the participation of 10 business professionals in the field of agriculture and livestock from various wilayats and different governorates of the Sultanate (Buraimi, Al-Suwaq, Bahla, and Nizwa) and headed by Engineer Hamoud bin Salem al-Saadi, member of the Board of Directors, and Chairman of the Chamber’s branch in South Batinah. This delegation was organized in cooperation with the Turkish commercial Consulate in Muscat.

While explaining about the delegation, Engineer Hamoud al-Saadi, member of the Board of Directors and Chairman of the Chamber branch of the South Batinah, said: the Chamber have arranged this delegation for some Omani companies involved in the agricultural field. Also the exhibition comes in line with this, which was participated by the Omani companies specialized in the field of agricultural and fishery products, fertilizer and equipment, agricultural pumps and sale of poultry, eggs, pesticides and animal feed. He urged the participants from the medium and small companies to take advantage of the efforts of the Chamber through the involvement of small and medium enterprises owners in these delegations, as well as to make business deals, opportunities and ideas raised by the exhibition.

He added: the delegation aimed to participate in the exhibition of Food, Agriculture, Livestock in Mersin, which is in South Turkey and approximately 1,500 kilometers away from Istanbul. The city is famous for its green agricultural oasis that stretches beyond the eye sight, with all kinds of fruits like oranges, apples, olives, and others, as well as vegetables. This is also famous for breeding poultry. This, in turn, contributes to the development of mechanism, capabilities, knowledge and experience of the members of the delegation and to define their future choices, so as to provide the actual needs of markets in the country.

The program of the visit included to attend exhibition of Food and Agriculture and Livestock, as well as bilateral talks with Turkish businessmen. During these days there were visits to several companies and factories specialized in manufacturing of organic fertilizers and juices as well as food canning industry.

The Group Acquainted on the Turkish Factory Experiments

The delegation visited the organic fertilizer factory where they spectated the process of manufacturing of organic fertilizers with semi-automatic mechanism for the production of organic fertilizers which are enriched, sterile and friendly to the environment, and the methods of utilizing the animal and plant waste for useful and safe fertilizer to meet all the needs of farms ensuring a healthy crop of vegetables and fruits along with a clean environment. The organic
fertilizers produced by the factory are in various forms; in the form of pills, powder form and in the form of liquid substances.

The delegation also watched the lines of production, equipment and machineries in different kinds, which are used in the production of fertilizers, whether plant or animal, as well as tools of mixing, and chopping, treatment rooms, stirring stage and finally packing and canning.

The productivity, by which the factory is distinguished, in terms of the amount of production per day and in the possibility of export since the plant now produces the organic fertilizer required for the local market only and it wants to expand production activity to include export to other countries, including the Sultanate.

Factory for Agriculture Tools and Equipment

The delegation also visited the factory of tools and equipment in the city of Mersin, accompanied by one of the founders of the factory. He explained the history of the factory from its foundation nearly 53 years ago. This was founded by his father at the beginning of 1962. The factory manufactures high-quality products like all kinds of agricultural manual ploughs which are fixed to the tractors, like agricultural insecticide spraying machines, milking equipment suitable for cows and goats, and water hoses as well as agricultural tractors.

The factory plans to introduce new destinations for the export for sustainable growth for its business by coordination to establish agencies in other countries, including Oman and they are fully prepared to provide the equipment and machinery in line with the standard specifications required.

Another visit was to some juice factories in Mersin region to take advantage of these factories' expertise in the production of juices, method of packaging and machineries used in this process from the beginning of the production line to the end of the shipping procedures. Production manager explained about the machinery and equipment used, methods of washing fruit before they are pierced, ways to remove the outer shell and ending in canning and shipping either in drums or juice cans, each according to its kind.

Exhibition of Food, Agriculture and Livestock

The delegation also participated in the food, agriculture and fisheries exhibition, which is a favorite destination for all the people of specialization. The show was participated by large number of agricultural engineers and entrepreneurs to take advantage and to enrich their awareness on the largest agricultural markets to move through to the neighboring markets. Also they wanted to take advantage from the show of products, services and technologies for the specialists, to communicate with representatives of Turkish companies, major buyers and entrepreneurs, to be agents or representatives of such large branded companies and to explore areas of partnership and cooperation with them by contracts and signing deals directly during the same event.

Participation by delegation opened us new doors

On the participation of representatives of institutions and companies operating in the food and agriculture sector, Mohammed bin Said Rabkhi, owner of Bahla Trading and Agricultural Services says: Our participation in this agricultural exhibition was very positive. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Oman helped to meet a large number of businessmen and arranged for us appointments with them. This have contributed to bringing value to our presence in the agricultural exhibition and opened in front of us the doors of new opportunities that we were not able to access on our own.

Abdullah bin Saif Al Nuaimi said: This delegation made for us the opportunity to learn about specialized companies in the field of agricultural production, agricultural mechanization and the poultry equipment as well as their marketing. Also we learned about marketing different plastic pipes used for agriculture, seeds and seedlings. Also there were some companies specialized in the marketing of some products that require the Sultanate markets such as frozen chicken, chicks and hatching eggs, not to mention, some companies are specialized in providing excellent agricultural mechanization with efficiency and durability suitable to the environment of the Sultanate.
The term fish farming was not familiar to the listener or its meaning was not clear to him. Many people know that the farms are within some boundaries where planting is practised. You can see there different trees and plants and no need of much explanation. This is enrooted in the mind of the listener and he observes the same with his eyes. But, fish farms are new to him!! It is known that we get fish by fishing from water bodies - mostly from seas and to a lesser amount from some rivers. This is a known practice since a long time. But if there are fish farms, then it is new!!

The Fish Farms
By fish farms we mean aquaculture by building fish farms. They are fish farming basins, either on the coast or in the holdings of any farm, where appropriate natural, environmental and technical conditions are provided for farming the fish, its nourishment, its growth and its harvest. This will be another source for fish in addition to the normal fisheries. These fish farms are very similar to the conventional farms, in many aspects, especially in the process of services, harvesting and production.
Role of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

In Oman, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries had continuous efforts to encourage the activity of fish farming in order to increase fish production and to achieve food security. The ministry’s attention includes encouraging investors and especially young people, in the implementation of aquaculture projects. A one-stop centre for fish farming is functioning in the ministry to provide facilities to investors and introduce the aquaculture to them as a productive economic activity. The Ministry has also conducted a number of specialized training courses in the fields of aquaculture for young entrepreneurs. During the last phase the ministry organized scientific sessions on integrated aquaculture, mariculture and rural fish farming.

