



Dear Friends and Clients,

We are still enjoying the cooler weather and should spend the last few weeks if possible outdoors. But business happens mostly indoors – in soundproof rooms and without CCTV. When I still worked behind the Iron Curtain east of Austria, we preferred meetings on public park benches because we could be sure that no bugs were placed somewhere to record or transmit our conversation. Nowadays, with high tech devices, nobody can be sure that a conversation will stay confidential. As long as your laptop is open or your mobile phone still has power (never mind if it is switched off or not) we will have uninvited watchers and listeners. So we just have to accept that we can't change it and have to live with these facts. My generation – Generation X – went on the streets to defend personal freedoms against authorities. The generation of my children have a different view: "we have nothing to hide. They (big brother) can know everything about me." Maybe they are right and we can hardly find arguments against this view. Third parties (e.g. banks) have to take the role of slaves or spies of the publicity and report to the IRS about the account holders and UBOs (ultimate beneficial owners).

Our thoughts are still free – the question is how long. Elon Musk (Tesla) predicted that chips implanted in our nerve system will be capable of communicating with other devices (e.g. in the car) without using our voice. Maybe mind-reading chips will be compulsory for our grandchildren?

Is there a way out? Or only ways into a very Orwellian and scientific future just as his book, 1984, predicted?

*Yours,
Theodor Strohal*

Getting ready for VAT

From January 1, 2018, the proposed introduction of five per cent VAT on most supplies of goods and services in the UAE will present a number of challenges for businesses operating in the region as the new tax will impact all parts of business. VAT implementation can require a significant change to business operations.

For more practical tips regarding your ideal preparation for VAT, MEO FZ-LLC, Strohal Legal Consultants and VAT Services Group will hold a free seminar at the Cove Rotana on 26 April 2017 starting from 6.30pm. For registration, please email contact@businesscenter.me.

Launch of Ras Al Khaimah Economic Zone (RAKEZ)

The government of Ras Al Khaimah announced today the launch of Ras Al Khaimah Economic Zone (RAKEZ), a world-class authority established to oversee, regulate and consolidate the services, facilities and zones of Ras Al Khaimah Free Trade Zone (RAK FTZ) and RAK Investment Authority (RAKIA).

His Highness Sheikh Ahmed bin Saqr Al Qasimi, Chairman of RAKEZ, RAK FTZ and RAKIA, said: "The formation of RAKEZ marks an important milestone for the free zone landscape in Ras Al Khaimah. We have worked very hard to establish a new Authority that will drive the Emirate's development by diversifying its offerings to attract a broad client base and grow the number of investors. It is our firm belief that after nearly two decades of operating independently, the time is right to leverage the combined resources of RAK FTZ and RAKIA under one strong, unified brand. We are confident that with RAKEZ, we will start an exciting journey that will help achieve our vision for Ras Al Khaimah to become a leading global investment destination that is better able to serve our clients."

RAK FTZ and RAKIA still exist and operate as standalone entities. It is business as usual for RAK FTZ and RAKIA clients. Nothing is currently changing for existing free zone companies.

Testament of RAK Assets in Dubai

DIFC Wills and Probates Registry has finalised its internal regulations. Now also assets in Ras Al Khaimah can be included in the Dubai-registered will.

"As more people are choosing to set up businesses, work and live in Ras Al Khaimah, using the successful DIFC Wills and Probate Registry system will increase their confidence and commitment, allowing them to put down roots and build happy lives and thriving businesses," said Ahmed Al Khatri, chairman of RAK Courts Department.

Holiday homes in Dubai: My house is your house

The home sharing platform Airbnb is slowly gaining prominence as an alternative form of visitor accommodation in Dubai. After operating for a few years in the legal grey area, Airbnb now has the regulatory go-ahead from Dubai's Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM).

Dubai's Department of Tourism & Commerce Marketing (DTCM) and community-driven hospitality company Airbnb, have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to help promote responsible hosting and help grow and diversify tourism in the Emirate.

The MoU follows the introduction of enhanced regulations in April that make obtaining a 'holiday home' license more streamlined for individual tenants and homeowners who want to rent their homes to guests. The regulations detail specific criteria that home owners need to meet to apply for a license, including quality standards, amenities, health & safety, insurance necessities, code of conduct, and wider community integration.

Home owners are also required to use a Dubai Tourism licensed operator (like Airbnb) to rent out their homes. This ensures that the operator is accountable for ensuring the property meets: all legislative requirements, complaint management policies, are sufficiently maintained, and amenities and guest services provided are accurately listed to visitors.

WOW-Fi - Dubai airports gets world's fastest free wifi

Dubai Airports has unleashed the world's fastest free wifi connection at an airport to millions of passengers traveling through Dubai International (DXB) each month. Aptly named WOW-Fi, the service provides internet connection up to a staggering 100mbps surpassing all other airports, and connections with just one click.

