On Chamber’s discussion table

Real Estate Brokers’ Card
STOP
WASTING
FOOD

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One of our first priorities within OCCI is to promote business sector and achieve growth so that it becomes an effective contributor to the country’s comprehensive development. In order to achieve this goal, we should take advantage of all means available internally and overseas and the success experiences witnessed by this sector whether within the Sultanate or outside. However, the achievement of this goal requires cooperation of all those who belong to this sector, particularly since the focus is now on the business sector. The business sector is now seen as a constant reliable source for creation of employment opportunities for the youth to enable them to live a decent life and contribute to pushing ahead the wheel of development.

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has for many years dispatched trade delegations to various countries of the world, the aim being to introduce Oman to the outside world as an attractive investment destination thanks to its remarkable diverse environment and fields of investment in addition to the unlimited support accorded to both local and foreign investors alike. Added to this are the laws which protect the rights of all involved parties and the political stability that is favorable for foreign investments to pour into the country.

During the past period of the terms of office of the current OCCI Board, a radical change has been made to the nature of these delegations in terms of the mechanism, objectives, priorities and justifications for participation coupled as well with the mechanisms of following up the outcomes and agreements, thus making the desirable goals easily achievable.

For a promising business sector

Editor-in-Chief
Cover Story

On Chamber’s discussion table

Real Estate Brokers’ Card

Dr. Ibrahim Al Ajmi: The condition is a “discussion axis” that does not harm the Chamber in any way, but the Chamber has the right to request clarifications on the decision.

Saleem Al Balushi: The decision is purely regulatory one aiming at regulating market and preventing fraud.

Shihab bin Yousef: We have great hope in having an authority for real estate organization to undertake regulatory roles.

Eissa Al Barashdi: We suggest that it suffices to be affiliated to the Chamber in order to obtain broker’s card.

Amor Al Hajri: Joining membership of Oman Real Estate Association requires having branches in all governorates.
The real estate sector in the Sultanate is developing in a progressive manner as reflected by the figures and indicators issued by the concerned authorities which in parallel and in cooperation with the partners in the economic community seek to re-regulate the sector by updating the legislations and laws and formulating and determining the relationship between sector’s parties in the context of partnership and public and private benefit alike. In this context, the decision obligating real estate brokers to join Oman Real Estate Association as a prerequisite to obtain broker’s card featured wide echo in the Chamber and Real Estate Association on one hand and the brokers on the other hand.
The members of Real Estate Development Committee of OCCI in the presence of representatives of Ministry of Housing and Oman Real Estate Association (OREA) discussed the decision issued by Ministry of Housing obligating real estate brokers to join membership of OREA as a condition for them to obtain broker’s card.

The discussions took place following a decision issued by the Ministry of Housing represented by the Directorate General of Real Estate Development at an earlier date this year providing for stipulations to obtain a license to exercise real estate brokerage profession as follows:

Firstly: Individuals
1. He should be an Omani or GCC national naturally residing in Oman.
2. He should not be less than 21 years of age.
3. He should be registered with the real estate register and a member of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
4. He should not have prosecuted in a crime of honor or dishonesty or have declared his bankruptcy unless reinstated.
5. He should have an appropriate premises or office in his name in the Sultanate of Oman.

Secondly: Companies
1. It should be an Omani corporate or company licensed to exercise brokerage business in real estate with percentage of Omani working with it as brokers being not less than 80% holding at least general education diploma or an equivalent qualification.
2. It should be registered with the real estate register and a member of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
3. It should have an appropriate premises or office in its name in the Sultanate of Oman.

The members inquired about the motive behind selecting membership of the association as a condition to obtain broker’s card. Expressing his surprise, Dr. Ibrahim bin Backer Al Ajmi, committee chairman, stated that the committee had previous meetings to discuss the mechanisms of obtaining broker’s card and that it was agreed in the presence of all concerned parties to a specific mechanism in this respect.

Dr. Ibrahim Al Ajmi attributes the reservation of the chamber represented by the Real Estate Development Committee on this decision to its desire to facilitate procedures for the sector’s employees away from bureaucracy featured by numerousness of procedures and delay of licenses issued by several organizations. He pointed out that it would have been better if affiliation to the Chamber was enough for obtaining
broker’s card at the initial stage in order to encourage the largest possible number of youth to access real estate brokerage activity and activate the sector, particularly with the Sultanate’s trend to diversify income sources and encourage the youth to join these sectors. “If it is not possible to do that, we suggest exempting those from accession fees to the association at least at the initial stage. Flexibility and streamlining of procedures for real estate brokers would make it easy for real estate developers and this is what is desired by sector’s stakeholders,” he said in concluding his statement.

Organization and prevention of fraud
Saleem bin Hassan Al Balushi, Assistant Director General at the Directorate General of Real Estate Development, Ministry of Housing, stated that this step comes in the context of a package of decisions relating to the regulation of real estate brokerage expected to be implemented. The legislator found it important to regulate the real estate market in the Sultanate in the framework of implementing the laws and regulations governing the profession real estate brokerage and the need to regularize the business of brokers in line with the provisions of the law regulating real estate brokerage. “This profession has remained based on norms over the past years. Non-compliance of some brokers with the required professionalism has led to departure of some investors from the country. Therefore, this is a purely regulatory decision intended to regulate the market and prevent fraud,” he added.
Shihab bin Yousef Ba Alawi, committee member, said: “We are aware of Oman Real Estate Association’s role and commend its efforts, but we pin great hope in a real estate regulatory authority to undertake the regulatory roles following the successful experiences in several countries in this field.”

**Explanation**

Dr. Ibrahim Al Ajmi, committee chairman, stated that the Chamber remains in commendation of the role of OREA and has supported the setting up of the association and strengthening its role since the very beginning. “We now seek to integrate our roles into the ultimate goal of serving Oman. Stipulating this measure is a matter of discussion and does not harm the Chamber in any way, but it is the Chamber’s right to request explanation of the decision. The questions in this respect are: Why are the obstacles and duplication of procedures? Why don’t we take into consideration that there is an emerging generation taking interest in this field of business. It is important to streamline the procedures such that the fees do not pose an obstacle,” he said.

**There is a need for the Association to have branches**

Amor bin Mubarak Al Hajri, board member of OCCI’s North Al Sharqiyyah Branch and Chairman of the branch’s Real Estate Development Committee, pointed out that it was better to
issue the broker’s card in coordination with the OCCI and Ministry of Housing in order to ensure non-duplication of the roles of the OCCI’s real estate development committee, Oman Real Estate Association and Ministry of Housing and create a flexible and smooth regulatory role for all parties. “It is also important to take into account the question of training of real estate brokers holding the card and qualify them before initiating their real estate business and develop their capacities to enable them to exercise the profession,” he said. In addition, Al Hajri says that joining membership of OREA should be coupled with existing branches in the governorates in order to encourage real estate agents to join the association and take advantage of its services in various fields of real estate business.

Initial period of two years of more
Eissa bin Humaid bin Mohammed Al Barashdi, of Niyabat Sinaw, said that the Real Estate Development Committee of OCCI’s North Al Sharqiyah Branch, has been looking forward for some time to the issue of real estate brokers’ card in order to streamline procedures for brokers and those wishing to join work in this vital and important sector. “The step is also important to regulate the real estate market in Oman and prevent cheating and fraud. However, we suggest for the present time that accession to the Chamber suffices for obtainment of broker’s card, say for an initial period of two years or more, after which brokers are required to join membership of OREA. The aim of this arrangement is to encourage the largest possible number of people to access the world of real estate brokerage,” he said.

Training of brokers
Hassan bin Mohammed Al Lawati, member of OCCI’s Real Estate Development Committee and member of OREA, stated that the Association had initiated discussion in cooperation with the Ministry of Housing, the aim being to regulate real estate market and that the Association would be committed to training brokers on any updated provisions of the law meaning that the Association would provide mandatory and optional training courses for its members.

According to the Directorate General of Real Estate Development, the categories targeted by the training programme provided by the Ministry in preparation for issue of profession exercise license are shown in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Group</th>
<th>Second Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Currently registered brokers with Ministry of Housing exercising real estate brokerage activity</td>
<td>New real estate brokers seeking employment and wishing to obtain new license to exercise real estate profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be trained at their own expense</td>
<td>To be trained at the expense of the Ministry of Manpower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Currently registered brokers with Ministry of Housing not exercising real estate brokerage activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be subjected to qualifying programme for two months at the expense of Ministry of Manpower</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Real estate brokers working under umbrella of companies for more than two years who have not been provided with real estate brokerage training programme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be trained at their own expense</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sultan bin Saif bin Salim Al Sinawi Establishment emerged as an individual firm operating in the field of decorations, paints and installation of wall papers. The establishment was set up in 2010, personally managed by Sultan himself, who takes keen interest in developing business operations according to the market’s needs and in line with the administrative rules and laws of the Sultanate of Oman that are applicable to the small and medium enterprises and supporting entrepreneurs.

In this interview with him, Sultan Al Sinawi, CEO of the establishment informed us that his establishment operates in accordance with clearly defined vision that adopts quality as an objective and innovation in work as a principle. This vision constituted the operating philosophy for the establishment whereby the customer is considered to have a right in knowing the details of work.

Sultan was very keen from the very beginning to define the field of business without wasting effort, time or money. He specialized in decoration and internal and external paints. His establishment has precedence in providing, selling and installing wall papers at the level of the Wilayah with him providing many types of modern and traditional wall papers suiting all tastes.

- Acquisition of working skills
- Electronic revolution
- Availability of practical experiences
- Management of small enterprises
- Direct involvement in enterprise

Al Sinawi pointed out that in the light of the electronic revolution and availability of information and practical experiences through the internet, he was able to familiarize with the principles and regulations concerned with the incorporation of trading establishments, management of small enterprises and conversion of ideas into profitable trading enterprises. He also pointed out that through direct work in SME sector he was able to acquire the necessary skills for setting up and running the enterprise in proper steps until his business grew and became a successful enterprise well known in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

Challenges to the enterprise upon its incorporation

- Provision of trained workforce capable of working under the guidance of the establishment’s philosophy
- Slow processing of procedures and obtaining of necessary permits
- Hidden trade
- Widely spread workforce on the loose

In his statement, Sultan referred to the difficulties that faced him upon setting up his enterprise. “If you like I call them challenges and not difficulties out of my full conviction that human beings love challenges. Naturally, all economic projects, even the big ones, face challenges at the beginning. I believe that the most prominent challenge that
I faced at the beginning of our enterprise was the provision of trained workforce capable of working under the guidance of the establishment’s philosophy. We were also faced with another challenge, that is the slow processing of procedures and obtaining of necessary permits from the concerned authorities and the time difference between one permit and another. This has delayed the setting up of the enterprise. We are faced with an important challenge featured by hidden trade and the widely spread workforce on the loose and lack of experience of workforce in addition to the instability of rules and regulations regulating this aspect which hinder the business owner’s strategic plans. Another challenge was the insufficient knowledge of the basics upon which enterprises must be built, including both administrative and financial aspects,” he said.