Fastest growing production sector in the world

Three decades ago the experience was rather difficult with the increasing numbers of the world’s population and lack of natural resources, agricultural resources, forests, pastures and fish resources. Economic activity of aquaculture was not known among investors and consumers alike and applications of modern technology was not available. In some cases, it was a non-achievable dream. Over the years the attention to fish farming began growing. Suffice to note here that fish farming is one of the fastest growing productive sectors in the world. Now, control of temperature, ventilation, light and providing suitable environment for the success of aquaculture projects have become affordable. The fish farm projects are now entered the era of specialization like farms for commercial purposes, farms for the fish production, others specialized for the production of progenies used in aquaculture farms and other farms are for scientific research purposes.

Various Projects

There are many productive and high quality fish farms in the Sultanate like projects in wilayats of Barka and Musanna in South Batina Governorate, in wilayat Manah in Dakhliya Governorate, and in the village of Wadi Jil at Wadil Ain in wilayat of Ibri, Addahira Governorate and in other wilayats. Some projects are completed and the others are ongoing. These are considered as successful experiments in fish farming in the Sultanate. These projects are of different types like projects for the production of fish, projects for the production progenies used in farming and projects for the production of feed and feed material, which is necessary in fish farming. Different methods are also used in farming. But the common denominator for these projects is the compatibility with the surrounding environment, appropriate utilization of natural resources, the use of highly developed technology applications and high output, with a firm confirmation that fish farming projects in the Sultanate are laying on solid ground and integrate with plans for development and growth of conventional fishing. Today there will not be any surprise to say the fish farms, since they are seen in real and exist in the lands of Oman.

Factors for success of Project

Successful project for productive fish farms depends on a number of factors associated with each other: the geographical ingredients and the proper utilization of natural resources, the use of modern technology and employment of trained human resources with scientific and technical abilities to work in the field of aquaculture. Here we review those factors and their importance in the success of aquaculture projects:

Geographical Constituents

Oman has a long coast of more than 3,000 kilometers and many bays and coves which are suitable for successful fish farming projects. The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries has published map showing suitable geographical locations for fish farming. This map is an important reference for investors because identifying the geographical locations apt for the aquaculture is an encouraging factor and it reduces the efforts and time for investors to choose appropriate places to set up their own businesses.

Appropriate utilization of natural resources

The fish farming in the Sultanate is utilizing the natural resources of water and land both within the agricultural holdings and on the coast. The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries encourages economical farming methods like the use of natural resources such as water as well as the ministry wants these projects to be appropriate to the surrounding environment.

Application of modern technology:

Application of modern technology has contributed to the development of different sectors and areas of aquaculture. The modern technology is utilized for development of projects, high efficiency of operation and increasing the productivity. Modern technology can be applied in many fields ancillary to the aquaculture like breeding, production of progenies and preparing the feed used in the fish farming.

Human Resources

The human resources component is the most important factors for success of aquaculture. The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries has focused on the human cadre working in the field of aquaculture. The aquaculture center of the Ministry is conducting training and development of workers in fish farming. The Centre has organized several training courses and workshops in various fields of aquaculture, for workers in this field. The ministry has participated in many seminars, conferences and training courses that deal with the fish farming. Also the ministry has organized in December of 2011 an international conference on investment opportunities in the field of aquaculture.
TALKING PICTURES
The Indonesian delegation of businesswomen visited Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry as part of their visit to the Sultanate, which aims to strengthen the Omani-Indonesian trade relations and to meet with Omani businessmen and businesswomen who are interested in partnerships in areas relevant to the delegation. The delegation was welcomed to the Chamber by Engineer Reza bin Juma Al Saleh, Vice Chairman of the Chamber for Administrative and Financial Affairs, who showed the Chamber’s appreciation to such visits by trade delegations. As it indicated earlier, it again indicates only the serious desire to improve the level of cooperation between the two countries and to raise the volume of trade exchange and the potentials of the two friendly countries. Engineer Al Saleh expressed his appreciation for the efforts of the Ambassador of Indonesia to the Sultanate, who chaired the delegation in its visit to the Chamber. He explained to the visiting delegation about the volume of attention that the women in the Sultanate of Oman gets through the wise leadership and the level of support they enjoy, result of which is prominent presence of Omani women in all fields, including entrepreneurship.

HE Sukanto, Indonesian Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, started his talks by congratulating Omani people for auspicious return of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, may Allah protect him, describing the day of His Majesty’s arrival as the long-awaited dividing day. It was an event made Omani as well as non-Omanis happy alike. His Excellency added that the nature of exchange of trade delegations is to establish an ideal base for the development of business between the Sultanate and the Republic of Indonesia. At the same time he called on the business community in the Sultanate to invest in his country and to exploit its rich natural resources, pointing out that the Indonesian economy is one of the fastest growing economies of Asian continent and the world. HE the ambassador concluded: We wish this step to be the beginning of future collaborations between the business sectors in our countries, and this visit to be followed by further visits of business delegations from both sides. The Chamber also provided an opportunity for the members of the delegation of women entrepreneurs to display their products through a miniature exhibition in the building of the Chamber so that the business community gets close awareness on these works.

Ms. Erna Lestari, a businesswoman among the members of the visiting delegation, owns a showroom of traditional craft industries related to interior design for hotels and homes like pillows covers and tables and family sets, manually manufactured with unique and creative designs using natural materials from Indonesia.

Ms. Erna says that this is her first visit to the Sultanate and she has impressed a lot with their program of visit that spreads between business and tourism. She expressed her thanks to Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry for it has made it possible for them to meet with the businesswomen in the Sultanate and to display their products in this exhibition. She added: As I learned, the hotel sector in Oman is growing broadly and in the light of the same, I hope to have the opportunity to market my products for these hotels and to build business relationships with them to deliver some of my products to them in the coming period.

Ms. Bananj is working with handicrafts, embroideries and home accessories. She is working in this field for 20 years. She is doing designs and assigns embroidery works to ten employees who have long experience in this field. She says that she is trying through this work to showcase the Indonesian culture and dress that are rich with embroidery and colors. Ms. Bananj says that she plans to visit the Sultanate again for the purpose of tourism with the family.
Arab Labour Conference in Kuwait

Bakri has been elected as chairman of team of the Governments

Sultanate has participated in the activities of the Arab Labour Conference at its 42nd session in the State of Kuwait, which was opened under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and in the presence of His Excellency Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid Al-Sabah, Acting Prime Minister and Foreign Minister.

His Excellency Sheikh Abdullah Bin Nasser Al Bakri, Minister of Manpower was leading the Sultanate’s delegation to the Conference. The delegation was consisting of representatives of the three sides of production, viz., the government, employers and workers. The business team of Oman was headed by HE Said Bin Saleh Al Kiyumi, chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, while Nabuhan bin Ahmed al Battashi, chairman of General Federation Oman Trade Unions, was leading the team of workers.

