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National rebranding efforts to accelerate Lebanon's transformation into modern tourist and business hub

Public figures and citizens urged to serve as 'Brand Ambassadors' in line with creative initiatives to promote Lebanon, says branding expert

Lebanon is emerging as one of the few positive stories in 2009 with remarkable growth in its tourism industry and overall economy, according to a branding expert. Concerted nationwide rebranding initiatives will help further accelerate Lebanon's transformation into one of the world's premier tourist and business destinations, as the government and the business sector need to take advantage of new developments to collaborate in creating fresher and more attractive images for "Brand Lebanon," said Ibrahim Lahoud, Director of Strategy and Brand Communication, Brand Central.

Lahoud pointed out that the national rebranding efforts will have a dramatic impact in redefining the way the world looks at this key Middle Eastern country, helping promote Lebanon as a major business and tourism destination like Brazil, Greece and Turkey. He also noted several gaps in the promotion of Lebanon, particularly in the area of tourism wherein a great number of people around the world are still unaware that Lebanon has so much more to offer than its cedar trees.

Another key measure that will enhance "Brand Lebanon" as a business destination according to Lahoud is to create dedicated districts that cater to various business and technological pursuits such as IT parks, banking and financial centres, and other business-centric development projects. Moreover, he emphasised the important role of prominent public figures such as singers and actors as well as ordinary citizens to serve as "Brand Ambassadors" of Lebanon.

"Lebanon is one of the rare success stories of the global financial crisis. Branding efforts focusing on its unique geography and way of life have opened up numerous opportunities in growth areas such as tourism, banking and construction, which continue to generate substantial capital from internal and external investors. Another important milestone that underscores the importance of branding strategies is the recent top-ranking performance of Beirut in an exclusive list of places to go in 2009, which has certainly boosted Lebanon's image as a leading leisure, lifestyle and business destination," said Lahoud.

"Furthermore, it is critically important to maintain the momentum generated by the country as a tourist hotspot and a safe and secure business destination. As such, there is an urgent need to develop more specific branding ideas and strategies that will further excite the world over the positive transformation of Lebanon. Although the Lebanese economy has gained so much this year, it is important to remember that competition remains tough as ever with other international travel and business destinations likewise aiming to improve their own stake in the global market. Our goal is to ensure that 'Brand Lebanon' remains firmly entrenched in the consciousness of our target audiences all over the world," added Lahoud.

Lahoud noted that significant achievements of the country need to be promoted vigorously to further enhance Lebanon's image as one of the most inspiring success stories in the midst of the global economic downturn. He further pointed out that the Lebanese economy has been projected to enjoy GDP growth of 3 per cent in 2009 and 4 per cent in 2010, according to the latest issue of the International Mon-

etary Fund's (IMF) bi-annual World Economic Outlook (WEO), even as the Lebanese Government expects a much more impressive 6 per cent growth this year. Lebanon's projected growth rate in

2009 easily eclipses the average growth in the Middle East (2.5 per cent) and among emerging and developing countries (1.6 per cent), while performing way above advanced economies and the world economy, which will record average negative growth rates at -3.8 per cent and -1.9 per cent, respectively.

On the other hand, a recent report by London-based investment firm Blakeney Investors has described Lebanon as a safe banking haven because of abundant liquidity and unprecedented inflow of deposits; the same report also highlighted Moody's upgrade of Lebanon's local and foreign currency government bond ratings at a time when several countries around the world have been downgraded. Lebanon's tourism sector also achieved dramatic growth, enjoying a 56.8 per cent surge in tourist arrivals for a total of 434,418 visitors in the first four months of 2009 compared with the same period in 2008.

Lebanon's tourism industry is expected to generate around 9.3 per cent of the country's GDP and account for about 9.6 per cent of total domestic employment in 2009. It is also projected to provide indirect revenues worth USD 7.78 billion and indirectly create around 439,600 jobs or at least one out of every 3.6 jobs within the year, equivalent to 28.1 per cent of total employment.

Lebanon's diverse and captivating natural resources, particularly its mountains, world-renowned cedar forests, and beaches, have helped earn the country a reputation as a travel haven. Other factors that continue to attract local, regional and global travellers are its excellent dining establishments; hospitable citizens; significant improvements in travel infrastructure through the Beirut International Airport and Lebanon's official carrier Middle East Airlines; and abundance of artistic pursuits involving film, music, food and design, among others.

Beirut, on the other hand, has topped the global list of "The 44 Places to go in 2009" published recently by the New York Times. The Lebanese capital edged out popular tourist destinations such as Washington, D.C., Galapagos, Las Vegas and Hawaii by garnering consistently high ratings in all criteria, which included Luxury, Ecology, Family, Frugality, Food, Culture, and Party. The top ranking affirms Lebanon's success in rebranding itself as a regional and global tourism hub.

Brand Central has been a key contributor in promoting Lebanon as a leading regional and international travel and tourism gateway. The consultancy provides turnkey solutions for brand development, corporate identity, and strategic design. Its mission is to provide a thoroughly positive impression of a company or product to existing and potential customers.

ARINC and Rockwell Collins Equip First Bombardier Challenger with In-flight Broadband: STC Available



ECB secures major investment programme for grassroots cricket

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) today agreed a four year whole sport funding plan with Sport England for the development of grassroots cricket.

The grant award of £37.8million is for the period 2009 to 2013 and covers both capital and revenue expenditure plans. It will be invested in projects that grow participation; sustain involvement; increase the satisfaction levels of participants; and creates pathways for excellence from the playground to Test Arena.