An imprint on quality
Sultan bin Saif Al Sinawi pointed out that as soon as he faced challenges in his business he worked towards finding the most appropriate solutions to overcome them adding that some challenges could be overcome and radically solved while the solution of some others lied with specific parties. Sometimes, we bring about temporary solutions until appropriate alternatives have been found. As with regard to the widely spread workforce on the loose in the market, he said: “We have been keen on putting in place a clear imprint for our works in the market that shows the quality of works, thus assisting in promoting the reputation of the establishment through the provided services and correcting some wrongful practices by consumers. We are still working on that and we will feel the positive results with time.”

Concerning the aspects of subsidy provided by the government to the owners of SMEs, Sultan pointed out that through training courses, technical consultations and workshops organized by the OCCI’s North Al Sharqiyah Branch and the Publi Authority for Development of Small and Medium Enterprisesin the field of trading business, we get very useful and helpful information. He added that each business owner looks forward to further support, particularly in the field of streamlining government procedures, obtaining of necessary permits and procurement of expatriate workforce.

Success of entrepreneur
- Patience, hardworking attitude and challenge
- Ability to bear work pressures
- Good planning and organizational capacity
- Type of enterprise and extent of its dissemination
- Excellence in providing services or commodities
- Preparation of realistic feasibility study

Sultan spoke about the major causes of success of entrepreneur and said: “I attribute the success to several factors, including the personal qualities of the entrepreneur such as patience, hardworking attitude, challenge, ability to tolerate work pressures, good planning and organization of work according to pre-planned programe. Free business requires some scientific principles based on actual and realistic experiences. There are several other factors depending on the type of enterprise, its dissemination, individualism and excellene in providing services and commodities that satisfy consumers. This is done by studying the market in real terms and preparing a realistic feasibility study for each enterprise.”

His ambition to promote his enterprise
- To be pioneer in decoration paints and wall papers
- To implement an expansion plan that takes into consideration consumers’ needs
- To provoke new services that will be marketed shortly

In concluding his statement Sultan bin Saif Al Sinawi said: “My ambition is to develop the enterprise into becoming pioneer in decoration, paints and wall papers over the next three years, God willing. At the beginning of the current year, we embarked upon implementing an expansion plan specializing in the same field, but in a new and different pattern taking into consideration the consumers’ needs by providing good services to the admiration of all. These services will be marketed shortly according to a proper marketing plan specifically prepared for the establishment’s products and services.”
P residing over the in-country value-added summit 2015, His Excellency Dr. Fuad Sajwani, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, explained that one of the major objectives behind establishing local value-added initiatives is to sustain spending in the country, develop local human capacities and stimulate productivity. He added that it is important to encourage small and medium enterprises, increase employment opportunities for Omani competent personnel, and upgrade the skills of electronic entrepreneurs. “In addition, there is a need to diversify the economy by not entirely depending upon oil and gas. There is also a need to continue to stimulate the tourist sector to enable it to exercise its role in promoting Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The agriculture and fisheries sector is entrusted with an important role to play in diversifying the national economy,” His Excellency said. He indicated that the Sultanate succeeded in achieving high rates of fisheries production amounting to 215% compared to the year 2011. It is expected to grow to 220,000 tons compared to about 156,000 tons produced in 2011. A quarter of the Sultanate’s population is associated with the agricultural sector and there are 45,000 Omanis working in the fisheries and fish farming sector. Hence, rate of involvement of the sector in the GDP ranges between 10 and 15%.
The progressive growth of Omani economy depends chiefly on diversified resources and on qualified and trained national cadres coupled with the Sultanate’s history and rich heritage which is considered to be one of the components of tourist sector upon which the Sultanate seeks to rely. The conference was organized in cooperation with OCCI and Business Process Outsourcing Services (BPOS). Several working papers dealing with important aspects in this regard were presented at the conference. The first paper entitled “productivity as a source of generating local value-addition” was presented by Aubrey Joachim a strategist and financial expert from Australia. The paper provided definition of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as an indicator for measuring value-addition through economic operations. He pointed out that the key to strengthening value-addition is the improvement of productivity. He explained that productivity inputs are featured by labor and capital while production outputs are featured by the achievement of returns reflecting the direct impact of productivity on the GDP.

According to him, productivity can be improved by adopting three strategies, namely: 1. Investing in human capital by way of providing appropriate training and qualification. 2. Investing in and employing modern technology with a view to consolidating and augmenting productivity volume using less workforce and 3. Enhancing productivity through innovation and encouragement of creative and innovative ideas and solutions.

The second paper entitled “exchange of best value-added practices in oil and gas sector” was presented by Mohsin Al Hadhrami, Director of Geological Marketing Department at Schlumberger Oman. He pointed out that the value-added elements at Schlumberger Oman are featured by the following: Omanisation of jobs, training of Omanis, investment in fixed assets and national establishments and reliance on local sources of commodities and services. Al Hadhrami indicated that there are about 1,500 Omanis currently employed by Schlumberger Oman, achieving 81% Omanisation, which is an excellent percentage and continues to rise in addition to 100 Omanis employed in the company’s overseas branches.

Dr. Omer Al Jabri, Assistant Professor, Department of Natural Resources Economics, Sultan Qaboos University, presented a working paper entitled “Achieving standards of food security and sustainability through small and medium enterprises”. He said: “Global demand for food is expected to rise by 70% by 2050 according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). He also referred to the possibility of achieving food security by creating sustainable networked food system involving production, manufacturing, distribution, consumption and waste treatment. He also tackled sustainable agriculture which he defined as being the production of food, fiber and other botanical and zoological products using agricultural technologies which protect the environment, public health, human habitats and animal resources.

Sajwani:

Fisheries production is expected to reach 220,000 tons by end of this year.

Mohsin Al Hadhrami:

1,500 Omanis are currently employed by Schlumberger Oman, i.e. 81% Omanisation.

Aubrey Joachim:

Value-addition can be achieved by improving productivity.

Dr. Omer Al Jabri:

World food demand is expected to rise 70% by end of 2050.
The OCCI’s branch of South Al Batinah Governorate has dispatched a trade delegation comprising 24 male and female business owners of the Governorate to the Kingdom of Thailand. The delegation was headed by engineer Humood bin Salim Al Saadi, board chairman of the OCCI’s branch of South Al Batinah Governorate, and took part in the exhibition of logistics held from 2 – 4 September 2015 in Bangkok where they familiarized themselves with the exhibited Thai products and held bilateral meetings with the participating companies. The delegates also familiarized with the Thai experiences in various fields and took advantage of them in developing local enterprises, particularly in the fields of textiles, leathers, shoes, bags and spare parts. The aim of the visit was to promote performance of SMEs and enrich their experience by familiarizing with the production methods used in Thailand and imparting and employing the modern Thai technologies as well as to look for trade partners for exchange of commodities and facilitation of importation of products needs by the Omani markets and create sale outlets in the Thai markets.

The participants attended opening of the logistics exhibition held at the exhibition center in Bangkok where they familiarized with the logistic services and products of various Thai and international companies. The participants met with the officials of the exhibiting companies and familiarized closely with the products needed by the Thai market and discussed possibility of establishing joint trade cooperation on exportation of Thai products to the Omani market and vice versa. The delegation also familiarized itself with the facilities provided by the manufacturing and producing companies to the Omani suppliers.

Visits
The delegation also visited shoes, garments and spare parts factories where they familiarized with the Thai SME experience in manufacturing and their effectiveness in providing products to the Thai and overseas markets. The delegates familiarized with the industry methods, machinery and equipment used and production inputs involving raw materials, manpower, mechanization, energy and other facilities meant to improve productivity. They further saw for themselves the strong elements that enable Thai small factories to compete in marketing their products internally and externally. The delegation met with the officials of those factories and discussed with them possibility of providing their products to the Omani market through enterprises of the visiting delegates.
Thailand Chamber of Commerce and Industry

The participating delegation met with the officials of Thailand Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TCCI) and a number of owners of Thai companies specializing in spare parts, garments and footwear. The delegates heard a detailed elaboration on TCCI's role in consolidating trade relations. They familiarized with the volume of trade exchange between the two countries over the past years. The vice-chairman of TCCI expressed his happiness at the visit of the Omani trade delegation of SME owners and wished that they take full advantage of the visit by meeting their Thai counterparts.

Engineer Humood bin Salim Al Saadi, the head of the visiting delegation, thanked the Thai side for the importance they attached to the visit which emphasizes sincere desire to facilitate the delegation’s mission and enable the two sides to take advantage of the trade investment opportunities available in the two countries. He called upon the TCCI’s officials and those in charge of the business sector in Thailand to utilize the investment opportunities available in the Sultanate of Oman and make further efforts to consolidate trade exchange between the two countries and promote volume of exchange commodities.

Halal foods market

On the fourth day of the visit, the delegation members took part in the Halal Foods Exhibition held under the slogan “Thai Halal Products are the Best Choice” where they familiarized with the halal foodstuff produced by the Thai companies as well as the Thai fruits, vegetables and agricultural produces. Possibility of exporting these products to the Omani markets was discussed.

Ali bin Hashil Al Malki, board member of OCCI’s Governorate branch, commented by saying: “This visit comes out of the belief of OCCI branch in the importance of familiarizing with the available investment and trade opportunities with various countries of the world. I have benefited from my participation in the logistics exhibition held in Bangkok where I got acquainted with the services and products that can make use of in our logistics activities.”

Saif bin Majid Al Maamari, owner of Gulf Design and Trading Company and one of the delegation members said: “It was a good participation that allowed us to communicate with several companies in Thailand, familiarize ourselves with the Thai experience in logistics and other industries and have a close look at the trade and industrial sectors falling within the specializations of the visiting delegation.”