The conference discussed a number of topics in contact with the challenges facing the Arab countries in the field of labour, particularly the report of the Director General of the Arab Labor Organization, Mr. Ahmed Luqman, under the heading, 'Social dialogue is embodiment of Solidarity for Development and Employment', which deals with the role of the Arab Labor Organization in establishing a culture of social dialogue as it is considered as the main access to the Arab solidarity for development and employment. This issue is addressed in consistence to the reports of the former Director-General. The previous session was under the heading, 'the Arab cooperation and its prospects for supporting the employment'.

The report came in six chapters, including the details of problem in the Arab labor market, reminders of the problems faced by jobs seekers (social and economic characterization). The most important cause of the problem faced by job-seekers lies in dimensions of population, quality, education and economy.

The second discussion of the Conference was general directions for new intellectual environment for social dialogue between the three parties of production. The third discussion dealt with human resource as a strategic resource in the globalized economy, while the fourth discussion was on the impact of new work patterns of employment and the need of unanimity between the production parties. Fifth discussion dealt with social dialogue and dialogue frameworks and its sidelines, while the sixth discussion was dealing with social dialogue towards a new social and economic contract as an embodiment of the national solidarity for the sake of issues of development and employment.

The Conference reviewed two professional documents, under the titles of: (1) ‘the role of social dialogue in the promotion of social protection’, and (2) ‘policies and mechanisms for labor disputes settlement and its role in the stability of labor relations’. Also it presented the project of Arab strategy for information and communication in the field of economic and social development in labor issues.

In addition to the Director General’s report, the opening session witnessed a set of ceremonial items related to the golden jubilee celebration of the organization, including honouring the leaders of the participating delegations with commemorative shields.

On the other hand the conference unanimously selected HE Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Abdullah al-Bakri, Minister of Manpower, as Chairman of the team of governments. The conference has also elected other members of the Directorate Body and representatives of the committees.

Bakri meets the Director General of ILO

On the sidelines of the Arab Labour Conference HE Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser al-Bakri met with His Excellency Guy Ryder, Director General of the International Labour Organization (ILO), in the presence of His Excellency the Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Chairman of the General Federation of Oman Trade Unions.

During the meeting they discussed the aspects of joint cooperation between the organization and the Sultanate. The Director-General of the Organization appreciated the efforts of the Sultanate in various areas of work. His Excellency the minister noted the importance of technical support for the efforts of the Sultanate to take advantage of ILO’s technical experiences that required to support future plans in the field of the development of the labor market.
SHERATON
Dubai Creek Hotel
gets a facelift
Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide Inc. announced re-opening of the famous Sheraton Dubai Creek Hotel and Towers, after undergoing the process of a wide and comprehensive makeover of $50 million. It recalls that this ancient hotel had opened its doors for the first time in the United Arab Emirates in 1978. The modernization process included re-furnishing and design of all rooms and public places and facilities, and the famous Italian restaurant, Vivaldi by Alfredo Russo, in addition to the restaurant, Ashiana by Vineet, which will enhance the prestige of Sheraton Dubai Creek Hotel and Towers, being a favourite destination for the meeting by global travellers and members of the local community.

According to Stephan Vanden Auweele, general manager, Sheraton Dubai Creek: “Sheraton Dubai Creek Hotel and Towers reflects heritage of this great city, as this ancient hotel is offering services to residents and tourists for more than 35 years. The makeover process that the hotel underwent has given us the potential to meet the growing demand for luxury hotel facilities that provide experiences of distinct and pioneering stay for its guests, in addition to providing interactive and social gathering places for various occasions sought by international travellers and residents in Dubai.”

Sheraton Dubai Creek Hotel and Towers

The hotel is located on the shores of Dubai Creek, to allow enjoying the spectacular views of the Gulf waters and distinguishing urban scenes of the Emirate of Dubai. New hotel designs provide modern and comfortable haven for business and tourists away from the bustle of the city.

Sheraton Dubai Creek Hotel and Towers has 268 rooms and suites which provide the highest levels of comfort and relaxation for guests and provide experience to stay with full of charm and splendour of old Dubai. The rooms that have been completely renovated are distinguished with contemporary design. All of them have Sheraton Sweet Sleeper Bed, which is famous brand of Sheraton. Also the rooms of hotel that peer over the creek water are dazzling with the large windows that stretch from floor to ceiling, which provides a comprehensive and stunning views of the Gulf waters surfaces and skyline of charming city of Dubai.

Advanced facilities

Sheraton Dubai Creek Hotel continues to provide a wide range of lounges and conference rooms, in addition to Dubai ballrooms for events that can accommodate up to 500 guests, and four rest rooms annexed to the Executive Conference Center. The hotel spaces allocated for hosting all types of events and activities. They are ideal to host major events like business conferences and weddings.
Hyper Market Picture

HE Said Bin Saleh Al Kiyumi, chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, urged to speed up the establishment of domestic cooperatives in all governorates of the Sultanate. He requested the government, the private sector and citizens, in general, to support and back the formation of these associations. He stressed the importance of achieving the principle of equal opportunities to ensure fair and equal competition and to empower the local investor and national products. All these are in the context of the economic approach of the Sultanate...

His Excellency Chairman of the Chamber demanded the government, in a statement to the Oman newspaper, to allocate appropriate and suitable locations in all wilayats of the Sultanate to form domestic cooperative associations and to facilitate to get loans and financial facilities through specialized financial agencies in the Sultanate. He called upon, at the same time, Omani suppliers and manufacturers to necessarily support such associations as 100% domestic investments. The associations’ founders might have to be at least 100 Omani persons, having direct returns to the economy and the citizens in general.

