

## Technology

# Ooredoo reiterates commitment to supporting entrepreneurs

## Telecom operator sponsors B2B 4 SME symposium



**KUWAIT:** Ooredoo, reiterated its commitment to being a leader in supporting entrepreneurs during a press conference which was held at Ooredoo's headquarters yesterday. This was underscored in a statement made by B2B Senior Director at Ooredoo Abdulaziz Al-Babtain during the press conference. The first activity in the symposium will be held tomorrow under the patronage of Minister Hind Al-Sabeeh.

Al-Babtain stressed that Ooredoo has always been keen on supporting entrepreneurs and listening to their requests, through its different services and solutions. He explained that Ooredoo's products and services are tailored exclusively to cater for the needs of entrepreneurs. This is especially apparent in Ooredoo's participation in launching the Kuwait Business Center earlier this year, which is a government entity established by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry that is dedicated to streamlining the process of business licensing for microenterprises in Kuwait.

Ooredoo's packages and bundles provide compre-

hensive solutions at competitive prices, aimed at propelling entrepreneurs towards success, especially in an age where the internet and communication play a major role in all businesses. He noted that all entrepreneur plans and bundles include free upgrades and other perks that help them stay connected more. "This is essential in this day and age where being online is vital for any business owner to connect with his clients and other suppliers," he said. He added: "We are proud to work in sync with the new generations' expectations through our commitment to embracing digitalization."



### First activity in symposium on November 21

Al-Babtain concluded by thanking the organizers of the event, the Association for Small and Medium Enterprises of Kuwait (ASMEK) and the main sponsors of the event: the National Fund of Small and Medium Enterprises; the Ministry of State for Youth Affairs, and the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation.

From his end, Dawood Marafie, Chairman of the Association of Small and Medium Enterprises stated during the press conference that the Association is committed to organizing and delivering the symposium to shed the light on the vast experiences of SMEs. He stressed that this interaction will open



the doors from large firms to provide full-fledged services to SMEs which will propel them to complement each other in terms of services.

Ooredoo's operations in Kuwait date back to December 1999 when it launched wireless services as the second operator. The company today provides mobile, broadband internet and corporate managed services tailored to the needs of customers and businesses. Ooredoo Kuwait - which is an enlisted company in the Kuwait Stock Exchange Market - operates a number of telecom service providers in the region, such as Ooredoo Algeria, Ooredoo Tunisia, Ooredoo Maldives, and Wataniya Palestine. Ooredoo Kuwait is a member of the international Ooredoo Group based in Doha, Qatar.

Our vision: Enabling the Kuwaiti community through digitalization and enriching people's daily experiences.

## UK to have driverless cars by 2021

**LONDON:** British finance minister Philip Hammond is to announce £75 million (\$99 million, 84 million euros) funding for Artificial Intelligence and plans to put driverless cars on UK roads by 2021, in his budget speech.

Hammond will announce regulation changes to allow Britain's driverless car industry, which the government estimates will be worth £28 billion by 2035, to get cars on the road within as little as three years, according to extracts of the budget released by his office yesterday.

The minister, who is under a pressure to deliver an eye-catching budget following Brexit spats with cabinet colleagues, will also announce a £400 million fund for companies hoping to roll out electric-car charge points across the country. People hoping to buy a battery-electric vehicle will also be able to access funding as Britain attempts to move towards zero-emission transport.

With a focus on tech industries, the government is also planning to spend £75 million supporting companies developing AI and £160 million in developing 5G technology, which it believes will be necessary for the mass rollout of driverless cars.

However, the Conservative minister is likely to be judged more on his social spending policies, particularly on his housing policy in the wake of the Grenfell Tower disaster that killed 71 people. —AFP

## Driverless, electric future just round the corner for urban cars

**LONDON:** A driverless, electric car is only a swipe away in the cities of the future, where pollution clampdowns and rapid advances in technology will transform the way we travel, despite lagging infrastructure. As more and more countries announce a phasing-out of pure petrol and diesel cars, early versions of tomorrow's models are already on the streets: hybrid cars, fully electric motors and vehicles that can partially drive themselves.

Attitudes to vehicle ownership in cities are changing as smartphone apps make a ride available in minutes. David Metz, of the Centre for Transport Studies at University College London, believes developed cities have reached "peak car", with ownership no longer associated with increasing prosperity. Metz said city planning was changing to temper the vehicle access once thought vital. "We now see high-density urban areas are more successful with less traffic," he said, citing London's car-free Leicester Square entertainment district and the Canary Wharf financial hub. Cars could be phased out of city centers altogether, as urban planners ditch the 20th-century, car-focused grid-plan model for city streets. Private cars, sitting idle for 23 hours a day, might be eclipsed by car-pool clubs, journey-sharing apps or one-trip rental cars as seen in cities around the world from Berlin to Istanbul to Vancouver.

### 'Driving everywhere by themselves'

Driverless technology also looks set to revolutionize urban road travel, according to industry figures.

Graeme Smith, chief executive of Oxbotica, a British company developing autonomous vehicle software, said new cities being planned in China envision all vehicles being electric, autonomous and publicly-owned. "In those cities, your life would be fundamentally different," he told AFP.