Amani bint Hamad Al Hadhrami, a participant in the visit, said: “I am happy with this experience. The visit to the logistics exhibition provided a favorable opportunity for us to meet with the Thai merchants who showed clear interest in introducing their products and services. Saleem bin Mubarak Al Malki, owner of the Abu Yasser Al Malki Trading Company, stated that the visit programme was very rich. He commended the OCCI’s role in dispatching such delegations. “We were able to familiarize with the stages of production in the manufacturing of footwear, garments and materials used and their prices as well as other useful information.”

Humood Al Saadi:
This visit contributes to utilization of trade investment opportunities available in two countries.
TOURISM: BOON OR BANE?

Random tourist camping is one of the biggest problems facing North Al Sharqiyah

The expanded meeting held at the branch of OCCI of North Al Sharqiyah discussed haphazard tourist camping, its causes and results and means of eliminating it by way of proposing some effective solutions aimed at curtailing its adverse impact on the desert environment in some of the wilayats of North Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

The meeting was attended by Ali bin Salim Al Hajri, OCCI Treasurer and board chairman of OCCI’s North Al Sharqiyah branch; Talal bin Khalfan Al Shuaibi, Director of Tourism Department at North Al Sharqiyah; Saud bin Salim Al Yahmadi, Chairman of tourism committee; tourism committee members; and a number of owners of tourist camps and inhabitants of the area who are suffering from the problems created by tourist camping.

At the beginning of the meeting, the chairman of the branch commended the efforts being made by the Ministry of Tourism in support of SMEs by offering a number of tourist locations for investment. These will have significant tourism feasibility and will create new enterprises to activate the tourism sector.

Tourist camps help develop investments

He pointed out that North Al Sharqiyah Governorate have some tourism enterprises, mostly represented by tourist camps whose owners carried out several expansion plans and re-organized their utilities and services providing them with too many facilities that suit various categories of visiting tourists, thus serving as distinguished attractive destinations.

Problems of haphazard camping and its impacts

The meeting discussed the status of some licensed companies and tourist camps and offices in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate which attract tourists from various countries of the world. The owners of these companies and offices pointed out that they suffer from the problem of haphazard tourist camping by some individuals and groups visiting the sands which adversely affect the rate of turnout to organized tourist camps and the companies organizing tours in the Governorate. They consider haphazard camping as one of the biggest problems facing the desert areas which has inflicted heavy damage on the desert environment and led to deterioration of lands and their plantation cover.

Some of the wrong practices in camping

• Disposal of garbages by throwing them haphazardly
• Removal of natural plantation cover for installing camps
• Use of vehicles that damage the sands
• Death of animals such as camels and goats as a result of overspeeding
• Continuing nuisance to the population

Jabir bin Hamad Al Wahaibi, a resident of the desert, said: “We have lost considerable areas of lands due to the problem of desert camping with so many tourists heading to the sand locations for recreation and entertainment. At the same time they exercise some wrongful practices in camping such as disposal of grabages and wastes by haphazardly throwing them and removal of the natural plantation cover in order to install their camps.”

The same opinion was expressed by Saleh bin Khalifa Al Wahaibi, owner of Bahjat Al Rimal Tourist Office, who said that most of the tourist groups that camp haphazardly move across the sands using four wheel drive vehicles which damage the sands and remove the plantation cover. These vehicles are also driven off-road causing a lot of problems to the inhabitants of the sand areas leading to the death of their animals such as camels and goats due to overspeeding, let alone the nuisance caused to them due to the change in the nature of their sand areas which should be characterized with tranquillity and purity.

Reported by: Ibtisam Al Saadi
Adverse impact on society’s customs and traditions
Saud bin Salim Al Yahmadi said that the haphazard camping had adverse impact on the society’s customs and traditions with some tourists committing some violations due to haphazardly camping in the proximity of the residential areas and encroaching into inhabited areas.

Voluntary team required
Amer bin Salim Al Wahaibi suggested the formation of a voluntary team to be concerned with raising awareness among camping tourist groups on the importance of protecting the desert and sand resources and the need to undertake activities that would be suitable to the environment of the area. The proposed team is to emerge from the tourism committee of the OCCI’s North Al Sharqiyyah branch.

Talal Al Shuaibi, Director of Tourism Department at North Al Sharqiyyah Governorate, referred to the Ministry’s efforts in developing the tourism sector in the Sultanate in general and said that the Ministry had made considerable strides towards preparing a tourism strategy that would give a qualitative leap to the tourism sector and employ the available tourism potentials and capabilities of the various governorates of the Sultanate. He added that the Ministry introduced some methods and tourism patterns that are in line with the nature of each governorate and that encourage the setting up of small and medium enterprises to invest in this sector and contribute to the national economy.

A law to regulate the process
The Director of Tourism Department at the North Al Sharqiyyah Governorate also pointed out that the Ministry was in the process of issuing a law to regulate this process by way of enacting some legislations that would curtail the phenomena having adverse bearing on the tourism sector in general. He indicated that there was constant coordination between the government and private organizations in so far as the use of lands is concerned.

Allocation of lands within camping locations
Mohammed bin Sulaiman Al Yahmadi said that the problems created by haphazard camping would be solved with the application of the law intended to put an end to the obstacles and problems. He suggested to the owners of tourist camps the allocation of lands within the camping areas in order to attract doers of haphazard camping and others who wish to stay in these camps providing them with what they need and hence enjoy the beauty of the sands and conduct their activities and events.

Hamad bin Said Al Hajri said: “As owners and managers of tourist camps we don’t know about the efforts of the Ministry to regulate camping by law which will be enacted in this respect. He stressed the need to consult with the owners of tourist camps seeking their proposals and opinions in order to develop this regulation and curtail the negative phenomena affecting the tourism sector in the Governorate.

Increased cost of stay in tourist camps
The expanded meeting was wound up by talking about the soaring costs of tourist camps which could be a factor leading some to refrain from joining such camps and hence resort to haphazard camping. Ali bin Salim Al Hajri stressed the importance of quality of services commensurate with the cost of staying in these camps. He stated that some matters needed to be clarified to the attendants with regard to the increasing rates such as the increase of operating cost of the tourist camps, cost of supplying them with the necessary essential supplies as well as the increased costs of transportation which are quite different from what is available for the remaining tourist resorts in the wilayah’s cities and centers.
Tourist influx into Salalah grew by 20.5%

The Ministry of Tourism has revealed rise of rates of tourist flow into the Governorate of Dhofar in concurrence with the beginning of the Khareef season and the launch of Salalah Tourism Festival 2015. The festival attracts thousands of local, regional and international visitors annually. Official statistics issued by the National Center for Statistics and Information showed the number of the visitors of Khareef Salalah Festival for 2014 and 2015 according to nationality and port of entry during the period 21 June to 30 August. (affix pictures in this place).

Rates of flow of tourists into the Sultanate recorded high levels, particularly during the Khareef season spanning the period from June to September. Many tourists, particularly those come from the neighboring GCC countries fleeing summer heat head to Salalah.

Operetta “Oman: love and peace”

An operetta entitled “Oman: love and peace” was demonstrated at Al Wilayat Theatre, Municipality Recreational Center, in conclusion of Salalah Tourism Festival 2015. Demonstrated in a historical dramatic pattern featuring the deep-rooted past and shining present of the Sultanate, the operetta dealt with the philosophy of peace contained in the Royal thought of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said emphasizing that security and peace are the foundation of stability and prosperity. The Omani renaissance is based on this principle which made Oman the friend of various countries of the world. The operetta portraits emphasized that this philosophy is an old approach upon which the pillars of the state have been based since ancient times. Thus, Oman has been the advocate of peace through its ancient cordial relations and trade exchange based on the principles of appreciation and respect for the Sultanate. The Operetta “Oman: love and peace” has portrayed the important role of “Shabab Oman” vessel and in eight portraits it epitomized the achievements of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said over the 45 years.
The operetta included vast array of portraits and dramatic scenes, such as the portraits entitled "Oman: love and peace", "Praise be to the Almighty Allah", "Maker of Glory" and several other portraits. Nearly 3,000 people participated in the show, including 1,500 male and female students and 1,000 participants of folklore bands.

400 events organized for the Festival’s visitors
The festival featured more than 400 religious, cultural, artistic, recreational and sports events organized for its visitors with the organizing committee taking keen interest in satisfying all tastes to allow for enjoyment of these events in the exceptional monsoon climates. This year’s festival witnessed considerable turnout for the various activities and events.

Believing in the importance of supporting Omani cadres and innovators in all fields, the festival’s organizing committee was keen on paving the way and involving the creative Omani youth in the various festival’s events. On the artistic front, 95 folklore bands took part in order to further consolidate and reflect Omani identity and inherited arts. With regard to the theatrical arts, the organizing committee gave the opportunity to the theatrical bands to present their shows to the audience who love theatrical works. The organizing committee provided financial and technical support to these bands to facilitate their shows. Youth musical bands were also involved presenting singing spells on the Al Buhairah Theatre.

Good opportunity for craftsmen and skilled hands
On the heritage aspect and in view of the approach pursued by Salalah Tourism Festival to present and portray the image of Omani cultural heritage and identify in line with the Royal approach of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said towards maintaining our Omani original inheritances, the festival witnessed a vast array of activities and heritage exhibitions with the Omani folklore bands presenting traditional artistic shows from the Governorate of Dhofar, in particular and from the rest of the Sultanate’s governorates in general. The Omani Heritage Home in Dhofar Governorate showcased events to acquaint the festival’s visitors with this heritage and its originality and history. There was also portrayal of maritime, rural and Bedouin lives to familiarize the visitors with the characteristics of these environments in the past, how people lived in these environments and the handicrafts and arts characterizing these environments. The organizing committee was keen on providing some restaurants serving Omani foods paving the way to citizens to take advantage of this opportunity and serve Omani food to the festival’s visitors.

Exhibitions
There were diverse exhibitions during the festival, including consumers, heritage, artistic and specialized exhibition as well as exhibitions organized by the official authorities and private sector’s establishments, the aim being to satisfy all tastes and wishes of the festival’s visitors. The most important of these was the “Oman: land of friendship and peace” exhibition showcasing the photos of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said.