He also said that it is vital to accelerate the establishment of these associations at the present time to rein in the predominance of some large commercial complexes (hypermarkets), which started to abnormally control the commodities and products, particularly national products, noting that the Chamber has received a lot of complaints from large national companies and factories expressing their displeasure over the practices and outrageousness of those foreign-invested complexes. He explained that a lot of national factories are suffering from hardships to showcase their products in

- It’s time to rein in the predominance of some large commercial complexes (hypermarkets).
- The Chamber received a lot of complaints from large national companies and factories against the outrageousness of commercial complexes (hypermarkets).
- The Chamber is against any practices that lead to damages to national factories and products.
- Some complexes (hypermarkets) have partnership with factories for 37% of sales value of showcased products.
- Company registration fees in some commercial complexes exceed RO 7,000.
- The most popular commodities are replaced with brand names of large commercial complexes.
- Fees for Omani companies to share in the construction of some complexes reach up to RO 15,000.
- We request to exempt some consumer goods from fees, so as not to hurt the consumer.
- We demand the government to allocate land in all the wilayats of the Sultanate to establish cooperative societies.
- We call on Omani suppliers and manufacturers to support the associations considering it as 100% domestic investments.
- We demand the government to amend Article 60 of the Oman Commercial Law promulgated by Royal Decree No. 55/90.
those complexes as the owners of those national factories are saying that they are not able to confront those complexes. Therefore they acquiesce in imposing of conditions and unjust and unfair fees. They wish if they have better options to market their products and get them displayed to the consumer. The Chairman of OCCI added: The Chamber is house of traders, but it is against any practices leading to damage to factories of national products. It is utmost disappointing that some large commercial complexes (hypermarkets) are imposing unfair conditions to national products but we are not exaggerating if we say that those products have to share about 37% of the total annual sales.

Some of the hypermarkets put conditions of annual rebates on purchases, ranging from 12 to 20%. Due to the financial and international power enjoyed by these complexes, they are asking an annual increase in the rate of agreed rebates. If the distributor refuses to increased rebates, those shops will be under pressure to stop distributing their products or their products will be removed from the shelves, noting that the distributor have to bear financial burden for getting his goods inside the shop. They require to pay company registration fees exceeding RO 7,000, in some complexes. His Excellency Chairman of the Chamber, said that some commercial complexes (hypermarkets), in addition to financial rebates required from the distributors, are also imposing a profit margin of between 10% and 15% on the final sale price displayed on the products. This is the case that clearly imposed, particularly on national factories and products, some of whom are facing the threat of bankruptcy as a result of this unhealthy situation, especially since the national factories have committed to comply with consumer protection act, by not raising the prices of goods. This leads to shrinkage in ratio of marginal profits which remain after the expenses that are being multiplied continuously. Moreover, those complexes (hypermarkets) whenever they observe any items displayed at their shops having high sales, they will stop displaying those items and replace them with the similar products of the hypermarket itself, which causes the distributors losses resulting from the accumulation of goods within their stores. He also said: In addition to that some large complexes (hypermarkets) impose extra fees as contributions for the construction of their new branches. When the hypermarkets wish to build a new branch, the distributor has to directly contribute up to about RO 15,000 to cover their construction expenses. If the distributor does not pay those contributions, he will be deprived of displaying his products. Also there is large hike in rent which reaches up to RO 400 per month in addition to charges for inclusion of the products in the lists of those complexes, ranging between RO 400 and 500 per product. Enough to say that contributions of national companies to those complexes under the name of (the bags contributions) are worth of about RO 3000. The rent of the chiller goes up to RO 500 per month per chiller. HE Chairman of the Chamber emphasized that all those unilaterally imposed fees weaken the national industry and domestic investor and in the long run, control of the local market will come to those complexes.

Besides the above, Said Kiyumi added that some commercial centers put conditions upon the suppliers and distributors to provide employees for moving their goods into and from the center, as well as for layout and arrangement of their products in the shelves, absolutely free of cost, without contributing to or bearing the costs of those employees’ salaries. Also they compel the supplier companies to recover the damaged goods without incurring the reasons for this damage. Also they impose upon the supplier companies the participation charges or to contribute to the offers, as some amounts in every week or month.

HE Said Bin Saleh Al Kiyumi, chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry opined that the status quo does not achieve the objectives of foreign investment, which should have the advantages of great facilities. It is supposed to have positive returns in terms of supporting national products and human resources and assisting small and medium enterprises to keep up with the directives of the wise government in this regard. Therefore it is important to correct the current situation with a collective vision to achieve goals and interests of all the parties, viz., large commercial complexes (hypermarkets) on the one hand, distributors, suppliers and small & medium-sized enterprises on the other hand. He added that one of the most important solutions proposed is amendment to Article 60 of Royal Decree No. 55/90 which is promulgated as the Commercial Law, which reads (It is allowed to deal in the shop, in whole or in part, as per provisions made in this chapter), asking the government to reconsider this article of Commercial Law, which also seem to act as cover for many erroneous practices by large commercial complexes (hypermarkets).

In the framework of the law, HE, the Chairman of the Chamber, pointed to the need to codify the process of charging by large commercial complexes to treat unilateral practices carried out by those complexes in determining those fees. It is important to pass a law to legalize those fees in accordance with specific regulations and subject to permanent and ongoing supervision by relevant authorities. HE demanded to exempt some basic consumer goods from the charges in order to avoid harm to the consumer and also demanded consideration of national products while formulating such laws.

His Excellency Chairman of the Chamber also stressed the necessity to initiate the establishment of cooperative associations with local and national investment and with the support of government and, specially, of the society, because it represents one of the important options to find alternatives to the marketing of national products and to provide more options for the consumer. Also he pointed to the importance of reviewing commercial contracts agreed between shops and distributors by concerned agencies and making agreement on certain ceiling, so as not to harm either side. In addition to above he pointed out to the necessity of instructing hypermarkets to stop pressure on distributors through asking extra rebates and to adhere to the particular ceiling as long as there is a general obligation not to raise prices on products and services alike. Moreover they are asked to limit the brands produced by large commercial complexes as their own, that affect largely on national products, especially since many of them benefiting indirectly and illegally through publicity that the national products achieved.

Al-Kiyumi explained at the conclusion of his statement that the Chamber might be with a firm position on what is happening in the market, after the large number of complaints received by the Chamber from large factories and suppliers appealing intervention to stop what they called greedy exploitation by the owners of «hypermarkets". This is dangerous a matter that shows the size of the problem since these companies will not complain, unless it is too serious.
Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Transport and Communications for 2015

Last year’s harvest witnessed a number of important decisions and achievements. The most important one is the transfer of navigational business activities of Port Sultan Qaboos to Sohar Port, after overcoming a series of challenges and difficulties, with the participation of the relevant government agencies to whom I extend sincere thanks and appreciation for their cooperation during the transition phase. This is a citation from speech by His Excellency the Minister of Transport and Communications during the media conference to explain the strategic plan of the Ministry of Transport and Communications for the year 2015, held in Grand Hyatt Muscat.

Appointing a number of inspectors and sending them for specialized courses.

HE the Minister of Transport and Communications added: In the area of regulation and supervision of Maritime Affairs, the Ministry has completed drafting of tasks during inspection and supervision of foreign ships through the appointment of a number of inspectors and sending them for specialized courses which reflected clearly on the results of the inspection quality and quantity.