"We are always looking for ways to enhance the airport experience for our customers by introducing the latest and best in technology and constantly making improvements to our existing services and facilities. During the two months since the soft launch of WOW-Fi, the service has been enjoyed by an average of over 100,000 unique users per day.

We are certain the WOW-Fi experience will impress the 89 million passengers we expect to welcome to DXB in 2017," said Michael Ibbitson, Executive Vice President of Technology and Infrastructure at Dubai Airports.

RAK Ports launches Marine Training Institute

Ras Al Khaimah Ports (RAK Ports) has announced the launch of the Marine Training Institute as part of the growing demand for specialised maritime training in Ras Al Khaimah and the northern Emirates.

Captain Michael Magee, Harbour Master of RAK Ports, said that the continued growth and success of Ras Al-Khaimah in establishing its position as an active maritime trading centre has demonstrated the need to launch a private training institute.

The institute will initially be located at the Saqr Port and training will be held at Al Jeer Port in cooperation with the RAK Civil Defense Department. The courses on offer include the STCW 2010 Basic Safety course (International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watch-keeping for Seafarers 1978), and a skipper course for vessels up to 12m, which the Federal Transport Authority (FTA) is starting to make mandatory. Other courses cover topics like: first aid, security, fire-fighting, oil spills and hazmat awareness, BA (breathing apparatus) set user, and H2S (Hydrogen Sulphide) awareness. The Institute also offers bespoke courses based on specific client needs, and has already rolled out tailored courses in response to requests from the local marine community.

New regulations regarding the UAE driving license

There will be new traffic rules, issued by Shaikh Saif Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior. Starting from 1 July 2017, new drivers of all ages will get a two-year driving license only. Driving licenses will subsequently be renewed every 10 years, renewable for similar periods for citizens, while expatriates will be entitled to renew their licenses every five years, renewable for similar periods. The new rules will not affect existing driving licenses as these rules will have no retroactive force on commitments that existed before the enactment of the law.

If you have a valid UAE driving license, nothing will change for you at the moment. Currently, your UAE driving license is valid for 10 years and keeps its validity. Only at the time you renew it will the new renewal period be only 5 years.

If you need to apply for a UAE driving license for the first time, your new UAE driving license will be issued for 2 years only. At the time of expiry, you can renew it for 5 years. To renew your license, you need to show your valid UAE residence visa.

First Abu Dhabi Bank after finalized merge

Following the legal completion of the merger between First Gulf Bank (FGB) and National Bank of Abu Dhabi (NBAD) on April 1, 2017, the combined bank began trading on the Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange (ADX) under ticker symbol 'NBAD'. Reflecting the new bank's deep roots and experience in the region, its Board of Directors has announced that the combined bank will be named First Abu Dhabi Bank.

The new bank aims to further strengthen its partnership with its corporate and investment banking clients, and across a variety of products and geography. With its global network across of 19 countries, the bank will strengthen and facilitate the trade flows and financial links between the UAE and its trading partners.

Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed Al Nahyan, chairman of the new bank, said: "As these two successful Abu Dhabi institutions unite to form one stronger and combined bank, today marks the start of another historic chapter in the story of the UAE. Embodying the UAE's vision for growth and prosperity, we are confident that "First Abu Dhabi Bank" will create new opportunities for our nation and support the growth ambitions of our shareholders, customers, and employees around the world."

German Spring Break

The German Community of Ras Al Khaimah will celebrate a German Spring Break par excellence at the Cove Rotana Resort on Thursday, 27 April 2017, starting from 6.00pm. There will be free entrance, a free welcome drink and great live music from a German band. The Cove Rotana will provide delicious German food and drinks available at a cash bar.

Participants who wish to spend one night, or the whole weekend in Ras Al Khaimah, can book a room directly from the Cove Rotana. Use the keyword "German Spring Break" to receive a special rate starting from 680 AED for a double room/night (including breakfast).

Contact:



STROHAL LEGAL GROUP
UAE/SINGAPORE/MYANMAR/AUSTRIA

UAE Head Office:

STROHAL LEGAL CONSULTANTS
Villa 2, 20b Street, Community 153
P.O.Box 31484, Ras Al Khaimah, UAE
Tel: (971) 7 2364530 ,
Fax: (971) 7 2364531
Mobile: (971) 503765847

SINGAPORE Office:

STROHAL LEGAL GROUP PTE. LTD
20 Upper Circular Road #02-10
The Riverwalk, Singapore, 058416
Fax: +65 65330313,
Tel: +65 65330212

MYANMAR Office:

U MIN SEIN & STROHAL ASSOCIATES PARTNERSHIP
7 B189-195 Pansodan Tower
Pansodan Street
Yangon, Myanmar
Tel: +959975061451

AUSTRIA Office:

MARSCHALL & HEINZ
Goldschmiedgasse 8, A 1010
Vienna – Austria
Tel: +431 5335256
Fax: +431 513191124

Email: office@slg-strohallegalgroup.com

Web: www.slg-strohallegalgroup.com

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