Number of visitors of Salalah Monsoon Season according to nationalities 2014 – 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Omanis</td>
<td>371,065</td>
<td>316,464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCC</td>
<td>78,907</td>
<td>67,488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Arabs</td>
<td>9,388</td>
<td>7,132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asians</td>
<td>38,543</td>
<td>22,046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europeans</td>
<td>1,746</td>
<td>1,733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1,279</td>
<td>864</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

100 events
The festival this year included a number of activities, seminars, cultural lectures, poetic soirees and religious lectures with the participation of scholars, men of letters and thinkers from inside and outside Oman. These activities amounted to 100 events which attracted large number of visitors interested in the cultural aspects and who like to enrich their knowledge through religious lectures.
OCCI Chairman

- OCCI Chairman says OCCI is making steady efforts to enforce Article 11 of the Expatriate Residence Law, thanks be to the government for positive response.
- Each country has the right to promulgate laws that are consistent with its vision and that serve the national economy.
- Labor protection practices in Oman among the best on the world level

OCCI supports Two-Year ban for Expats
Article 11 in the Passport and Residence Law in Oman states that the employment visa will not be issued to any foreigner who has previously worked in Oman but has not completed two years from the date of last departure. The Inspector General may not enforce this article when the public interest requires so.

Said bin Saleh al Kiyumi, Chairman of OCCI said that OCCI has been calling for the enforcement of this article. He added that arguments about its negative effect on the Omani economy are mere exaggeration. He also pointed out that the pros are more than the cons of this decision.

“The Sultanate, as it is the case with any other country, has the right to promulgate national laws that protect its people and economy. This right does not contradict with international conventions,” he furthered.

“Moreover, the enforcement of the decision ensures stable work environment especially for SMEs and limits from non-regularized employee turnover. It also limits the illicit trade which harm the Omani economy. It also protects employers from the greed of employees who have been exposed to their companies’ trade secrets and knowhow and well as deter them from disclosing confidential information.”

**Manipulation**

The examples of suffering from the practices of domestic workers are many. Many companies also train some of their staff until they get a driving license. After getting this license, he will submit his resignation because he got a better offer or he may lease a vehicle and do illicit trade.

Unfortunately some employees blackmail their employers because they know the trade secrets. If this decision is not implemented, some may act badly.

As for the concerns about the image of the Sultanate and honoring its commitments to international conventions it has signed, it should be noted that the Omani Labor Law is favoring the employee. Having said this, such stance should not prejudice the national economy.

It should be noted that the Sultanate’s practices in terms of labor rights are among the best in the world and even far much better the situation in many advanced countries. It is thus illogical to request the Sultanate to enforce laws that are not enforced in their countries. If we made a quick look at the laws of the countries that call for freedom of trade, we will find that they have strict labor laws that in some cases target specific nationalities. How can such countries request us to enforce law that they are not enforcing?!

After the expiry of the two years period from the date of departure, the employee has the right to come back to the Sultanate at any time. Moreover, the employee may come back to work in the Sultanate any time after departure if he received NOC from his employer.

On the other hand, ILO is in discussions about setting minimum wages and providing employees with decent living. A number of labor exporting countries to the Sultanate insist to set a minimum wage. We are respecting the laws of these countries, therefore they are required to respect our laws. Some of these countries ban the entry of some Omani exports to their countries to protect their industries. It is also our right to take whatever decision to protect our country as long as it does not contradict with the international charters.

We have to point out that those targeted by this decision are not humble labors. OCCI advocates giving simple labors the right to come back to the Sultanate at any time. The targeted category includes leaders and those occupying senior technical and managerial position. We may seek the opinion of the employer to take a decision on the same. We affirm here that if OCCI believes that any employer is manipulating this right, it will support the humble labors’ right to come back any time.

OCCI, as a representative of the private sector organization is making steady efforts to enhance the growth of the different sector and provide whatever possible support to serious investors. OCCI is ready to facilitate the investors’ procedures and exclude them from the implementation of such article if they prove their seriousness and willingness to come back for investment.
In a meeting with Sharan Burrow, Secretary General of the International Trade Union Confederation and her accompanying delegation visiting the Sultanate, His Excellency Said bin Saleh Al Kiyumi, Board Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), stated that despite the recent experience of trade unions in Oman this activity has made considerable leap that we are proud of. “Social dialogue is a point of strength in the Sultanate.

Sharan Burrow: Oman’s experience on trade unions liberties is admirable.
As production parties we work jointly with decisions taken collectively which is a source of strength. Despite the differences of views and intersecting interests of various parties on some occasions, we understand that each party has the right to defend the rights of its representatives. Our belief in dialogue allows us to maintain distinguished relationship. Dialogue can achieve what is not achievable through collision. The nation’s interest is a firm principle we are committed to”, he said.

Sharan Burrow expressed her happiness with the Sultanate’s trade union experience and commended the Oman’s commitment to international agreements with regard to the trade union liberties saying that Oman’s experience is honorable and can be imparted to other countries.

The meeting discussed the impact of declining oil prices on the region’s economy. In this respect, His Excellency the OCCI Chairman stated that there was exaggeration in portraying the implications of reduced oil prices. “The economy may be affected but not in the manner portrayed through the various media. Infrastructure projects may be affected too but our economy is robust and continues to achieve good rate of growth. We are looking at this issue in a positive perspective because it is now time to diversify sources of income. We believe in the ability of the tourist sector to play an important role in this context over the upcoming period”, His Excellency said.

The Secretary General of the International Trade Union Confederation commented on the efforts being made to put in place plans for diversification of sources of income in order to confront the impact of reduced oil prices by saying: “We welcome these efforts aimed at diversifying sources of income and are happy with this trend. We also thank the officials in Oman for being open to dialogue as solutions are always achievable through dialogue”.

Trade Union Confederation commented on the efforts being made to put in place plans for diversification of sources of income in order to confront the impact of reduced oil prices by saying: “We welcome these
OCCCI to organize
Business Opportunities Forum 2015

✓ Business Opportunities Forum (BOF) aims at being a brand image of the Sultanate in promoting investment and establishing ventures.

✓ It creates a platform for companies to benefit from the business opportunities displayed under one roof to help them expand their businesses.

✓ BOF attracts local and foreign companies interested in displaying their services, contracts and business opportunities.

✓ New additions include platforms for companies to promote their products.

✓ Invitation is open for entrepreneurs to review the potential opportunities for establishing new economic ventures.

✓ The major challenge this year is to get the same value of the contracts inked at the previous version of the Forum due to oil price slump.

✓ Ideas to involve university students studying commerce, economic, management and human resources at the Forum.

✓ Four awards approved for SMEs taking part at the Forum

✓ More than 63 foreign companies are expected to take part at the Forum.
Business Opportunities Forum is one of the key initiatives by Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (2014-2017). The Forum aims at creating an ideal platform for promoting investment, establishing joint ventures and attracting foreign capitals. It provides major as well as SMEs and trade delegations with the opportunity to meet and network under one roof. The Forum provides participants with the opportunity to display the various investment opportunities available at the market.

Business Opportunities Forum seeks to achieve an important base for supporting the Sultanate’s endeavors to promote MICE tourism before the opening of Oman International Center for Conferences and Exhibitions. The Center is expected to play a pivotal role in promoting this type of tourism which has proved its feasibility in some neighboring countries.

OCCI is pleased to announce that the third version of Business Opportunities Forum will be held 16-17th November 2015 to coincide with the Sultanate’s celebrations of the 45th National Day. Coordination has been maintained with the Supreme Committee for National Day Festivals – the General Supervisor of the Supreme Committee for National Day Festival and Sheikh Sabaa bin Hamdan al Saadi, Secretary General of the Committee. OCCI would like to thank them for including the Forum at the 45th National Day celebrations.

The move will help OCCI in promoting the event as one of the regional and international forums that help in promoting the Sultanate as an economic hub. The Forum will also help in activating the role played by the private sector in the industrial development. It also activates the role played by the private sector in the development process through direct or indirect investments and through partnerships with local and foreign investors in the different economic and business fields.

The third version of the Forum builds on the success made by the previous two versions. It stresses the keenness of OCCI Board of Directors (BoD) to ensure sustainability of this
major economic event. OCCI seeks to make the Forum an international event that highlights the investment opportunities in the country. It also aims at making the Forum a brand image of the Sultanate in promoting investment and establishing ventures, creating a platform for companies to come into contact with each other and start partnership and helping major companies to showcase the business opportunities they have before the SMEs.

The Forum also seeks to enhance partnership in In-Country-Value for products, industries and social responsivity. It also seeks to display the market needs in terms of services as well as the potential business opportunities. The Forum also seeks to attract foreign investors for partnerships with Omani companies.

The main aim of this Forum is to provide an ideal platform to showcase the achievements made by the Sultanate in various fields and allow Omani companies to promote their products and services before other companies and visitors of the Forum.

OCCI seeks to break the record of the total value of the contracts that were achieved in the last version. OCCI hopes to have RO100 million worth contracts in this Forum. Taking into consideration the current economic conditions, the low oil prices, the value of the contracts and tenders offered in the Forum is expected to be not less than $17 billion. The Forum also seeks to establish five new companies and provide contracts for them as it has been the case with the first version. Two companies have been already established in the previous version and were proved successful.

The Forum aims at attracting attention to the importance of the Forum and the contracts that may be generated from it. The Organizing Committee has started sending the invitations to the different types of companies. At the coming stage, OCCI is going to concentrate on the selection process to ensure diversity of companies taking part so that they reflect the diversity of businesses in the Sultanate.

While participating at this Forum, major companies may disclose the available purchase orders and tenders they have for 2016 as well as their expansion plans in the coming year. The Forum allows participants to sign or renew contracts with SMEs and major companies. In this area, the Main
Committee focuses on direct contact with companies and on organizing field visits to their sites. It also meets with respective officers to attract a large number of companies and secure the required participation and sponsorship. OCCI has obtained initial approval of a number of companies operating in production and service sector especially the capital intensive companies. OCCI seeks to bring platinum, main, gold, silver and associate sponsors to this Forum.

OCCI would like to invite all private companies to extend their support to the event by sponsoring it. The team in charge of promoting the event has already started visiting these companies and advising it of the importance of participation, how to participate and sponsor. The marketing team is distributing the promotion book of the Forum – of which more than 1000 copies have been printed. The book includes detailed information about the Forum, the participation forms and communication details with the organizing committee. Over the past period, OCCI has forwarded invitations to participate and sponsor to a large number of companies and establishments.