In the civil aviation sector it has numerous achievements, especially the opening of the first phase of the new Muscat International Airport, the opening of regional airports in Sohar and Duqm, and the completion of construction works for the Salalah Airport.

Roads and Transport

In the area of roads, the year 2014 witnessed assigning bundles of vital road projects as dualization of Bidbid - Sur road (the second Phase), dualization of Adam-Thumrait road (first and second parts), dualization of Barka-Nakhl Road, dualization of Mirbat-Taqa Road and dualization of Ibri-Yanqul Road (the second phase), in addition to assigning a group of tenders for bridges and tunnels as well as to open a number of roads and bridges that contributed to the flow of traffic on these roads, while the process of awarding the remaining projects stated in our plan for the same year is going on with the relevant authorities.

Al-Futaisi added: We have established Oman Railway and provided with the qualified national cadres. A tender for pre-qualification has been floated and 18 consortiums have been qualified as the main contractor for infrastructure works and the five consortiums have been qualified as specialized companies for systems technology. Also tender for detailed design and execution for Segment-1, from Buraimi to Sohar has been floated for the eligible companies.

Communication Sector

In the telecommunications sector, during the year 2014, the second phase of the frequency relay plan and operations of 57 stations have been completed within the joint initiative between the TRA and the operators body to provide communications services to villages and remote areas not listed within the obligations of operators by the installation of 200 stations for about 250 villages in various governorates of the Sultanate.

During the same year, completed the adoption of Board of Director for Oman Broadband Company enabling it to proceed with its work overseeing the implementation of infrastructure for broadband development projects in the Sultanate. Also the ministry has completed the first draft of the Telecommunications Regulatory Act in the overall context of its review. With regard to general policy for a postal service, during the year, one specialist consulting company was appointed to study postal market in the Sultanate and the general policy framework for the sector as a road map for the next five years.

Before the curtain falls for the last year, the ministry completed the formulation of the national strategy for the logistic sector and study of the development of public transport in the Sultanate, to begin their implementation this year.

2015

His Excellency the Minister pointed out that 2015 will see, by Allah’s willing, a number of projects notably the assignment of the first line to Oman Rail (Buraimi to Sohar), and begin to implement it on the ground along with the completion of the initial designs for all proposed lines coming under the network of Oman Rail. The ministry is proceeding to put the first building blocks for Oman Rail Centre of Excellence which is approved by the Board of Directors of the Company to give importance to management of applied research and training in this new sector. Also this year will witness...
the adoption of Operation and Maintenance Strategy after floating the tender in the first half of this year, which means the possible options for operation and maintenance and opting the best.

Road transport plan in 2015

He explained that the ministry’s plan for 2015 targeted the attention to regulate the road transport sector, where the focus will be on the issuance of the executive regulations of this important sector, after the promulgating road transport law and work to implement them through active restructuring to ensure the implementation is as recommended by the study of the World Bank to restructure the ministry.

He added: We will follow up all the ongoing projects of the ministry, with the opening of some important roads, including: the new parts of the Sharqiya Road (Bidbid-Sur) and Al-Batina Express High Way part (Muscat-Barka), and we are working to complete the assignment of the rest of the roads packages related of Batinah Express Highway, and to start implementation of the first and second parts of dualization of Adam-Thumrait road.

Cooperation between Transport, Communications and Muscat Municipality

His Excellency pointed: We have identified in our plan for this year to start implementing the public transport plan in Muscat governorate in cooperation with the Muscat Municipality and Oman National Transport Company through running a pilot lines for public transport using modern buses with new identity and high quality in terms of comfort and adherence to the timings.

We will also work on the development of roads management system in order to ensure proper management and maintenance of one of the most important basic infrastructure, which is being implemented by the Sultanate during the past four decades.

Monitor the performance of the Port of Sohar to develop its services

During the year 2015, the ministry will continue to monitor the performance of the Sohar Port for the development of services and to reach to the international standards attracting more direct shipping lines, to prepare berths able to receive the giant ships with 18,000 containers by the end of the year, and of start implementation of project for the development of high-tech automatic gates for the entry and exit of trucks.

As for the Port of Salalah, the ministry will work during the year on the opening of berth for liquid substances to be an important addition to the port, the start of work at the service hub, linking the free zone with this berth, start of the work of detailed designs for the area of general merchandise, and start of implementation of the link road between the Raysut roundabout and the entrance to the port.

In Port Sultan Qaboos, the work of removing the cranes and everything related to the commercial port and the work of marine technical studies for the port of tourism are continuing. The minister says: We will focus on the establishment of the developer to actually start to develop the port area as a unique marine front and global tourism terminal, as we intend to obtain a number of regulations in the field of regulation and supervision on the maritime Affairs services.

Follow-up of the implementation of national strategy for broadband

The ministry’s plan for the telecommunications sector for the year 2015 comes with aims to complete the execution of procedures and projects specified in the general policy framework for the telecommunications sector. Also the plan includes finishing of the third and final phase of evacuation of the frequency spectrum ranges, completing the review of the Telecommunications Regulatory Act, the follow-up of study on the extent of the need for a third operator and follow-up of the implementation of the national strategy for broadband.

It also includes, the extension of optical fiber network in the governorate of Muscat and beyond, wherever possible, looking for opportunities to accelerate its implementation through integration and partnership with other infrastructure projects such as electricity, water, gas, sewage etc., discussion on the possibility of expanding the project to provide services of telecommunication and broadband in villages and regions through satellites, and strengthening of operators’ fiber-optic communication networks to enable them to provide broadband services over mobile phone networks. Similarly the finalization of preparing the policy framework for the postal sector as a road map for the sector for the next five years, with the help of one of internationally experienced houses.

In the framework of raising the institutional work efficiency, the ministry will continue its plan to develop a set of systems such as transport planning system, supervision/control system, project management and GIS databases.
ECONOMIC NEWS

National Initiative for Free and Open Source Software (FOSS)

FOSS Conference discusses the digital solutions for development of the society.

The Centre for Telecommunications Research and Information at Sultan Qaboos University and the Information Technology Authority (ITA) jointly organized the second conference on free and open source software (digital solutions for the knowledge development), at the Conference Hall of the University, with the participation of a group of international researchers and specialists in the field of free and open source software within the Sultanate. The opening ceremony was patronized by His Excellency Dr. Abdullah bin Nasser Harrasi, Chairman, Public Authority for Radio and Television, in the presence of His Excellency Ali bin Saud, Al Bimani, Vice Chancellor of the university.

