

Business

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Zain main and active partner in executing digital transformation

Zain Kuwait CEO Eaman Al-Roudhan participates in a panel discussion as part of EGOV8

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, took part in a panel discussion that came as part of the first day of the eighth eGovernment Forum (EGOV8). The event, sponsored by Zain, was hosted by NoufEXPO in a virtual format titled 'Integrated eGovernment: an urgent post corona need' and came under the patronage of HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

The event's opening ceremony witnessed the participation of HH the Prime Minister's representative, Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Communications and Information Technology Dr Rana Al-Fares, Senior Vice President, President of Huawei Middle East - Huawei Charles Yang, NoufEXPO General Manager Yousef Al-Marzooq, and many prominent government officials and private sector executives.

EGOV8's first day featured a panel discussion titled: "Unified Permits System - Launch of Integrated e-Services and Government Process Reengineering Initiative", which witnessed the participation of Zain Kuwait CEO Eaman Al-Roudhan, Chairman and CEO of the Communications and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) Salim Al-Ozainah, General Manager of Kuwait Municipality Ahmad Al-Manfouhi, President of the Federation of Kuwaiti Engineering Offices and Consultant Houses Bader Al-Salman, and Senior Vice President of SAP Middle East North Ahmed Al-Faifi.

During the panel discussion, Zain Kuwait CEO Eaman Al-Roudhan said: "I'm very pleased to take part in this panel today alongside my colleagues, who wonderfully summarized the necessary steps for successful implementation of digital transformation within the government, whether in relation to Kuwait Municipality in particular or the general roadmap for accelerating digital transformation within the public sector as a whole".

Al-Roudhan explained: "I would like to stress on an important point that we learned from our experience at Zain, which is a leader in both technology and digital transformation in the Kuwaiti market. We have taken a number of successful and

"Kuwaiti market is mature, advanced, and ready for digital transformation"

effective steps in executing digital transformation internally at Zain, as well as having successful partnerships in the same area with the public sector. We have built many fruitful partnerships between Zain and various government entities, including for example the smart meters project with the Ministry of Electricity and Water, and the recent "Shlonik" app for enforcing home quarantine measures in partnership with the Ministry of Health, and much more".

Al-Roudhan added: "it is imperative to have a unified and integrated platform for digital transformation to link government entities together. Our topic of discussion today, the Unified Permits System, is an example that I believe can go beyond merely issuing permits. Instead, the system can be utilized in a plethora of other post-permit purposes, including renewal, upgrades, updates, and more. One of the most crucial lessons we learned from our experience is the importance of the preparation and design phase of such platforms. Specifications and requirements must be unified, and this is an important factor in making this platform as success". Al-Roudhan continued: "the fact that every government entity adopts a different set of specifications and requirements for their platforms is simply not practical. Unfortunately, this is the reality today, as most government entities started implementing their own digital transformation process recently, but without unified systems, platforms, and filing systems. In order to avoid having to re-invest from scratch, plans for such specifications and requirements should be carefully unified and integrated as a first step to achieve the desired digital transformation outcomes with

utmost efficacy".

Al-Roudhan further explained: "the hardest part of executing digital transformation is training users who will benefit from such systems (in this case customers or citizens), as well as training the government entity's human resources who will operate, manage, and maintain the systems. In addition, there are financial investments needed for the software and hardware necessary to operate these systems". Al-Roudhan added: "another important note we learned from our experience and always stress on is the importance of reviewing processes. A common mistake that happens globally when implementing digital transformation is the automation of manual systems and existing non-electronic processes as they are straight into electronic systems. When doing this, digital transformation systems and platforms lose a great deal of flexibility and efficiency. Here lies the importance of carefully reviewing processes and existing systems, whether for the permits system or others. And in case there are more than one entity involved, the integration process has to be simplified first, then the processes must be automated in the right manner. Like this, we can achieve the desired outcomes of digital transformation".