As for SMEs, the Forum aims at gathering major companies and SMEs under one roof to provide them with the opportunity to sign deals and establish partnerships. The Forum will provide them with the opportunity to review the available business opportunities in the market, how to take part at the tender, how to establish ventures with foreign investors and how to get commercial agencies.

To ensure wide participation by SMEs, OCCI has approved a new mechanism to ensure successful participation of these companies. The Committee will design pavilions and stands for SMEs and will provide RO500 indirect subsidy by bearing 50% of the cost of stand design and installation. OCCI advised these companies on how to communicate and negotiate with major companies about the contracts on offer in the Forum. To ensure the success of the Forum, OCCI urges representatives of SMEs to be available during the Forum to display their products and services in a novel way to attract customers and partners from inside and outside the Sultanate.

OCCI has been very keen on encouraging and honoring the companies that offer considerable contracts and tenders for SME. To this end, it has dedicated a number of awards that will be as follows:

- The biggest value of contract
- The biggest value of a single contract
- The biggest number of contracts to be signed.
- Establishing new companies.

A committee will be formed to supervise these awards. The committee comprises members from inside and outside the Sultanate. It will make a list of the different companies and assess them according to pre-set standards. The winners will be recognized at the concluding event of the Forum which will be attended by a number of business and economy professionals from inside and outside the Sultanate.

A number of friendly and sister companies that participated at the previous versions of the Forum expressed interest in participating at this Forum as well. The number of international participations is expected to be about 63. Invitation has been forwarded to 22 European countries, 13 Asian, 6 American, 11 African countries in addition to GCC states, Yemen, Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. These invitations are forwarded to ensure maximum participation of businessmen and investors. OCCI has been keen on promoting the Forum at different events.

To ensure convenience of participants, OCCI provides a number of facilities and assistance in transportation and visas for expatriates. It prepared an efficient program for participants to advise them of the tourism and investment potentials of the Sultanate as well as the incentives provided by the Sultanate to foreign investors.

The second version of the Forum that was held in 2014 has received good response and was very successful either in terms of the number of local and foreign participants, the size of contracts that were signed and the businesses that were unveiled. More than 45 major companies offered contracts and tenders worth of about RO17 billion. They also signed contracts worth of RO55 million. Statistics show that 160 SMEs participated at the event. The contracts offered at the forum included more than 35 businesses in addition to participation of more than 150 economic personalities from 15 sisterly and friendly countries.

A large number of businessmen and women from the Sultanate participated at the event as they consider it an ideal platform to promote their projects and products and be briefed on the projects of their counterparts. The forum, which allows companies to build partnership and sign deals, is supported by the various public and private organizations form inside and outside the Sultanate.
Food and Hospitality Exhibition 2015 held

Al Kiyumi calls upon the government to reconsider Consumer Exhibitions Regulations which are adversely affecting the economy.
His Excellency Said bin Saleh Al Kiyumi, Board Chairman of OCCI, pointed out that the exhibitions held at Oman International Exhibition Center are purely consumer exhibitions which bear no fruit to the national product, does not create opportunities and does not contribute to establishing alliance among various firms or transfer of experiences of international organizations to local establishments. “However, the Food and Hospitality Exhibition 2015 has changed this philosophy by allowing for promotion rather than sale of products. The exhibition is meant to promote the Omani products and other international products and open up prospects for businessmen to establish alliance with foreign companies. His Excellency called upon the government to reconsider the Consumer Exhibition Regulation because such exhibitions jeopardize the national economy and adversely affect businessmen. It is enough to organize exhibitions for promotion of foreign products. These exhibitions should be held to promote national products,” His Excellency noted.

This statement was made as His Excellency opened the 10th Food and Hospitality Exhibition 2015 organized by the OMANEXPO in cooperation with the National Hospitality Institute and Society of Omani Chefs. The exhibition featured a total of 300 trademarks and included variety of industry-related events and presentation of food with a view to demonstrating local talents in food and hospitality sectors.

The exhibition witnessed in its previous edition in 2014 considerable turnout with the visitors totaling to 4,000, including food and hospitality specialists and stakeholders.
The food and beverage sector is all set for the “Gulfood Manufacturing 2015” scheduled to be held at Dubai World Trade Centre during the period from 27-29 October 2015 at a time in which a clear picture is portrayed for the Middle East, Africa and South Asia (MEASA) as the biggest vital region witnessing rapid growth in this sector. MEASA region is now considered to be embodying the fastest growing emerging markets in the world.

Gulfood Manufacturing is the biggest and most effective platform in the fields of food production, processing and packing and packaging which paves the way for the participants to avail of the exceptional trade opportunity available involving suppliers and manufacturers from around the world. It is a favourable opportunity for those who wish to take advantage of the main growth factors inherent in this vital region.

The great reliance on food imports, particularly in the various parts of the MEASA region is a factor that prompts the needs for developing food processing. The units concerned with food production in countries like Saudi Arabia, the largest food producer in the GCC, rose from 460 units in 2002 to more than 735 units in 2015 according to a report issued by the Alpen Capital in 2015. This rise was coupled with an increase in the total investments in the sector amounting to an annual growth rate of 11.9% to reach USD 12.3 billion in 2012. The growth strength in other GCC markets are not different with due account of the variation in the volumes of markets.

Food processing sector has developed in South Asian countries into becoming one of the biggest drivers of economic growth there. India’s foreign affairs ministry says that the contribution of food exports to the promotion of this sector is more than the contribution of imports. Indian food industries, however, now constitute 32% of the total food market, 14% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of manufacturing sectors in the country, 13% of the Indian exports and 6% of the total industrial investments in India.
In South Africa, the third largest industries, food industries contribute 14% of the total annual GDP of the country. On the other hand, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Algeria, Morocco and Egypt constitute the largest hubs for food industries and agriculture-related trade activities in the African Continent.

Governments in the various parts of the region are carrying out programmes that aim to facilitate growth of food industries, including provision of subsidies to their companies to enable them to obtain some necessary food production equipment, interest-free loans and customs exemptions on imported raw materials. The governments of the Sultanate of Oman, UAE, Qatar, India, Nigeria and South Africa work towards developing specialized manufacturing complexes to support investment and boost growth in this sector.

The launch of Gulfood Manufacturing Exhibition two years ago was meant to help regional food processing companies develop their businesses and obtain solutions that would support their growth. The event which set off for the first time last year witnessed an exceptional demand compared to supply in all aspects of this sector.

Companies such as Ecolean A B, a manufacturer of innovative solutions for dairy products and liquid foods, focus on expanding their clientele in the MEASA in particular. The company will join Gulfood Manufacturing in order to achieve its desirable expansion. “Our company is active in more than 30 countries around the world and is now going through a big geographic expansion stage in MEASA which enjoys promising growth opportunities. We have a wide range of flexible and suitable packing and packaging solutions for all refrigerated and room temperature saved foods. We will exhibit the latest of our prize-winning innovations, including “Ecolean” and Reclose Snap Quick,” said Ana Aniras, Marketing Manager at Ecolean.

TechnicaPlast taking part in the exhibition which is famous for plastic syringe technologies is of the opinion that the region has a wide prospect for its products in the field of durable packing and packaging solutions for food industry. “The trust in the opportunities available in the region for packing milk, cheese and labna are such strong that we were prompted to put in place a plan to open a factory in Dubai shortly,” said Ali Kwai Yrali, sales and marketing officer at the company.

The growth capabilities in food processing sector attract world investors leading to establishing partnership relations, setting up joint ventures, concluding licensing agreements with local manufacturers and acquiring companies operating in the region.

The major investments of the private sector in the food processing sector in the UAE include a factory of the Al Islami Foods operating in the field of Halal foods in the region investing a total of USD 27.2 million based in Dubai and another factory of BRF S.A. of Brazil in Abu Dubai in the total sum of USD 150 million.

Great trade opportunities are available in various parts of MEASA in the light of the increasing food consumption raising the need for developing the infrastructure of supply chain at all levels, including purchase, packing, packaging, processing equipment, storage solutions as part of the refrigeration chain, logistic transport services and retail. Markets such as those available in the UAE are seen as firm global centres whose importance is not because of their fast growing food industries but also for being one of the largest exportation centres in the world.
Scene of honoring ceremony organized by OPEX committee for participants in Omani Products Exhibition in Jeddah
OCCI, represented by engineer Redha bin Jumaa Al Saleh, Board Vice-Chairman for Administrative and Financial Affairs, took part in the consultative meeting of senior officials of the GCC ministries of labor and chairmen and members of chambers and associations of commerce held in the Qatari capital of Doha on 18 October 2015.

Engineer Redha Al Saleh pointed out that the agenda of the meeting included discussion on the many issues of interest to the public and private sectors and of priority to all GCC countries. He added that among the questions brought forward was the organization of joint meetings and the need to activate the resolutions of the 23rd Summit of the GCC Supreme Council with regard to full equality in treatment among GCC citizens in the fields of employment in government and private sectors, particularly the decision that the GCC citizen should enjoy the same privileges granted to the national citizens of any particular GCC state. This includes considering the GCC employees working with the private sector as being national employees without any discrimination between them and national employees of any particular GCC state.

Engineer Redha added that in addition the meeting dealt with the issue of involving the GCC private sector in the ongoing negotiations with the manpower exporting countries as well as coordinating positions of the public and private sectors towards the questions brought forward in Arab and international labor organizations in order to achieve the interest and stability of Gulf labor markets.

The Services Committee of OCCI has held its third meeting at the OCCI premises as part of a series of meetings this year under the chairmanship of Rashid bin Amor Al Masalhi, Board member and committee chairman, in the presence of committee members.

The committee discussed several issues relating to the service sectors in Oman, including the importance of national health insurance policy to serve as a guide to classification of health institutions, insurance prices and services and laws regulating health insurance in particular. The meeting familiarized itself with the challenges to implementation of this policy with a view to ensuring the rights of all and hoped that the policy would be issued after being studied by the competent authorities.