The plan will also see the ECB continue its focus on improving opportunities for women, girls and disabled players to participate in cricket.

David Collier, Chief Executive of the ECB said:

“This agreement is fantastic news for cricket and will enable us to continue our work to increase opportunities for people to take part in our sport. The ECB has been awarded the largest grant of any National Governing Body which demonstrates the confidence that Sport England has in our ability to deliver grassroots programs.

“I would like to thank everyone in cricket, from the thousands who volunteer at local clubs through to our development team, who have helped to help us to build partnerships in community cricket.

“Sport England will also be bringing forward further lottery funding opportunities based on potential priority policy themes such as increasing participation by women and girls, improving

school-club links and building sustainable community sports clubs. Cricket has a major contribution to make in this area and we will be working with Sport England to secure further funding for projects that not only increase participation in cricket but address wider policy objectives such as improving health and building social inclusion”.

“I can also announce that the ECB has determined that a significant portion of the Whole Sport Plan funding will be directed toward the Cricket Foundation’s Chance to Shine initiative. This award, alongside agreement we have reached with Minister for Sport Gerry Sutcliffe about future funding arrangements, mean that Chance to Shine’s £20m four-year investment programme funded jointly by the private and public sector can move ahead.”

Wasim Khan, newly appointed Chief Executive of the Cricket Foundation said, “We’re delighted that the Government continues to acknowledge the positive effect Chance to Shine is having on communities nationwide. This year over 300,000 young people at primary and secondary schools across the country will benefit from our programme, which uses cricket to teach children key life skills.”

Sport England’s Chief Executive Jennie Price said “Sport England has worked hard to ensure that our half a billion pound investment in grassroots sport delivers value for money, and most importantly, results. We believe that our partnership approach will build the firm foundations of a world-leading community sport system”.

Federation of Indian Export Organization

Declining credit off take with interest rates showing no signs of abating, a cause of concern for the MSME export sector : FIEO Chief

Mr A Sakthivel, President, Federation of Indian Export Organization (FIEO) while commenting on the latest update of the RBI stated that the non-food credit had declined to Rs.3,58,494 crores in 2009 from Rs.4,88,719 crores in 2008. The percentage variation for the year-on-year figure is 36.32%.

The FIEO Chief, however, observed that while the bank credit to the commercial sector had declined in 2009 on a year-on-year basis to 15.5% (Rs.4,05,176), the credit offtake in 2008 was 24.5%. At the same time, the net bank credit to the government on a year-on-year basis had increased from Rs.80,371 crores to Rs.4,54,313 crores which is nearly a five fold increase over the previous year.

Elaborating further Mr Sakthivel stated that investments in Government securities had almost become three fold to Rs.3,24,213 crores at Rs.1,42,800 crores in 2008 while PLR’s had remained constant in range 11% to 12.25% inspite of the declining offtake to the commercial sector.

President, FIEO stated that a declining credit offtake, higher investments in government securities besides interest rates which show no sign of moving southwards may not augur well for the MSME export sector in the existing slow down.

Extension of territorial jurisdiction for levy of service tax to CSI & EEZ would add to trade costs: FIEO Chief



RIZON TO CENTRE ITS GULF REGION ACTIVITY FROM DOHA HEADQUARTERS

Reports upswing in charter business and makes progress with UK approvals

Rizon, the Middle East charter and aircraft management operator is to centre its Gulf region operations at its new Doha, Qatar headquarters, the company announced today.

“We are reducing the size of our Bahrain and Sharjah offices to consolidate our back office and administrative functions in our new headquarters in Qatar”, confirmed Rizon Group CEO Will Curtis. The move underlines Rizon’s commitment to Doha, where it is constructing a brand new 120,000 sq ft hangar and fixed base operation (FBO) at Doha International Airport, due to open in March 2010. The building is modular so that it can be dismantled and moved to the New Doha International Airport when it opens early in the next decade. Many of Rizon’s staff in its Bahrain and Sharjah offices are relocating to the Doha office to take up their existing posts there, acknowledged Curtis. “The move will enable us to reduce our costs by 15 to 20%, whilst simultan-

ously improving our administrative efficiency to cope with our growing business. Rizon’s offices in Bahrain and Sharjah will remain open for sales and marketing activities, but the centralisation in Doha will enable us to improve accessibility to the services we offer to our clients.”

Progress at London Biggin Hill Airport, UK too
Meanwhile at London Biggin Hill Airport, UK, Rizon is nearing completion of a second 120,000 sq ft maintenance and FBO facility, which is on course for completion in late September 2009. Rizon UK recently received its EASA145 Part M and subparts G and I in respect of its UK operation.

All the approvals and capabilities required to maintain the Learjet 40 and 45, Challenger 300 and the Cessna 550/560 Series (the latter in support of a new management contract) are now in place and operating from Rizon’s temporary base hangar at London Biggin Hill

Approval for maintaining the Challenger 604/5 is in process now and is expected to be added to the Rizon EASA 145 shortly, while the Global Express will follow thereafter. “This will allow us to offer a full service from day one when the new hangar opens. Indeed we are already in position to offer support for these types today,” Curtis added.

Rizon sees improved trends in GCC

Rizon reports a pronounced upswing in its volumes of charter business in the GCC over the past two months owing to an increase in market share and the recent service entry of its Qatar based Challenger 605 where it has had steady uptake for this brand new dedicated charter aircraft. Rizon was recently granted its AOP (Air Operating Permit) from the Qatar Civil Aviation Authority, becoming the first Doha-based private jet company to receive approval for dedicated business jet operations from Qatar.



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