Aims
The conference aimed to support the Free and Open Source Software Initiative and to encourage the ICT (information and communication technology) industry in the Sultanate of Oman by focusing on the importance of this software and aspects of employment in the public administration and in building electronic government cloud, as well as the promotion of entrepreneurship and the provision of job opportunities. Also the conference aimed to build relations and exchange of experiences among the participants to develop free and open source software and applications. The conference targeted the companies working in the field of information technology, technicians, researchers, academics, students and software society in general.

Scientific Research
The opening session began with speech of Sultan Qaboos University, where Dr. Amer bin Ali Al Rawas, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of SQU for Postgraduate Studies and Research, said: «Sultan Qaboos University assumes the great importance in the field of scientific research in various vital sectors that have national and strategic importance, so as to ensure the advancement of the scientific and cultural level, and to meet the needs of the society. Among the roles played by the University in this area are its concern in the sector of communications and information technology and relevant software, inclusion of same in the research and educational programs, and organization of scientific and applied activities that enhance the reality and effectiveness in service of education, research and technology in the Sultanate service. The University is keen to play its leading role in the field of adoption and dissemination of culture of software in general and free and open source software in particular, and in supporting national efforts in this area. This was the first University to contribute to the national initiative to support the free and open source software, implementation of which is supervised by the the ITA.

Cooperation
Regarding the cooperation between the University and Information Technology Authority in relation to the support of the National Initiative for Free and Open Source Software, Rawas explained that the efforts of the University team represented by Communications and Information Research Center and ITA reached to renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding between the University and the ITA as a base of work to contribute to building and strengthening culture of
free software and entrepreneurship in the society, including human and program skills in this area, and the adoption of initiatives and projects that support the spirit of innovation and the finding solutions based on free and open source software, and implementation of joint projects that help to develop the necessary skills and knowledge. Rawas added: «Organizing the conference of free and open source software Oman - 2015, came into existence to be one of the fruits of joint and continuous cooperation between ITA and Research Centre for Communications and Information Technology at SQU. It targeted maximum digital society specialized in fields of IT and communication and the society in general. This conference will serve as the basis of what has been achieved after the organization of the first edition two years ago and the forum that brings together the specialists and those interested to provide active participation with the global community in the support and development of free and open source software, and building a base that enables us to deal with the various challenges related to information security.

Initiative

Then Omer bin Salem al-Shanfari, Dy. Managing Director for operations at ITA delivered his speech, in which he focused on the initiative of supporting free and open source software. "It was a central objective of the initiative to support free and open source software since its launch, to spread technical awareness on the existence of free software as a technical option that meets the growing needs of individuals and institutions. The second objective is to build specialized human skills to deal with this software with high efficiency. The third objective is to encourage entrepreneurs to develop solutions and services based on free and open source software and to present the same as services handy for public and private sector. Shanfari added: "In terms of numbers, more than 70 awareness lectures and workshops specialized in free software were conducted, in addition to the organization of the Free Software Symposium in 2010, and the first conference of free software in 2013, and with respect to training, more than 1,200 professionals of information technology have benefitted from specialized training in different applications and free software solutions.

Partnership

Shanfari talked about the importance of a genuine partnership between ITA and academic institutions, saying: "In order to achieve the objectives of the initiative, ITA was keen, since the early days, to establish a partnership with the leading academic institutions in the Sultanate, where there have been so far four memorandums of understanding with Sultan Qaboos University, the University of Nizwa, Ministry of Higher Education and the Middle East College. It is also keen to raise awareness and spread the culture of free software between the academic staff and students, to provide specialized training opportunities for them, and to encourage research and development using free software to produce technical solutions that meet the needs of telecommunications and information technology sector in the Sultanate. We, here at the second conference of free and open source software, are discussing with our partners about the future of free software and how to exploit it to commensurate with the general trends and future plans for the country, and to identify the difficulties and challenges faced by the digital Oman society when they are using such software at maximum range, as well as the development of plans and procedures to overcome these difficulties to commensurate with the general trends.

Concept

In his speech, Prof. Hadj Bourdoucen, chair of the conference organization committee, talked about features of the free and open source software (FOSS). He said: «What distinguishes open source software from free software is a combination of characteristics that gave it great influence and leading prestige by the uniqueness of its model made on open-source basis. The availability of the source code and provision of freedom are very important in the development, modification and customization process as it allows to add the necessary improvements to the program and provides the possibility of adaptation to changing circumstances as per needs and technical and other objectives of the user, which enables the user to continue to understand precisely the method of programming with its all details, in addition to the right to redistribute the modifications and improvements that he made on the software. Also he is entitled to re-use other open source software. All of these benefits are utilized by the exchange of experiences and solutions among the large numbers of interested developers, resulting in a large movement in the development of projects and finding solutions through the establishment of many companies that provide solutions based on open source software.»

FOSS as a motor for Entrepreneurship

This working paper was presented by Patrick Sinz, Managing Director of Ethiqa SAS and Board member of the AFUL, with the title of "FOSS as a Engine for Entrepreneurship and Job Creation". He discussed the open source solutions in establishing companies working in the field of IT and characterized by the flexibility. It helps to speed up the growth and development of these companies, and to reduce their dependence on specific businesses companies, in addition to its role in stimulating the internal work teams. The lecturer spoke about the possibility of rewarding companies that achieve financial profits by relying on free software, appreciating their experiments with the freedom and attempts to offer free and open source software solutions, which is beneficial to all the companies contributing to its sustainability.

Initiative

Then Hassan Fida al-Lawati, E-Industry Development Director, Information Technology Authority, presented a working paper entitled ‘National FOSS Initiative in Oman, Challenges and Facts’, and talked about the importance of this initiative, which is considered as a part of the Digital Oman strategy and that supports all applications and technologies that can be used in the development of the IT sector in the Sultanate since its launch in March 2010. Also it aims to promote innovation and the expansion of skills for free software development and provide the necessary resources and infrastructure for commercialization and business approvals.

Exhibition

This conference was accompanied by an exhibition of software solutions and applications from and outside the Sultanate. Winner projects in the contest of ‘Oman Summer programming’ organized by the Information Technology Authority were displayed in the exhibition. The exhibition also included some free and open source software applications such as Moodle system for distance learning, panel of Raspberry Pi Application and panel of Arduino, and other applications.
Captain Ghassan Al-Zadjali: Crimes against ATMs come in second place in terms of crimes using more sophisticated Information Technology.

Engineer Al Saleh: The Seminar aims to raise awareness of the risks about the electronic commercial transactions.

The seminar on Information Systems and Security is to expose the importance of keeping up with the requirements of this world in which we live and which is becoming day-by-day smaller and smaller village over the multiple means of communication, and advanced programs that made it possible to speed up the pace of work and improve production in a way that the latest updates are to be kept up with, in order to be at the front of the convoy and not behind.