Dr. Waleed bin Khalid Al Zadjali, Chairman of Oman Medical Society and Member of OCCI’s Services Committee, stated that this policy would improve the standard of health services in the Sultanate in line with the needs of citizens and health institutions. “There is a balanced environment for medical treatment in the private sector which would prevent irregularities by insurance companies and some health institutions. This environment would also expedite the accomplishment of services relating to treatment of patients properly to the international health standards.”

About the national insurance policy, Rashid Al Masalhi, committee chairman, said that OCCI received many health insurance complaints from the private sector involved in the health field as well as many observations from the patients and visitors to the effect that the prices were not coping with the changes to the local market. There are some inconveniences as a result of the procedures carried out by the insurance companies to approve treatment in some cases. This would obviously stir frustration of the patients, thus having adverse bearing on the private health centres in the Sultanate. He added that the OCCI’s Services Committee always sought to identify the obstacles facing the service sectors and worked towards bringing about appropriate solutions to them.
The Services Committee of the OCCI’s branch in the Governorate of Buraimi has met with the managers and officials of some banks and banking institutions. The meeting discussed the problems and difficulties facing private sector firms in so far as their banking transactions are concerned. The two sides exchanged ideas about the societal and developmental roles of these institutions and the need to provide advanced and expanded banking services in various trade communities and service facilities.

In his welcoming address, Mr. Khalid bin Jumaa bin Shahin Al Balushi, Chairman of Service Committee of OCCI’s Buraimi Branch stated that the meeting was intended to discuss the challenges to the financial and banking sector in the Governorate. He stressed the importance of the role that the banks play in supporting development and providing eased financing sources to the private sector companies and establishments. He further underscored the need to conclude investment partnerships with the private sector and cooperation and contribution to developing the banking sector.

In their part, bank officials stressed their commitment to provide advanced banking services in line with the plans put in place and in keeping abreast of the significant growth in the labor market in the various wilayats of the Governorate. They promised that they would continue to facilitate all financial and banking transactions with the customers in both the public and private sectors.

The meeting also discussed the challenges facing companies in opening new accounts for their employees. The delays that some banks experience in account opening procedures for private sector firms were criticized. It was noticed that this poses new challenges to owners of companies concerning the transfer of the wages of their employees to their personal bank accounts. In order to overcome this shortcoming, the attendants proposed that the banks should transfer the wages from the company’s account to exchange shops spread in the governorate to enable the employees receive their monthly salaries through the exchange companies. Commenting on the proposal, the bank officials pointed out that this would require further study and coordination with the exchanges to ensure whether they are capable of implementing this proposal and absorb the large numbers of employees involved.

On the other hand, the meeting discussed the shortage of electronic funds transfer at point of sale (EFTPOS) in some government service organizations and major trade complexes and malls, particularly since the volume of trade transactions in the governorate’s market is steadily on the rise. Hence, there is a pressing need to provide such equipment to facilitate this sort of services and make available advanced banking options for the governorate’s visitors on the understanding that this kind of service would contribute to the growth and prosperity of the Governorate. In addition, the meeting stressed the importance that the banks should study the possibility of opening new branches and providing ATMs and CDMS in various wilayats of the Governorate in line with the expansion and rapid growth.

Al Buraimi Branch calls for greater Banking Support
In collaboration with the Al Waha Management Training Institute, the branch of OCCI at Buraimi organized a training course entitled “Management of e-marketing and social networking”.

The training programme included an array of axes focusing on familiarization with e-marketing, the highlighting of e-marketing characteristics and advantages and definition of steps of setting up a website on the Internet in addition to the fields of e-marketing and how to identify and prepare e-marketing plan.

Organized under the supervision of trainer Ibrahim bin Hamad Al Saidi, director General of Al Waha Management Training Center, the programmes comes in the context of three free training programmes presented for the private sector in cooperation with the OCCI as part of its social responsibility towards the community.

The OCCI’s Al Buraimi branch seeks to support and help male and female business owners and reach out to the other segments of the society, including job seekers and university students wishing to enter into the world of economy, to enable them to avail of the opportunities and businesses available in the private sector which portrays the promising future of Omani labor market.
Development and training

Mohammed Mahmood Uthman
mohmeedosman@yahoo.com

The world is set to define the path of spending on sustainable development by nearly USD 2.5 trillion worth of funding spanning the period from now through to the year 2030 giving priority to education as a basic approach towards the desirable development. This is to be achieved through planning with a view to providing students with the knowledge and technological skills that they need for development and sustainable life styles based on respect for human rights, gender equality, promotion of peace, non-violence and citizenship culture, appreciation of cultural diversity and sustainable development.

This is what is exactly required by the Arab labor market which is regarded as one of the major markets absorbing tremendous workforce from various countries of the world. It is also unstable market due to its conflicting regulatory laws which are below the international standards and are conflicting with the principles of Sharia and general legal principles governing the rights of workforce. It is noted that business owners adhere to the sponsorship system which enable them to impose control over the workers and deprive them of their basic rights as approved by the treaties and agreements of the International Labor Organization, human rights charters and Islamic principles.

The West describes some of these practices prevailing in the Arab labor market as being a form of human trafficking in modern times. This accusation tends to be against the very essence of Islam which liberated the world from slavery and established the grounds for the modern European renaissance. It is for this reason that the upcoming years represent a pivotal and decisive stage for the Arab educational institutions which are required to consolidate innovation, tackle the issue of unemployment and uplift the competitive capacity at the regional level.

This cannot be successfully achieved by the governments alone, and therefore, it is necessary for the private sector to be involved in the process of learning development and in turning the educational process from the theoretical framework into practical and technology-oriented education. This trend is achievable through specialized training centers in each and every industrial, production or service sector with these centers being committed to training programmes at the level of actual skills, regulations and specifications required in accordance with the international standards of each profession.

In addition, it is also required to focus on the plans which are implemented by the training centers of the private sector so that these plans can serve the society with their capabilities and contributions to development. For this, we need a clearly defined road map to be put in place defining the obligations and duties each and every vocational training center and the number of trainees and the required level of skills in each period of time with a view to integrating the efforts aimed at providing the required technically trained cadres for the labor market. However, the problem lies in the feasibility and extent of active involvement by the private sector which is suffering from low level of productivity and shortage of training and skills.

These shortcomings had adverse bearing on the competitive capacity of Arab manpower against the expatriate manpower due to the great gap between educational qualification and labor market requirements and weakness of education and vocational and technological training programmes of workforce in the Arab countries. This coupled with the weak capacities of human capital represented by the trainers and supervisors does lead to doubling the volume of unemployment. The problem will further aggravate unless the levels and quality of education deliverables are made compatible with the labor market’s needs by promoting education deliverables and adopting a specific quality system to measure compatibility of deliverables with the actual needs and requirements.

It is in this manner that we can address the underlying causes of deteriorating education and vocational and technological training. The ultimate goal of this drive is to find a solution to the lack of skilled and well-trained national cadres which led to increased number of expatriate workers in various sectors. This, therefore, confirms the importance of the competition and emulation between the public sector and the private sector. Owing to the high cost of this type of education and training on one hand and the inability of participants to bear its cost, the public sector is required to contribute by providing a package of motivational incentives to attract possible number of trainees who will then constitute the basic drive of sustainable development.
Omani trade delegation visiting Islamic Republic of Iran dispatched by the branch of OCCI at North Al Sharqiyah Governorate led by Ali bin Salim Al Hajri, OCCI Treasurer and Chairman of OCCI’s North Al Sharqiyah branch, was provided with the opportunity of familiarizing themselves with the major economic resources and potentials in the trade, industrial and agricultural sectors in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The delegates familiarized with the mechanism of establishing trade and investment relations with the Iranian companies and means of strengthening and deepening economic cooperation, taking advantage of the technical, administrative and professional capabilities and familiarizing with the distinguished Iranian experience in managing the private sector’s companies and establishments and small and medium enterprises.

The delegation comprised more than 15 business persons and owners of small and medium enterprises (SME). Ali bin Salim Al Hajri pointed out that the visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran was meant to encourage and establish bridges of cooperation and deepening economic, trade and investment relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The delegation visited a number of factories and companies in several Iranian governorates such as Teheran, Esfahan and Yazd where they familiarized with the abundant production experience and modern technology and held bilateral meetings between Oman and Iranian business owners.

Investment opportunities in Tehran
- Human resources
- Strong infrastructure
- Mining sector and health services
- Tourism and antiquities

The visiting delegates held their first working session with their Iranian counterparts at the premises of Tehran Chamber where they were received by the board chairman and a number of the chamber officials. The delegates were briefed on activation of trade between the two countries and available means for investment as well as the energies, human resources and strong infrastructure features of the capital city of Tehran.

The Iranian side referred to the investment opportunities available in the mining sector and health services in addition to the cooperation in tourism sector, particularly antiquities, archaeologies and recreational parks. Speaking to the visiting delegation, the chairman of Tehran Chamber stressed the importance of the direct maritime shipping line between the Sultanate and Iran which would open up prospects for further cooperation and trade exchange between business owners in the two countries in several areas.

Bilateral meetings in Esfahan
The Omani trade delegation met with the chairman of Esfahan chamber. The two sides exchanged investment opportunities available in Oman and Iran and reviewed investment potentials in the wilayats of the North Al Sharqiyah Governorate and the Governorate of Esfahan as well as the investment laws in the two countries.

The visiting Omani delegates also met with the Governor of Esfahan and reviewed with him ways of encouraging and establishing bridges and cooperation and deepening trade and economic relations between business owners in the two countries. Bilateral meetings were held between the visiting Omani delegates and their counterparts. The two sides exchanged ideas about production fields provided by their companies and SMEs and ways to consolidate their growth. They also exchanged experiences and ways of procuring modern technology.
Agricultural and industrial cooperation

The delegation also visited goernorate of Yazd where they met with the chairman and board members of Yazd Chamber and some business owners in the governorate in the presence of His Excellency Saud bin Ahmed Al Barwani, the Sultanate’s ambassador to Iran. H.E. the ambassador stressed the importance of consolidating trade and investment relations between business owners in the two countries and the need to take advantage of the investment opportunities and exchange practical experiences in the business sector, particularly with the opening of the direct maritime shipping line linking Bandar Abbas to Sohar.

The chairman of Yazd Chamber pointed out that Yazd Governorate is known for its industrial, agricultural and tourism potentials and medical services with too many diverse medical specializations allowing for greater investment opportunities in this important sector. He also referred to the other investment opportunities in the Governorate in technology, food stuff, plastic, textiles, cables, marbles and ceramics.