"50 years into the future, maybe these things will be driving everywhere by themselves-but there's a progression to go through." Driverless technology faces the challenge, over time, of bringing down the cost of sensors while improving their performance-and there is currently no standard operating methodology. Some cars with levels two and three autonomy are



LONDON: A BMW staff member poses for a photograph in a BMW i8 plug-in hybrid sports car during the Regent Street Motor Show in London. —AFP

already on the roads. Britain's Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said he expected the first level four self-driving cars to reach the UK market by 2021, bringing the world closer to level five, or total autonomy. Fully driverless cars could help ease gridlock by driving closer together in convoy and avoid traffic by exchanging real-time information.

### 'The final destination'

The switch to electric vehicles (EVs), meanwhile, is already well under way. Volvo will no longer sell solely diesel or petrol cars from 2019, while Volkswagen's Audi brand is gearing up to offer an electric version of every one of its models. "We think it is really the final destination for the auto industry," said Eric Feunteun, Renault's electric vehicle program director, told journalists in Utrecht in the Netherlands earlier this month at an event where the French car maker unveiled partnerships with renewable energy companies.

Britain and France intend to ban the sale of fully petrol or diesel cars from 2040, while smog-plagued India wants to sell only electric cars by 2030. Besides legislation on a pan-European and a national level, cities themselves are taking action on pollution.

London is set to introduce an ultra-low emissions zone in the

city centre in 2019, with charges for more polluting vehicles, and hopes to extend it to the inner London ring road by 2021.

### 'Woeful lack' of charging points

Manufacturers said they feel up to the challenge. "We'll supersede the sale of petrol/diesel cars way before 2040," said Jonny Berry, Renault's regional electric vehicles fleet sales manager. Berry was speaking at a car show in Regent Street in the heart of London's shopping district, where electric models were the focus of attention. "I think it's a very easy target for us to reach. More and more people are coming round to the idea." While some countries like Norway have a high take-up of electric vehicles, in many world cities, the charging infrastructure is patchy. Some commentators see a future of wireless charging base pads laid under city streets, underground car trains or drone car flights; others are more skeptical.

Expert motoring journalist Matt Robinson said a "woeful lack" of suitable charging points remained a big problem for electric car users. "London is the best place in Britain to own an electric car but the infrastructure lags behind the uptake of early adopters," he said. Robinson is also skeptical about the distance ranges given by EV manufacturers for their batteries, saying they are almost "impossible to obtain in the real world". —AFP

## Swimming with dolphins in VR to aid disabled

**APELDOORN, Netherlands:** Swimming with wild dolphins is something most can only dream of, and jumping into pools with captive animals has become increasingly controversial with environmentalists condemning it as cruel.

But a Dutch non-profit believes it has found a way to bring people, especially the disabled, closer to such a joyful experience through the technological, immersive advances offered by virtual reality (VR). The Dolphin Swim Club is the realisation of a more than two-decade journey by artist Marijke Sjollema, who had her first chance encounter with a dolphin in 1993 while snorkeling off the coast of Mexico. "I saw this grey shadow under the water and my first thought was this is the end. I thought it was a shark," she told AFP. She tried to stay calm "but this shadow was following me. And then

there was this split second that I realized that it wasn't a shark. It was a dolphin."

"I didn't know anything about dolphins, but I instinctively knew, 'Oh a dolphin, I'm fine. This is a good thing.'" From that moment on, Sjollema's love of dolphins and all cetaceans was born.

"We know that there is something magical about dolphins. We think of joy, and playfulness and happiness and innocence when we meet dolphins. And this is even a healing quality," she told AFP.

She and her business consultant husband, Benno Brada, have devoted their spare time, energy and personal resources to their mission of enabling people to discover their own encounter with dolphins.

### Healing qualities

Their first project using normal VR headsets playing a film of the dolphins launched in late 2015.

But last month they went a step further, unveiling waterproof VR glasses, which allow people to drift around a pool watching bottlenose and spinner dolphins playing around them in virtual reality.

This VR dolphin therapy in a pool, still at the trial stage, is thought to be a world first.

"The dream was to find an alternative to dolphin-assisted therapies using dolphins in captivity," Brada told therapists at a residential community for disabled people run by the 's Heeren Loo organization who were testing out the waterproof goggles in the pool.

The center has been using the land version of the VR glasses since 2016, and has seen noticeable benefits. "Some 82 percent of our clients feel actually relaxed by seeing the films," said the organization's policy advisor Johan Elbers. "It takes them away from the world they are in, they enter a new world in another mindset, think differently, feel differently, see differently, and relax completely." He recalled how one young woman, who had long had trouble sleeping, now watches a VR film of the dolphins swimming at night, and falls quietly asleep. Another man is able to completely forget an agonizing pain in his arm. Dion, a 21-year-old resident of the community, said watching the film made him feel "peaceful." "The dolphin noises and the water calms me down, that calms me from all the noises that there are, then you're zen," he said.

### Sharks next?

The pool-safe VR goggles, developed thanks to 50,000 euros (\$59,000) grant



APELDOORN: A therapist tests out new cutting-edge waterproof virtual reality glasses playing a film of dolphins, at the 's Heeren Loo care centre for disabled people in Apeldoorn, eastern Netherlands. —AFP

from the Dutch government, consist of a waterproof Samsung smartphone in a waterproof backing mounted on a special 3D-printed rig made of recycled plastics. "Stress is very important as a driver of all kinds of psychiatric problems," explains psychiatrist Wim Veling, from the University of

Groningen. "So we are trying in therapy to make people more relaxed," said Veling, who has been studying the use of VR to help people with mental health disorders. "The power of virtual reality is in the immersion" into another world, he says on the Dolphin Swim Club site.