This way, Engineer Reza bin Juma Al Saleh, Vice Chairman of the Chamber for Administrative and Financial Affairs, began his speech in the Seminar on Information systems and security, organized by Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, represented by the Committee for the banking, financial and insurance sector, in cooperation with Smart Power Information and Communication Systems. He followed that: Our attempt by this seminar is to raise awareness of the risks around the electronic commercial transactions and to understand necessary procedures to address these risks and to overcome them.

Seminar was held under the patronage of HE Ahmed bin Sulaiman Al Maimani, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry for Administrative and Financial Affairs and Regions Affairs, in the presence of His Excellency Said Bin Saleh Al Kiyumi, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and a number of Excellencies and those interested in systems and information security.

In the seminar, two papers were presented. First was of the Royal Oman Police and presented by Captain Ghassan bin Badr al-Zadjali, from the Directorate General for Criminal Investigations. He said that the electronic fraud and data theft operations are no longer limited to credit cards, but surpassed to several means. Perhaps the most common such mean is e-mails that request personal and financial information. According to the National Center for Computer Security statistics, 80,000 electronic penetration and 8,000 cases of planting and dissemination of viruses are registered in the Sultanate during the past three years.

The paper explained that the crimes against ATMs come in second place in terms of using more sophisticated Information Technology after the crimes in electronic penetration. For this type of crimes, several sophisticated and ever updated techniques are used.

Captain Ghassan bin Badr al-Zadjali has given some directives and precautions to be taken when using credit cards. The important are:

- When we are using any of the ATMs we must ensure no strange body is present on the machine.
- Cover the keyboard when you enter the PIN number.
- Inform the relevant authorities in the event of exposure to the process of stealing your data or suspected something fishy on the automated teller machine.
- The relevant institutions must keep their ATM up-to-date with awareness of the latest criminal developments.

The second paper was by Raj, CEO of Paladion which presented a comprehensive range of offers to manage fraud risks which vary in their methods of prevention, detection and deterrence, providing a comprehensive and integrated mechanism for the management of electronic fraud operations. The paper discussed how to cope with hidden security threats and risk assessment derived from the use of technology in business and the possibility of control, and the use of key fraud indicators that help to manage the risks inherent in the technology.
Investment in human resources, how and why?

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Investment in the human resources is one of the most important components of investment which should be given utmost care in the context of the endeavors aimed at sustaining comprehensive economic development. That is why all countries of the world seek to utilize all the available resources to programme their development plans. The endeavor should start from human resources as being a main factor in the success of all economic plans. Therefore, the investor always takes keen interest in the levels of expertise and skills that the workforce should have in the labor market. The availability of well trained and cheap workforce is also one of the relative advantages characterizing labor markets as being one of the strong factors of attraction which the local and foreign investors seek to obtain.

It is important to focus on promoting and preparing national human resources to empower them with the necessary tools and techniques to shoulder their responsibility and get involved in national development projects. The aim of this trend is to enable such personnel to become active contributors to the proper growth of the economy without wholly depending on expatriate manpower. They should make a positive and serious move by joining vocational training centers which provide them with the required professional training enabling them to take up various jobs.

This also applies to those personnel who have completed their theoretical and academic studies. It is time for them to draw upon such centers which are established with the main aim of empowering them with the skills and expertise required for them to be able to compete in the labor market. It is the responsibility of the individuals, the government and the private sector to combat unemployment and their related diverse problems.

At the same time, the government and the private sector also should create an appropriate environment for training by providing the necessary funding, instructors and trainers in accordance with the recognized international standards. It is also useful to provide necessary statistics about the numbers and places of the professions where there is shortage and the level of quality required for each job.

The problem now facing the Arab workers is the absence of an effective mechanism to utilize their capacities and direct their energies towards further enhancement of productivity. What is needed is the empowerment of human resources with the required technological skills that would enable them to innovate and advance towards playing their required role with operational efficiency. The ultimate goal of this process is to increase productivity. It is essential to provide labor care and social, political, legislative and organizational conditions. It is important to set up organized and strong labor unions focusing on the humanitarian concept of work and laborers’ rights. Trade unions should work towards consolidating their respect and prestige within the society as this would eventually assist in achieving continuing improvement of productivity, working performance, sense of participation in decision-making and interaction with the production components.
Japanese experience in supporting SMEs

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Is it possible to draw upon the Japanese experience in the area of supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs)? The answer is definitely ‘yes’ in order to further promote them as part of a greater attention being dedicated by the government to SMEs, youth projects and new initiatives devised by young Omanis or the organizations concerned with the development and support of SMEs.

Several days ago, the CEO of the Rafd Fund, Tariq bin Sulaiman Al Farsi, called upon the concerned authorities to have more contribution towards uplifting marketing efficiency by setting up specialized national marketing companies. He drew the attention to the possibility of drawing upon the Japanese experience in the area of setting up an authority that is concerned with the marketing of SME products inside and outside the country. The Government of Japan has maintained a commitment to developing a specific system whereby SME’s tax-exempted products are marketed.

It is well known that Japan is one of the leading countries in the world in motivating SMEs. As a matter of fact, Japan and some other Asian industrial countries have been successful in setting up a structured system encapsulating SMEs where young Japanese job-seekers found their niche. The system succeeded in providing employment opportunities to greater numbers of national and foreign jobseekers. The Japanese experience is also good in so far as it has established a sound legal system for SMEs providing for the definition of small and medium enterprises based on the number of employees. The experience also involves the creation of a funding and loan guaranteeing system that would effectively enable the banks and financial institutions to provide funding to SMEs quite easily.

Realizing that marketing is one of the most important challenges and obstacles to any new enterprise, Japan has set up SME products marketing authority which is operational both inside and outside Japan basically involved in promoting SME products at international exhibitions and events. Moreover, the Government of Japan is committed to developing a system whereby SME products are purchased and exempted from any taxes. In addition, the government has established cooperatives whose aim is to protect SMEs against bankruptcy through the provision of insurance cover.

The success of the Japan’s modern experience is attributed, in the first place, to its being chiefly dependent on small enterprises which could later turn into large industries and as a result of horizontal, vertical, forward and backward integration eventually becoming giant industrial enterprises. SMEs account for more than 99 percent of total Japanese enterprises employing more than 70% of the working hands. Consequently, Japan succeeded in reducing unemployment and increasing production in all important fields and sectors while it could, at the same time, eliminate the obstacles to SMEs and tackle the challenges to them by enforcing effective laws regulating SME development.