Ali bin Salim Al Hajri stressed the importance of utilizing the investment facilities available by the businessmen in the two countries, and setting up an investment company for development in various fields and consolidating cooperation between the two countries. He thanked the board chairman and members of Yazd Chamber for the reception they accorded to the visiting Omani delegation.

The visiting delegates also held bilateral discussions with their counterparts in the Governorate of Yazd and discussed with them ways to promote cooperation between the two countries by taking advantage of the investment opportunities and potentials enjoyed by Oman and Iran.

Visit to specialized Iranian factories

The Omani trade delegation concluded their visit by touring a number of factories and companies specializing in the manufacturing of furniture, carpets, brics, ceramics, electronics, cloths, plastics and tyres. They also visited the industrial estates and ports and some other tourist locations where they discussed ways of activating cooperation between the specialized companies in Oman and Iran. Views were exchanged on prospects of joint investment and ways of developing bilateral trade relations and strengthening cooperation in various fields.

Al- Hajri:
It is important for businessmen in the two countries to take advantage of investment facilities available in the countries.

Chairman of Tehan Chamber:
Direct maritime transport line between Oman and Iran will open up prospects for further cooperation and trade exchange in several areas.

Chairman of Chamber of Iran’s Yazd Governorate:
The Governorate is known for industrial, agricultural, tourism and medical production which would allow for greater investment opportunities in these important spheres.
Royal Oman Police (ROP) represented by Directorate General of Customs launched customs procedures and processes computerization system and single electronic window system “Bayan” at the beginning of June 2015 at the Industrial Port of Sohar. This is considered to be one of the most important national projects that aims to support the movement of international trade exchanges and contribute to providing safe, accurate, speedy and easy customs services.

In a working paper presented at the gathering organized by OCCI in the presence of a host of officials of the Directorate General of Customs and representatives of customs clearance companies and establishments at the OCCI premises, Muqaddam (Lieutenant Colonel) Mansoor bin Nasser Al Rahbi, Director of Tariffs and Statistics Department, stated that the Directorate General of Customs aims in its mission to provide the best security and customs services in support of the national economy and the trade community.

He added that the ultimate goal of the Department is to contribute to economic and trade development, support consultancies and protect the society against security, health, environmental and economic risks. He tackled the strategic objectives featured by consolidation of partnership relationship with the trade community and contribution to creation of competitive trade environment to employ and capture capitals and adopt the best electronic solutions to streamline customs procedures, support partnership with customs-related government departments and authorities and strengthen central customs database for all levels of decision-makers. The aim is also to consolidate customs relations with the fraternal and friendly countries and international organizations.

“The department aims to strengthen security procedures at the customs outlets with state-of-the-art risk management systems, support and uplift the efficiency of human resources with specialized cadres in all customs fields, prevent smuggling and customs tax evasion, boost human and technical capabilities to prevent duplication and trade cheating and consolidate the efficiency of auditing and control customs revenues to ensure their growth and augmentation.

He said that customs procedures and processes computerization system and single electronic window system “Bayan” has several advantages as it constitutes a significant national project serving all customs aspects and provides necessary facilities to the trade and industrial community in parallel with the technical support and data provided to the concerned government authorities to enable them to take their decisions in accordance with a vision based on sound principles with a view to achieving the Sultanate’s strategic objectives in disseminating the umbrella of security and supporting economic prosperity through the diversification of sources of income.

Firstly: Single electronic window system of Customs

About the single electronic window of customs, he said: “The system is a standardized electronic window allowing all relevant authorities to link up electronically with the Directorate General of Customs. Currently, there is no electronic system linking government authorities
with the Directorate General of Customs. For this reason, the concerned government authorities issue licenses and permits on papers. These procedures are time-consuming and are subject to alteration and forgery in terms of data and quantities and other important information by some beneficiaries.”

Muqaddam Mansoor Al Rahbi pointed out that there are about 40 government authorities which are concerned with customs, including Ministry of Commerce and Industry represented by Directorates of Commerce, Standards and Measurements and Industry, Ministry of Health represented by the Directorate General of Pharmaceuticals and Drug Control, Directorate General of Health Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries represented by the Directorates General of Agriculture, Animal Resources and Fisheries and Ministry of Environment and Climatic affairs represented by the Directorate General of Environmental Affairs, Ministry of Finance represented by the General Secretariat of Taxation and Directorate General of Income and other related government authorities.

After activation of the single electronic window system and provision of links with the concerned authorities, paper documents will cease to be used and information and data will be exchanged electronically involving all relevant authorities. These authorities will be able to take part in decision-making relating to release of their shipments electronically and at a record time.

“The single electronic window system will have a significant role to play in ensuring integrity and accuracy of data provided by the clears and businessmen to the Customs in order to avoid legal accountability for any error in the shipment’s particulars. Data of all shipments will be exchanged among the Directorate General of Customs, shipping agents and establishments operating at seaports and airports and other authorities related to trade movement,” he elaborated.

Secondly: Integrated Customs Management System

Elaborating on the components of the project, Aqeed (Colonel) Yahya Al Maymani pointed out the integrated customs management system comprises all customs procedures and processes allowing customs officials to complete all transactions electronically. This system has several sub-systems, namely:

- Trade partner’s registration system
- Manifesto system
- Customs tariff management system
- Customs value system
- Vehicle entry/exit and shipping certificates
- Customs statement registration system
- Customs taxes and duties payment system
- Guarantees management system
- Customs taxes refund system
- Finance management system
- Customs subsequent auditing system
- Customs stores and warehouses management system

Thirdly: Risk management system and its importance to international trade agreements

It is one of the main systems forming the customs procedures and processes computerization system and is subdivided into several sub-systems, as follows:

- Data collection system
- Information analysis and evaluation system
- Inspection procedures system
- Customs priorities system
- Investigation procedures system
- Customs cases system

It is also an electronic system through which all documents and data pertinent to trade shipments are received before their arrival to the customs outlets allowing analysis of potential risks by the electronic search engines built in the risk management system which is supplied beforehand with all security, customs, health and environmental risks, standards and indicators in order to monitor and analyze various risks in the shipments and carriers coming into or leaving the Sultanate. This would allow the system to identify high, medium and low risk shipments or risk free shipments and hence take the appropriate decision on them.
When opened and operated, the new conventions and exhibitions center is expected to cause qualitative leap in the Sultanate in the field of organizing international conventions and exhibitions and events related to trade, industry and tourism. Located at the Al Erfan district, four km from Muscat International Airport, this center will serve as a competitive regional destination for many activities whether both regionally and internationally concerned with hosting important international conferences, events and meetings. Hence, Oman International Center for Conventions and Exhibitions will achieve diverse economic returns for the country besides serving various economic-related interests.

This new center is scheduled to be completed and operational by the end of current year. It comprises a tiered auditorium seating 3,200 people and more than 22,000 square metres of column-free exhibition space that can be divided into five separate sections. It also contains 14 conference rooms accommodating 70 to 360 persons and two party halls accommodating 2,360 persons as well as an excellent space for VIPs, spacious dining halls and multi-storey car parking accommodating more than 4,000 vehicles. Among the facilities surrounding the new center are one five-star hotel comprising a conference hall, two four-star hotels and one three-star hotel.

The total number of rooms in all hotels will be 1,000 together with a commercial district and hotel apartments.

The aim of the project is to support the economic diversity now underway in the Sultanate. In November 2011, the Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran) which possesses this project announced the appointment of AEG Ogden, specializing in operation of huge auditoriums and exhibitions to manage this center upon its completion. This project has undoubtedly provided too many employment opportunities for Omanis since commencement of phase I of constructions and the project is expected to bring about yet more jobs in subsequent stages.

It is hoped that the first stage of this vital project will be operational at the beginning of 2016. This stage focuses on conventions, functions, direct events and hosting of meetings and conventions organized by companies and government organizations. For this to be achieved, the center’s concerned organs need to embark upon a promotion campaign for this project and its various programmes by making promotional tours in cooperation with the ministry of tourism, the aim being to highlight the center’s capabilities and capacities in hosting international conventions and exhibitions and promoting the Sultanate as one a prominent world-class destination attracting decision-makers and opinion leaders of various international organizations and major companies. The promotion campaign covered European cities such as Berlin, Brussels, Milano, Geneva and others. Other visits will also continue later in order to consolidate and build relations with global institutions and companies operating in the field of conventions and business events.
Petrofac is celebrating recruiting a record intake of Omani graduates as part of its 2015 intake. Almost 30 young women and men will be kick-starting their careers with the company by October 2015, an increase of nearly 40% on the previous year.

In the presence of His Highness Sayyid Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmoud Al Said, Assistant Secretary General of the Deputy Prime Minister Office for Cabinet Affairs, Petrofac welcomed the new intake.

Country Manager Ray Richardson said: “Last year we had a great response from the universities and colleges with whom we work here in the Sultanate. Twenty-two students are now completing the first year of a tailored graduate training programme which we run through our Petrofac Academy. They are also excellent ambassadors which without doubt, complements the recruitment process. The tremendous take-up this year speaks for itself.

“Joining Petrofac straight from university or college can be a hugely rewarding experience. Our programmes provide the experience, training and development newly-qualified graduates need to accelerate their careers and develop their full potential in a forward looking organisation. They want to succeed and their performance reflects that motivation. They represent our future and I am very proud of every one of them.”

The Petrofac Academy is a purpose-built facility dedicated to the continuous professional development of all the company’s employees at every level and stage of their careers.
Passion to Excel

Sami Al Yaaqubi:

Interviewed by:
Mohammed Al Kilbani
In line with its care for entrepreneurs, Al-Ghorfa Magazine takes keen interest in introducing through its pages entrepreneurs who have achieved considerable success in the world of entrepreneurship driven by their great passion for entrepreneurship and technology.

Sami bin Salim Al Yaqubi, owner of Diamond Shine Mobile Phones Establishment speaks about the idea of his project by saying: The beginning was in 1992 when I worked in one of the mobile phone sales and repair shops. I was keen on managing the shop personally providing all mobile phone accessories which are constantly updated. We had to cope with the developments in this field in order to attract more new customers and retain our regular customers.