Al-Roudhan mentioned: "the last point I would like to stress on is the importance of cybersecurity systems. We are in need of building sustainable teams and systems for cybersecurity, as we live in a fast-paced tech world. It is vital to unify cybersecurity systems against hacks, leaks, and weak points. These systems and all their related processes and workflows must be continuously and periodically reviewed in order for them to be sustainable, as these systems are an extremely



Zain Kuwait CEO Eaman Al-Roudhan



important part of the overall success of the automation of any integrated system".

Al-Roudhan concluded: "the private sector has a big and crucial role in government digital transformation projects in Kuwait. The Kuwaiti market is very mature from a technical point of view, and perhaps the best evidence on this is the rapid rate of smartphone usage in the nation. There's also a recent study that outlines that the size of the e-grocery business in Kuwait during 2020 exceeded the Saudi one. We all know the difference between Kuwait and KSA in terms of geographic size, population, spending expenditure capacity, and more. This is a clear indication of the maturity and readiness of the Kuwaiti market for digital transformation, and I believe it is important that we accelerate the plans we discussed to achieve digital transformation within the government".

This year, the forum came in an all-virtual format to abide by health guidelines imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Zain's support to the event for the fourth consecutive year affirmed its keenness on actively shouldering the various local efforts that contribute to developing the nation's infrastructure and progressing national economy. This is especially true during such unprecedented times that demand doubled efforts and more collaboration between the public and private sectors to combat the pandemic's impacts on health, economic, and social fronts.

Hitachi buys US software firm GlobalLogic

TOKYO: Japan's Hitachi said yesterday it will fully acquire US software company GlobalLogic in a deal worth \$9.6 billion as it looks to expand its digital services offerings. Hitachi will pay \$8.5 billion for the firm, but the cost will be bumped up by the additional repayment of GlobalLogic's outstanding debt, the Japanese company said.

The purchase comes with Hitachi increasingly focused on tech offerings, including through its Internet of Things unit Lumada. "Through the acquisition, Hitachi expects the addition of GlobalLogic's advanced digital engineering capabilities, and its solid client base including major technology companies, to strengthen the digital portfolio of Lumada," Hitachi said in a press release. "Digital transformation continues to be a priority for organizations everywhere, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only expanded demand for new data-driven business models, customer experiences, and connected ecosystems," the company added.

"Against this backdrop, the demand for GlobalLogic's services is growing rapidly, and the combined company has greater access to this massive market opportunity." With 20,000 employees in 14 countries, GlobalLogic brings a network of design studios and software product development centres as well as hundreds of clients. The news, officially announced at the close of the trading day, was earlier reported by the Nikkei financial newspaper, and sent Hitachi stock plunging, ending the day down more than seven percent.

But Bloomberg Intelligence senior analyst Takeshi Kitaura said the acquisition "makes sense" given Hitachi's ambitions in the sector. "The company has a client network, which will help Hitachi grow further," he told Bloomberg News. The Nikkei report said Hitachi's purchase was likely to be a record acquisition for a Japanese electrical equipment firm. It comes after the firm's mammoth buyout, completed last year, of Swiss-Swedish engineering giant ABB for 704 billion yen (\$6.4 billion). —AFP

Biden to unveil \$2tn 'once-in-a-century' infrastructure plan

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden proposes a \$2 trillion infrastructure plan aimed at modernizing the United States' crumbling transport network, creating millions of jobs and enabling the country to "out-compete" China.

The first phase of Biden's "Build Back Better" program, which he will unveil in a speech in Pittsburgh, will detail massive investment spread over eight years. It plans to inject \$620 billion into transport, including upgrading 20,000 miles (32,000 kilometers) of roads and highways, repairing thousands of bridges and doubling federal funding for public transit. The president, whom Donald Trump tried to caricature as "Sleepy Joe" and a man without strong ideas or motivation, intends to make the bold infrastructure plan one of his flagship policies.

"He views his role as laying out... a broad vision, a bold vision for how we can invest in America, American workers, our communities," White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said.