In Oman, we are now having examples of such enterprises, particularly the enterprises which are managed by dedicated owners with good administrative and technical know-how and future visions. Such enterprises were able to achieve high profitability in a relatively short period of time while at the same time maintaining reasonable long-term rates of profitability and sustaining any potential completion. They were also able to provide self-employment opportunities for their owners and for more job-seekers alike. Such enterprises tends to be capable of maintaining their presence in the market and yet expanding gradually with the progress of time.

Such enterprises may also work towards increasing direct foreign investment and entering into joint ventures in host countries. In addition, they provide employment opportunities at a reduced investment costs due to the nature of their production capacity in terms of labor intensive production and reduced capital. It is also understood that such enterprises do not require high standard of qualifications. For this reason, they play an effective role in absorbing workforce having low level of education and technical training, particularly in the developing countries.
A new report reveals the growth of Islamic markets and investment potential in the Member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation «is much higher than the global average.”

The report publishes for the first time investment index of the member states of OIC.

57 OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) member countries, representing a GDP (current) in 2013 of $6.7 trillion are projected to grow 2015-19 at a higher rate (5.4%) than rest of the world (3.6%) or BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) nations (3.9%).

The top OIC sector clusters identified are: Energy, Food & Agriculture, Electronics, Travel & Transportation, Metals, Chemical & Allied, Plastics/Rubber, Textiles & related, Infrastructure & Construction, and Health Products & Services.

Islamic investment markets growth report 2015 was launched during Global Islamic Investment Gateway forum conducted in Bahrain. The report is developed by Thomson Reuters, the world’s leading source of intelligent information for businesses and professionals, in partnership with “DinarStandard”, a growth strategy research and advisory firm in the field of Islamic markets.

The report included investment index in the Islamic growth markets where the classification of Oman in the fourteenth place among the Islamic growth markets for 2015. The Index is based on a set of nine metrics covering the categories of a country’s growth fundamentals, growth momentum, investment momentum and relative country risk. It is clear from the index that there is no risk with respect to the ambient of the Sultanate of Oman.

Indonesia showing the strongest growth fundamentals among the top three having the highest population (249 million, 2013) and GDP ($870 billion, current US$, 2013), while Malaysia the strongest growth and investment momentum (217% FDI inflows growth 2009-13). GCC economies led by UAE are also on the top ten list including Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Other markets on the top 10 include Kazakhstan, Egypt, Turkey, Morocco, and Mozambique.

The report includes DinarStandard’s OIC Industry Clustering model in areas of industry in OIC member countries. The model identifies different types of standards, growth, values and opportunities according to the sector clusters. They are Energy, Food & Agriculture, Electronics, Travel & Transportation, Metals, Chemical & Allied, Plastics/Rubber, Textiles & related, Infrastructure & Construction, and Health Products & Services. The model includes identification of new investment opportunities and leading & developed local companies in these areas.
MINI Hatch Five-Door Car shows striking techniques

After the success the five-door MINI Hatch car received in Yalla MINI mobile exhibition last year, it is back again in a new exhibition fun carries name of Your MINI Home, to highlight the new communication specification of MINI in a quiet ambient.

Al Junaibi International Automobiles spotlight in Oman by showcasing MINI Hatch car with five distinctive doors in Muscat City Centre, enabling the fans of the British brand, MINI to closely look to the details of the car in a beautiful lounge. It offers the new and unique concept for customers to interact with the world of comfort that will come from MINI Connected system, which includes a remarkable number of information and entertainment systems in the car, as well as operations of communications, and Internet connection. Visitors also glanced at the new levels of comfort, safety and easy-to-control that can make the MINI experience a special and distinctive one.

New storage facilities for lease near Muscat

Cluttons, the world’s leading company specialized in the field of real estate consultancy, has been appointed as major real estate agent to market and hire new project of huge warehouses in Rumais.

The new warehouse project, which is implemented and developed by the company “First Logistics Services”, is occupied a prominent site, which is easily accessible via express high way between Muscat and Sohar in Rumais, just about one kilometer and a half from the intersection of Naseem Park and 30 kilometers to the west of Muscat International Airport.

The site provides easy access to and from the express highway in Muscat and the Batinah Express Highway, which is still under construction, and cargo storage area of the proposed railway project in Barka. This is considered as an ideal site for tenants seeking to work in Muscat and internal markets, especially after the recent transfer of the shipping path from Port Sultan Qaboos to Sohar Port.

The first phase is still under construction in the eastern part of the project, which extends over an area of 81,000 square meters. It provides 36 warehouses in three different schemes on areas ranging from 500 to 1,000 square meters. Among the most prominent features of the project is the design of twelve units along the front area of the project as retail warehouses which will enable the tenants to take advantage of the distinctive highway interface.

The new warehouses provide a unique opportunity for tenants to enable them to obtain high-quality storage in an ideal location to meet the needs of market of Muscat.
While the political and economic relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran are steadily progressing in various arenas and levels, the utilization of such relations remains below the level required from the two countries. No concrete steps were taken in commensuration with the level of rapprochement and homogeneity between the two countries in all bilateral aspects. The economic relations between the two friendly countries and people should have developed further to reflect what has been achieved in other areas. There is a need to open up direct trade lines between the two countries in all spheres that would allow direct importation instead of importation through third party. Such direct exchange would achieve considerable material and trade gains, reduce prices, enrich fields of cooperation and strengthen interests among the businessmen of the two countries.

The efforts being made by OCCI is to eliminate such monotonous pattern of trade relations between the two countries and the failure to take advantage of the good relations that exists between the two countries. There is a pressing need to motivate the private sector and establish direct trade lines linking the two countries. The direct shipping line opened between the Port of Sohar and the Port of Bandar Abbas in Iran will increase the volume of trade exchanges between the two countries.

The opportunities available with regard to these economic developments are unrivaled at the GCC and Arab levels in general and need to be drawn upon properly by way of opening up spheres of director trade between the two countries. Oman and its neighboring countries should take advantage of the direct shipping line opened between the Port of Sohar and the Port of Bandar Abbas in Iran for flow of commodities and goods, particularly if we look at the standard time of trade exchange between the Omani and Iranian seaports.

The individual efforts being made by OCCI are based on its commercial responsibility towards serving businessmen and the country in opening up direct prospects for further strengthening of trade movement between the two countries. These efforts should be integrated with similar government efforts aimed at further consolidating these steps and contributing to facilitation of trade. There is also need to eliminate the concerns that surround some practices in the light of an integrated security system and to get rid of bureaucracy which obstructs cooperation between the two countries. On the other front, traders should draw on such distinguished Omani-Iranian relations by establishing trade exchanges and links which would contribute to further increasing the volume of imports and exports between the two countries.