**Success factors**
Achieving and maintaining success in business is not easy as envisaged by some people, particularly in the presence of competitive environment which puts enterprise owners in constant challenge. Answering a question about the requirements of success of any business, Sami said: “The person must have a good idea and knowledge about the business. It is of prime importance to define the goal from the enterprise and conduct economic feasibility study for the project. These are basic steps prior to commencing any business.

**Do not expect hasty success**
Sami believes that it is important not to demand hasty success for businesses because success normally takes some time before the business establishes itself in the market and win the trust of customers. The person must also be positive and optimistic about the success of his/her business no matter what obstacles he/she faces at the beginning of setting up the business.

In addition, the enterprise owner must have distinguished ideas that would make the business distinct from other businesses providing the same service or product. Marketing and promotion of the business as well as good time management are important factors too in order to achieve dissemination and success.

**Challenges**
As for the challenges that faced the business, Al Yaqubi said: Provision of capital was the first obstacle in addition to the difficulty of procedures and delayed processing of transactions at the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA). Another challenge is featured by the scarcity of certified mobile phone agents in the Sultanate and shortage of training courses in this field which allow for development of skills.

**Plans**
About his plans to develop his business, he said: “My beginning was so simple but the business gained momentum and developed into its present state. I have great ambition to further expand and establish branches to cover the various wilayats of the Sultanate. I am also trying to be a certified agent of one of the reputed mobile phone companies.

Sami gives a word to the Omani youth who are planning to enter the world of entrepreneurship by saying: You should have strong resolve, determination and patience in studying whatever is related to the business idea before taking any decision. Proper planning and setting of clearly defined objectives are two very important things. All these elements have direct bearing on the success map of the business.

• It would be wrong to demand success of businesses hastily
• I aspire to a certified agent for one of the mobile phone companies
Meethaq Shari’a Board reviews branch operations

The Shari’a Supervisory Board of Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat visited the Meethaq branch in Al Qurm as part of the strategy to review branch operations. Sheikh Dr. Ali Qaradaghi, Chairman, and the board members Sheikh Essam Muhammad Ishaq, Sheikh Majid Al Kindi and Abdulqader Thomas visited the branch along with Sulaiman Al Harthy, Group General Manager – Islamic Banking.

The Shari’a board members interacted with the branch staff to evaluate important operational aspects and discussed Meethaq activities and strategy for branch operations in the coming period.

Sulaiman Al Harthy said: “As the pioneer of Islamic banking in Oman, Meethaq is proud to expand branch operations across the Sultanate and thereby offer world-class Islamic banking experience to customers. The banking sector in Oman is witnessing the consolidation of Islamic banking and the state-of-the-art branch network reflects Meethaq’s focus to redefine Islamic banking operations in Oman. The new branch is designed to create a unique ambience and banking environment in line with the Meethaq brand values of true Partnership, Transparency and Trust. Meethaq plans to expand the branch network as well as launch new products and services to complement the unique Islamic banking experience.”

Meethaq, as part of continuous endeavor to provide world class services through the latest technology and innovation, recently upgraded its core banking system, resulting in a host of cutting edge and first-of-its-kind Islamic banking services covering ATM/CDM, debit card and mobile banking for Meethaq customers. Meethaq now functions on iMal core banking system.

Meethaq strives to fulfill the needs of customers with innovative Shari’a based products and the extension of the branch network is yet another proof of its commitment and dedication to meet customer expectations for Islamic banking. Meethaq is well positioned to provide Islamic financial expertise to diverse segments and thereby promote the good of society as a whole.

Presently, Meethaq has 12 branches across the Sultanate and plans to expand the network as well as launch new products and services to complement the unique Islamic banking experience. The bank has invested in staff, systems and controls to ensure the service is delivered in a professional, segregated and fully Shari’a compliant manner. Meethaq offers a full suite of Islamic banking products and services, including savings account, current account, home finance, auto finance, credit card and mobile banking.

Meethaq has adopted the best practices in Islamic banking and finance worldwide to combine a robust model which protects customers and complements the Islamic banking industry. Every Meethaq product goes through the process of Shari’a compliance certification by the Shari’a Supervisory Board and is created in line with the guidelines of the Central Bank of Oman.

Meethaq stands out for its independent Shari’a Supervisory Board, separate capital allocation from shareholders’ money, unique risk management tools, complete fund segregation, separate books of account, Shari’a based core banking system, stand-alone Islamic banking branches and proper profit distribution mechanism among investment account holders/depositors. The adoption of AAOIFI standards (Accounting & Auditing Organisation for Islamic Financial Institutions) distinguishes Meethaq Islamic banking practices in terms of standardisation of products and services.
Six Senses Spa Opens at Al Bustan Palace Hotel

Under the auspices of HH Sayyida Dr. Muna bint Fahd Al Said and attended by the Minister of Tourism, HE Ahmed bin Nasser Al Mehrazi along with HE Maitha bint Saif Al Mahrouqiya – Undersecretary of the Ministry of Tourism, Six Senses Hotels Resorts Spas announced the official opening of the impressive 33,000 square foot (3,066 meter) Six Senses Spas at Al Bustan Palace, A Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Muscat.

Reflective of traditional Omani design, the spa beautifully complements the hotel and feature domed ceilings, elegant arched walkways and columns, and falaj (water channels). Housed on three levels much like an ancient Arabian fort, heavy wooden doors flank the imposing entrance that leads into a smaller entryway. The spa is comprised of a large reception area with ladies majils (intimate seating/meeting area), two consultation rooms and a spa gallery featuring a variety of skincare and wellness lifestyle products.

With 17 treatment rooms and a myriad of wet facilities such as infrared saunas, steam rooms, ice showers and hammams, the facility will entice the most discerning spa goer. In the activity studios, guests can experience Six Senses popular yogic programs and immerse themselves in reconnecting experiences through the group’s expert visiting practitioners program.

A private ladies only club includes a gym, activity studio, relaxation area, hammam, sauna and steam, as well as ice shower. The facility also features a ladies only indoor pool and a private beach.

Spa goers will enjoy a wide selection of signature massages, results-driven facials, wellness therapies and rituals plus body, beauty and fitness treatments. Treatment highlights include a series of locally-inspired signature body scrubs using indigenous ingredients to revitalize the body and mind.

More Café Opens Outlet At Qurum

Dubai based More Café recently opened its newest outlet in ‘Bader Al Qurum’, situated near the PDO compound in Muscat. With communal and hanging tables, art displays, the signature purple hue and a friendly team, More Café exudes a warm and welcoming ambience for customers from all walks of life.

Ajit Singh, Group General Manager of Asha Enterprises, believes More Cafe’s commitment to the highest standards of quality and its distinctive food and surroundings gives it an advantage in Muscat’s highly competitive casual dining market. “The restaurant offers patrons a relaxed environment where they can enjoy menu choices from an extensive selection of modern and international dishes with a few local favourites, served in a way that is uniquely MORE,” he comments.

Since opening its first café in Muscat in 2012, the brand has grown immensely with a loyal fan following. Our Wave location has enjoyed great success and we are sure that the outlet at ‘Bader al Qurum’ in the central Qurum location will be equally popular amongst the local community.”

The restaurant is well liked by business professionals who prefer the calm and elegant environment to conduct meetings. The communal table, free wifi and the latest business publications make it the perfect location to hold weekly office meetings.

The menu presents a healthy range of soups, salads, sandwiches and pasta dishes, as well as a mouth-watering array of desserts, pastries and drinks.

MORE uses the freshest ingredients, roasts its own coffee, bakes its own breads and pastries and produces the pastas, jams, dressings, chutneys and ice creams on their menu. These ingredients can also be purchased at the store along with other More Café specialities such as chocolate truffles, cookies and pralines. The restaurant also has an extensive catering menu for private parties.
Interaction with any organization comes when a person feels that he is an inseparable part of this organization or that. Cooperation increases when a member senses that the greatest concern of the organization is to benefit a wide segment of its members making sure that the role of such organization does not target one specific category of individuals without paying attention to others. This is exactly the role which Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) plays at this particular stage absorbing all members and affiliated organizations without discrimination or particularity, including all levels of businessmen and small and medium companies. While being with an OCCI delegation on a visit trip to Turkey, I asked one of the major businessmen about the gains that can be achieved from organizing such trips. He quickly replied: “We are now feeling that we do have a real chamber of commerce and industry in Oman” referring to the efforts that OCCI has been making in inviting all to participate without exclusion of any organizations, be they major companies or small or medium enterprises.

I continued my discussion with him about what he said. In a diplomatic language, he said that the invitation means that you are not ignored regardless of the benefit that can be achieved through such invitations. “Our participation is meant to support other company owners and businessmen and to contribute to the efforts being made by OCCI towards developing the business community and empowering it to explore the world, bring about partnerships with the foreign private sector and attract investments,” he added.

Interaction and satisfaction involving organizations cannot be realized unless there is direct or indirect benefit from that organization for all levels and categories. This is how a system can be created whereby all organizations pay their accession fees for membership and hence each one of them has the right to benefit from the services that OCCI is providing, including participation in the visits made by the delegations dispatched by OCCI. The Chamber is now doing intensive work, its aim being to enable all to benefit from its capabilities, relations and status as a home for businessmen.

We are indeed very delighted and satisfied with the broad and deep dialogue that is going on about the requirements of the private sector, the challenges it is facing in driving investment in the country and the obstacles and bureaucratic procedures. This dialogue was the outcome of these meetings which created channels for discussion of the applicable laws and procedures and the setting up of working committees to resolve these issues and overcome the obstacles facing the companies each in its field of business.

The extensive commendations voiced by the businessmen following the visit to Turkey were not a matter of courtesy nor were they driven by their wish to achieve their business interests though this is their legitimate right, but were the result of the favorable opportunity that was given to them. The interaction that resulted from organizing such important visits has opened up more prospects for our businessmen.

Direct interaction with the OCCI’s officials has contributed to discussing methods of work and the related implementation mechanisms intended to make decision-making easier and faster. The OCCI’s efforts are not only directed at organizing such overseas visits though such visits have many benefits to the society opening up wider prospects before businessmen. There are laws which address various questions, committees which review businesses and a management which operates with the private sector and all of these entities are generating satisfaction over what is achieved without any bias.

We do hope that OCCI’s momentum will continue to develop further with a view to representing the private sector in such an outstanding manner treating all businessmen on equal footing in order to sustain harmony, with the ultimate goal being to contribute to building our national economy.