A hydrogen future for planes, trains and factories

PARIS: Hydrogen could potentially power trains, planes, trucks and factories in the future, helping the world rid itself of harmful emissions. Here is a look at where the industry stands in various sectors:

Cars and trucks

Hydrogen fuel cell electric cars are already on the road. Toyota launched the Mirai sedan, the world's first mass-market hydrogen fuel-cell vehicle, in late 2014 while Hyundai unveiled its Nexo SUV in 2018.

The starting retail prices are high for the average consumer, however, at around \$50,000 in the United States and higher in Europe. Other hurdles are a lack of recharging stations and the need for large reservoirs that eat up seating space.

Several automakers and equipment manufacturers have nonetheless unveiled substantial investment plans to improve the vehicles and develop race cars as well. A likely place to start is with freight transport, where hydrogen could replace diesel fuel. Vehicles can be refilled quickly, they have substantial autonomy, weight is not a problem and they are allowed in urban centres that might

The investment would be partly paid for by raising corporate tax from 21 percent to 28 percent. "The President is proposing to fundamentally reform the corporate tax code so that it incentivizes job creation and investment... and ensures that large corporations are paying their fair share," a senior administration official said ahead of the speech.

The new legislative offensive comes soon after Congress passed a nearly \$2 trillion COVID-19 economic stimulus plan. And Biden's speech is set to open a bitter battle in Congress, where the Democrats hold only a narrow majority and will face strong opposition from the Republicans.

The coming months will test the negotiating skills of the Democratic president, a veteran of Washington politics and deal-making, to the limit, and the chances of his infrastructure plan passing into law remain uncertain.

'Urgency of the moment'

"It's an important initiative to start the process with the president being very clear that he's got a plan, and that he's open to hearing what others think," the administration official said. "But what he is uncompromising about is the urgency of the moment and the need to really deliver for the American people and make good on building back better in this moment." The plan also vows to "spark

otherwise be off-limits to heavy trucks.

Hyundai has already rolled out prototypes, and GM, Traton (Volkswagen) and Toyota are accelerating the development of their own models. US start-up Nikola created a short-lived buzz with its promise of a hydrogen-fuelled truck before acknowledging it still had a long way to go. Several companies propose buses that run on hydrogen fuel cells, but the sector is still at the experimental stage.

Train prototypes

Hydrogen-fuelled trains are tipped as a good alternative to diesel for trains that cannot run on electricity. They will need a dedicated refueling network however. French manufacturer Alstom has been testing such a train in Germany since late 2018, and is ready to build rolling stock.

SNCF and four French regions are expected to sign a contract for the trains this week, with a goal of putting a prototype on the rails in 2023, followed by pilot programs in 2024-25.

Airplanes: 2035

The air transport sector is betting on hydrogen to cut 2005 pollution emission levels in half by 2050. Two main paths are being explored at present, the first being directly as a fuel for jet engines, which will mean overcoming serious technical obstacles and modifying the design of aircraft.

Even at -253 degrees C (-423 F), hydrogen takes up four times as much space as kerosene, which is what planes use at present. A second possibility is



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the electric vehicle revolution" by building a network of 500,000 EV chargers, replacing 50,000 diesel transit vehicles and electrifying 20 percent of the famous yellow school buses.

And it aims to make infrastructure more resilient to climate change. With much of the country's creaking infrastructure dating back to the 1950s, the dream of new roads, bridges, railways and airports is shared by many Americans. But building a political consensus to transform Biden's plan into reality is no easy task. —AFP



A technician works on the hydrogen tank of an under construction hydrogen bus, at the plant of the Albi's Automobile Company for Repair and Manufacturing (Societe Albigeoise Fabrication Reparation Automobile - SAFRA), in Albi, southwestern France.—AFP

to combine hydrogen with carbon dioxide (CO2) to produce a synthetic fuel that can be used by itself or with kerosene without major engine modifications. The European aircraft manufacturer Airbus has made hydrogen-fuelled planes a strategic priority, and is targeting 2035 as the date for at least one of three concepts to come to fruition. German aerospace research group DLR and Boeing are interested in the hybrid fuel concept, but the sector does not have the luxury of putting all its eggs in one basket, notes Sheila Remes, head of sustainable development at the US planemaker.—AFP